



THE CATA LIST FOR TAKING EFFECTIVE ACTION

Powerful actions have the ability to initiate powerful results. BY **JOELLE JAY, PH.D.**

What distinguishes the mediocre leader with so-so results from the effective leader who makes a big impact every time? The answer is the ability to take effective action.

There's a big difference between taking action and taking *effective* action. Most leaders are fairly good at taking action. They make lists and check items off those lists everyday. To be truly effective, you've got to be more strategic about the items that go on that list. Instead of just putting down every small action that will move you to your vision step by step, you've got to choose one or two high-impact actions that launch you forward in leaps and bounds. This approach helps you turn motion to momentum.

To illustrate this, we can think of a concept from chemistry: the catalyst. In the sciences, a catalyst is a substance that increases the rate of a chemical reaction without being consumed in the process. For you, a catalyst is an action that dramatically increases the rate at which you

achieve your vision, without consuming you. The goal for leaders who want to be their most effective and get the best possible results is to look for the catalysts in their action plans – those powerful actions that have the ability to initiate powerful, even transformational results.

You can get the potency of a catalyst by using an action plan appropriately called the CATA List. The CATA List is a chart divided into four categories:

1. Catalysts
2. Achievements
3. Tasks
4. Avoidances

These categories help you sort interminable lists of “To-Dos” to find the ones that pack the biggest punch.

CATALYSTS

To find your catalysts, ask yourself, “What is the one thing you could do that would have the greatest impact on your vision?”

Any item you call a “catalyst” must be an action that drives all the rest, either because it causes the rest of the actions to happen; it frees you to put your time where you want it; or it unlocks a barrier to action. The main criterion for your catalyst is that you know this one piece will do more than any other to advance you in the direction of your vision. If you're writing a speech, a catalyst might be to stand up and practice. If you're leading a company, a catalyst might be to communicate the strategic direction. You can see how easily catalysts get crowded out by more pressing issues. Indeed, even though your catalysts have the most value, if you're not careful they can easily get pushed aside.

To find your catalysts, think about what action you would take if you could find uninterrupted quality time because you know it would make the biggest difference in your ability to attain your vision.



ACHIEVEMENTS

The next category includes actions you classify as important...really important. They may not have the transformational effect of your catalysts, but they are the kinds of achievements that matter on a day-to-day basis. These achievements typically take center stage in your life. They tend to be:

- › daily actions
- › key relationships
- › priority projects
- › deadlines

As a rule, working on achievements makes for a very productive day.

TASKS

You use the “tasks” category for the actions you’d like to take but can’t justify as truly critical. Yes, they are things that may have to get done, but they don’t have nearly the impact as your catalysts

and achievements.

Tasks are big time consumers such as long meetings, some networking, or obsessive perfecting of non-essential details. You might feel a little twinge when you admit these tasks are less-than-important, because you may want to do them. And you may get to. But only after the more valuable things are done.

AVOIDANCES

The items in this category take more energy than they deserve. When you’re trying to rid your action plan of excess, cut the fat by forcing yourself to put at least 25 percent of your “To-Dos” onto this list. Look for actions that take a lot of time with little return. The “avoidances” list is a place to throw off extra baggage. Letting some actions go undone allows you to be more available for the things that really matter.

As a whole, the CATA List takes the commitments that emerge from your focus areas and marries them in a single-page, concrete list of actions that ultimately lead to your vision for living and leading well.

When you create a CATA List, you have a quick categorization of everything you need to do, organized in order of value. As you think about all the actions on your “To-Do” list now, can you see how categorizing your tasks in order of value might help you make room for working on your goals? Suddenly the most important thing you need to do isn’t just the most pressing; it’s the one that fits with your focus and leads to your vision. **LM**

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