Defeating Self-sabotage:

Procrastination
Perfectionism
Overcommitment

Hugh Kearns
Who am I?

- Flinders University, Adelaide
- Lecture and research
- Self-management
- The psychology of high performance
Who We Are

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Hugh Kearns
Flinders University
iThinkWell

www.ithinkwell.com.au
Introductions

- PhD Etiquette
Deschapelle’s Coup

Mr Alexandre Deschapelles
Playing ‘at odds’

World Championship Match, New York 1894
What Gets in the Way

• Patterns of behaviour
  – Overcommitting
  – Never saying No
  – Getting distracted
  – Procrastination
  – Perfectionism

• What gets in your way?
Overcommitment

- Overloaded?
  - Balls and tube

- Overcommitment

- How many balls in your tube?
Time management – saying no

- Learn how not to say YES
- Buy yourself time to think
- Give people alternatives
- Delegation
Saying NO

• Situation:
  • Your supervisor/boss has asked you to consider taking on an additional project. This could be important for the department. She’s expecting that you will say yes.

• Feelings:
  • As you knock on her door about to say NO how do you feel.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation:</th>
<th>Saying NO to your supervisor/boss</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feelings:</td>
<td>Nervous, guilty, anxious</td>
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**ANTS**

Automatic Negative Thoughts
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<tr>
<th>ANTS</th>
<th>AND SO</th>
<th>MATHs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Automatic Negative Thoughts</td>
<td>More Accurate Thoughts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She'll be very disappointed</td>
<td>She'll make me feel bad and guilty</td>
<td>She might be but I'm not being unreasonable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'll feel terrible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She'll be upset with me</td>
<td>She might take it out on me</td>
<td>She hasn't in the past. Unlikely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I should be doing it</td>
<td>Maybe I'm not committed enough</td>
<td>I do good work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She'll think I'm not committed</td>
<td>She might tell others</td>
<td>I am committed. I just can’t do this one thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It'll affect my career</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'll miss out on more chances</td>
<td>I'll be stuck in this job forever</td>
<td>Overall I’ve got a good track record.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'll never get a promotion</td>
<td>People forget and move on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'll be falling behind</td>
<td>It’s not a race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe I’m not up to it</td>
<td>She told me before I was doing well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe I’m not cut out for this</td>
<td>Ditto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>type of work</td>
<td>Not really!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I knew it – I’m a failure!</td>
<td></td>
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### Cognitive Behavioural Coaching

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<td>More Accurate Thoughts (MAThs)</td>
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It’s the THOUGHT that counts

Event

Bank being sold

Beliefs

This could be good

Feelings

Optimistic

This is bad

Worried
It’s the THOUGHT that counts

Event

Beliefs

Feelings

Overestimating probability

Overestimating consequences
The Secret Life of the Researcher
Distractions

• Why is housework so much fun?

• Displacement activities
  – Tutoring, marking
  – Grants, tangential projects
  – Endnote, formatting
  – Emails, Facebook, Solitaire

• What is your distraction of choice?
Distractions

• Where you work
  – Open plan offices
  – On the kitchen table

• Close the door
• Do not disturb
• Earphones
Emails

- Number one excuse for not doing work
- They interrupt and break concentration

- Multi-tasking vs Single-tasking
- Email can make you dopey!

- Don’t check first thing in the morning
- Log out
- Specific times
Be realistic:
It’s not a Nobel Prize
Perfectionism

- It’s not a cure for cancer
- Adding to the body of knowledge
- Academic culture
- You are learning how to do research
- My best-selling thesis
The 80/20 Principle

- Perfectionism
- The Pareto Principle – 80/20 rule
Perfectionism

• Situation:
  • You’ve been working on a difficult part of your paper/thesis for a couple of weeks. You’ve got a draft but it’s not finished. It’s due next Friday.
  • Your supervisor comes along and says she’ll take whatever you’ve done now as she has some time before her meeting with the Dean of Research.

• Feelings:
  • As she puts her hand on the papers how do you feel
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation:</th>
<th>Handing over unfinished report</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feelings:</td>
<td>Anxious, worried</td>
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<th><strong>AND SO</strong></th>
<th><strong>MATHs</strong> More Accurate Thoughts</th>
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<tr>
<td>It’s full of mistakes. It’s rubbish</td>
<td>It’s going to look like I’m stupid.</td>
<td>It’s a draft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is she going to think of it?</td>
<td>She’ll think its stupid. No good. Sloppy.</td>
<td>I’ve explained that it’s not finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is her boss going to think of it?</td>
<td>She’ll think I’m stupid. No good. Sloppy. So will her boss.</td>
<td>In the past I’ve done good work. They know that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not fair. They shouldn’t do this to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td>These things happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is terrible. It’s a disaster.</td>
<td>Everyone will find out how stupid I am I’ll never get my PhD I’ll be kicked out of uni My family will be so disappointed I’ll never get a decent job I knew it – I’m a failure!</td>
<td>My supervisor said I was going OK They probably would have told me by now Unlikely. They might be disappointed but they would get over it Lots of rich people don’t have PhDs Not really!</td>
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Frauds

- Imposter syndrome

- The belief that you are one mistake away from being exposed as a complete fraud
Being Realistic Tips

• Get evidence
• Try it out
• Look at what’s real
• Just because you feel bad DOES NOT mean that it is bad!

“The Best is the enemy of the Good”
Procrastination

▲ The black cloud

▲ Avoidance strategies
  – Email and surfing the net

▲ Waiting for the motivation fairy
Motivation

How motivation happens

Motivation

Action
What are your Controllables?

- What can you do (or not do!) that could help you manage your time and research?
- Small and achievable steps
- For example:
  - not check emails first thing
  - identify the next thing
  - break big jobs into smaller jobs
  - submit that draft