
More Productive Leadership by Batching and Sequencing

Dividing attention through multitasking can increase slips/trips/falls, and also contribute to soft-tissue injuries, driving accidents, caught by/between, struck by problems, and many more.

By [Robert Pater](#) | Mar 01, 2017

People frequently tell me they're surprised at how much I get done. If they're accurate, there are at least two likely reasons for this: 1. I have a high energy level (and, while some of this is part of my constitution, I strongly believe this can be greatly developed with the right practices, diet, exercise and mindset) *and* 2. I Batch and Sequence.

That is, I strategically aim to accomplish several objectives at the same time ("Batching")—and then to approach these in the "right" order ("Sequencing"). Batching is based on mindfulness; it's the polar opposite of multitasking; the latter typically entails splitting attention by trying to do several different things simultaneously. Like watching a video while composing a message. Separating attention divides effort (such as giving 50 percent thought or awareness to each of two diverse actions); further, even this becomes even more difficult to do as we get older.

Though balance tends to deteriorate as people age (side note: there are many practical ways to head this off), studies at the University of Pittsburgh (by Redfern, Furman, and Jennings) reveal that as people age, their physical balance becomes even *more* compromised when they try to accomplish other tasks while crossing uneven surfaces. So dividing attention through multitasking can increase slips/trips/falls, and also contribute to soft-tissue injuries, driving accidents, caught by/between, struck by problems, and many more.

Martial arts adepts understand the limitations and dangers of multitasking. When trying to defend against two attackers, splitting attention between the pair weakens potentially protective actions against either. Much more effective to deal fully and

quickly with one, then totally shift attention to defend against the other.

Batching, on the other hand, means lining up objectives in order to take *one* action that accomplishes multiple positive results. When you have several objectives to accomplish, better to think simultaneously or concentrically (Batching) rather than serially (multitasking.) Batching saves time and resources. Let's say you're an archer with three targets you're trying to hit. Rather than shooting three arrows, Batching here would mean lining up the three targets one behind the other to penetrate all of them with one arrow. For most companies, arrows and other resources are precious. And the time needed to nock, draw, aim, and shoot (think planning and scheduling) is also limited.

For example, we strive to help companies simultaneously Batch the three crucial strands—Energy, Expertise, and Engagement—we've found necessary for weaving global-class Safety performance. Rather than planning several separate, often disconnected interventions to accomplish each, set into motion actions that reach all three at the same time. Even structurally, organizations can reduce multitasking by aligning professionals, departments, and committees to better coordinate and plan for simultaneous actions and to report to the same leader.

Sequencing means prioritizing which objectives to first aim for improved Safety and efficiency. Such as: preheating the oven before mixing up the recipe, enlisting buy-in before rolling out the new training, or scoping out traffic before stepping off the curb. In defending against dual attackers, the martial artist consciously Sequences, selecting which opponent to deal with first, and then positions herself in the most advantageous place (so she's facing him but he's slightly angled away from her.) Her choice will be based on many factors, based on her mindful (in the moment) reading of the situation. She also moves into a spot to physically line them up, such that one attacker blocks the path of the other, both shielding her (Batching) and giving her enough extra time to effectively control the second.

To harness the power of Batching, begin by deciding on your "Stated" and "Strategic" objectives. Think of an iceberg whose mass is approximately 1/9 above the surface. Stated objectives are visible to all, what you tell others or convey as your aims—*what* you'll cover or aim for. These include yearly goals, meeting or training agenda, or what you initially communicate to set the stage in an incident investigation ("We're here to determine what caused this so we can make it less likely you or others will get hurt from this in the future.")

In contrast, Strategic objectives aren't "sneaky," they merely focus on internal reactions, the foundation of *how* your actions are actually perceived and embraced. These answer the question, "What would have to happen to make this

meeting/investigation/training/implementation extremely successful?" These might include critical below-the-water-level aims such as "Supervisors to buy in more to promote Safety." "The person who was hurt will trust they're not being blamed in this investigation, so will be forthcoming with fully honest information." "Executives increasingly see me as a valued professional and will be more likely to seek out my viewpoint in future planning." All of these Strategic objectives may be crucially important, but overtly stating them can jar and backfire. Yet these should determine which "targets" you want to Batch and line up. Once you've decided on your Strategic objectives, you can better Batch these with your Stated ones. For example, I'll time-efficiently brief execs on our upcoming Safety initiatives ("Stated") *and* while doing so, develop greater trust, heighten support, and promote credibility ("Strategic"). Four simultaneously Batched targets, one Stated and three Strategic.

Batching and Sequencing strategically and smartly significantly help accomplish the right things with the right timing. Just start by thinking through what you really want to get done and see if you can light on an action that attracts three different birds with the same song.

About the Author

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