

CHAPTER 2

UGH! THE WORK YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE DOING

Nothing is so fatiguing as the eternal hanging on
of an uncompleted task.

—WILLIAM JAMES

Think about the things on your work plate that you truly intend to do but don't feel like doing. These are the actions, tasks, and projects that are like unpaved and muddy sections of the road to success. To get to success, you need to get through the mud. But the mud resists your good intentions and threatens to turn the promises you make to yourself into broken promises. Yes, the risk of neglecting the things you don't feel like doing is very real indeed. And it poses a very serious threat to your success.

Andrew can tell you all about it.

When he was a child, Andrew loved to draw.

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Now, at the age of thirty-seven, he still loves to draw. In fact, he earns his living by drawing. Andrew is a commercial artist, and a very good one at that. However, the business that Andrew built around his passion and talent for drawing—a business that's the realization of his childhood dream—isn't doing very well. That's because along with the drawing he loves to do, Andrew now has lots of things on his work plate that he doesn't feel at all like doing. And even though he knows that doing those things would contribute to his success, he neglects them.

Andrew hates, for example, preparing price quotations for his customers. He doesn't like having to estimate how much time a project will take him because he doesn't really know for sure and doesn't want to guess and be wrong. The unknowns and risks of getting it wrong drive him crazy. Just thinking about preparing a quote is enough to make Andrew feel sick. And when he feels sick, Andrew often does things that only make matters worse, like going on the Internet, where he wastes hours looking for various things he knows he doesn't need.

Andrew has a great deal invested—both financially and emotionally—in his business being successful. Because he's painfully aware that he has to get these quotations done whether he feels like it or not, he keeps promising himself that “from now on” he'll submit quotations promptly. But he hardly ever does it.

Andrew has plenty of insight. He realizes that he's avoiding work that must be done. He understands

why he's avoiding it and why he has to stop. He's looked to friends, family, colleagues, and even a consultant for help. Although he's managed to collect lots of encouragement, a few scoldings, and a practical suggestion or two, the problem persists.

Andrew's inability to do what he doesn't feel like doing does more than just hurt his business. It's beginning to erode his confidence and his morale. It's threatening to turn his childhood dream into an adult nightmare.

Andrew is not only troubled by his failure to do what he intends to do, he's baffled by it. It doesn't make any sense to him. He figures his strong desire to succeed should allow him to overcome his reluctance to do something he'd rather not do. In other words, he assumes that his good intention will have enough oomph to push him through his reluctance.

To Andrew, this assumption is so utterly reasonable that he can't let go of it despite the fact that his actual experience keeps telling him it's wrong.

WHAT'S ON YOUR WORK PLATE?

On your work plate are all the things you know you must do to be as successful as possible. Like Andrew, you have two distinct piles of demands.

In one pile are the demands that represent things you know you should do and also feel like doing. These include the things you dreamed about doing before you started your business, chose your career, or

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took a job that you were excited to get. They include your passions, the things that excite you, and all the things that come easily or flow naturally for you without stirring up any reluctance, resistance, or avoidance. For Andrew, it was drawing. Drawing for him was like gliding effortlessly down a silky smooth road. Andrew just naturally felt like drawing.

Of course, if the only kind of demands on your work plate were the kind that required you to do things you naturally feel like doing, following through wouldn't be a problem. We rarely have trouble doing the things we naturally feel like doing.

But there are very few people on this planet who are lucky enough to have their work plate filled solely with demands that require them to do what they naturally feel like doing. Even the most talented professional violinist, for example, who's filled with passion for playing that instrument, probably has to practice sometimes when he or she doesn't feel like it.

So unless you're one of the luckiest people in the world, you have a second pile of demands on your work plate. These demands require you to do things you simply don't feel like doing. Some require you to do things you find boring, tedious, or burdensome. Some require you to do things that are just unsatisfying enough to repel and push you away. Some require you to do things that make you feel sick and anxious the way Andrew felt about preparing quotes. Some may require you to do things that are so dreadful that you don't even dare think about doing them.

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Yes, this is the pile of demands you wish would go away and leave you alone. Just tell yourself to do what one of these demands requires and a little voice in your head will scream, "I don't wanna do it!"

You tell yourself, "I really should work on that financial report today," and a little voice in your head replies, "I don't wanna do it!"

Surely you've heard the shouts and groans. "Ugh!" "Not that!" "Go away!" "God help me!" "Shoot me!" We've certainly heard them. In fact, we hear them all the time.

There's obviously a huge difference between a demand that requires you to do what you naturally feel like doing and one that requires you to do what you don't feel like doing. It's like the difference between, on the one hand, picking up an adorable puppy with its tail wildly wagging and its tongue licking your face and, on the other hand, picking up a pile of smelly dirty diapers. Although they may weigh the same and the actual amount of physical work required may be the same, the experience is certainly very different. Lifting the puppy feels like it hardly takes any effort at all. There's no real resistance. The puppy wants to be lifted. Not so the pile of dirty diapers. The pile might as well be shouting, "Don't come near me!" It resists. It repels. It makes you want to hold your nose and run the other way. It makes you want to shout, "I don't wanna do it!"

GIVING IT A PROPER NAME

Rob, a seasoned middle manager for a U.S. manufacturing company, heard the voice in his head shout, “I don’t wanna do it!” so often that he decided to give a proper name to the demands on his own work plate that require him to do things he doesn’t feel like doing. He calls them “goo.”

Goo is unpleasant. It’s heavy. It’s sticky. And it resists and repels. Boy, does it resist and repel!

Rob loves his job. Well, that’s only *partly* true. Rob loves only part of his job. It’s the part that he actually feels like doing. For Rob, that’s the part that involves creative thinking and problem-solving.

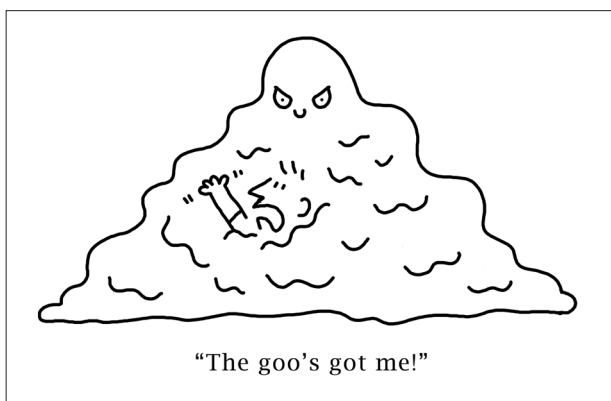
When he started his job years ago, Rob wishfully assumed that it would consist entirely of creative thinking and problem-solving. He thought that what he loves doing would completely fill his work plate.

Well, it didn’t take long for Rob to discover that there was going to be a second pile of demands on his work plate—a pile that would keep growing and growing and growing and eventually dwarf the first pile. But there it is. It’s a towering pile of demands that require him to do things he doesn’t feel at all like doing. This is Rob’s *goo*.

To say that Rob detests the goo on his work plate would be an understatement. “It totally sucks,” he told us. Yet because Rob knows he can’t be successful without “doing the goo,” he never hesitates to promise himself that he’ll do it.

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But promising to do it isn't the same as actually doing it. Rob struggles all the time to try to do the things on his work plate that he doesn't feel like doing. Much of it he puts off for "as long as possible." Some of it he puts off for even longer than possible, and he suffers the consequences. Some he starts but then sets aside because, as Rob puts it, "I can only take so much goo without going stark raving mad."



GOO IS PERSONAL

Everyone we've ever worked with and everyone we've ever known has had plenty of goo on their work plate. Let there be no mistake about it, it's perfectly normal and natural to not feel like doing some, or many, or even most of the things you know you must do to be successful.

There's nothing unusual or unhealthy about having your whole being wince whenever you try to do—or even try to think about doing—things you don't

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feel like doing. And in our opinion, anyone who tries to tell you otherwise is doing you a great disservice.

Like beauty, goo is in the eyes of the beholder. It's 100 percent personal. What repels you may not repel someone else, and what repels someone else may not repel you. The same task that you'd do

nearly anything to avoid might be welcomed by someone else as a gift.

Case in point: When Steve was a health care executive, he had an awesome administrative assistant who he used to jokingly introduce to others as "Maggie—she does my job." Hundreds if not thousands of times during the many years they worked together, Steve would apologetically give Maggie a task or project that he perceived as being tedious and boring enough to induce nausea, vomiting, and possibly suicidal thoughts. What never ceased to amaze him was that the very same hideous task or project that he presented with his eyes rolling would make Maggie's eyes sparkle. What was goo to Steve was nectar from Heaven to Maggie.

Whenever Steve could spend his time dealing with creative big picture matters, he felt like he was on

that same silky smooth road that Andrew was on when he was drawing. He loved dealing with the forest. He didn't care that much for the trees. And, frankly, he felt nothing but contempt for the leaves. But Maggie welcomed the leaves with open arms. In fact, she loved the leaves.

Our point is, it doesn't really matter why a particular action, task, or project triggers that "I don't wanna do it!" feeling for you. It doesn't matter if it makes no sense at all. All that matters is that if it feels like goo to you, it is goo. And if it's goo, you're at risk of neglecting it. And if you do neglect it, you're shooting yourself in the foot—or worse.

Goo is obviously subjective. It doesn't matter how little effort, objectively speaking, something you don't feel like doing requires. All that matters is how much it makes you groan.

Like us, you might feel reluctant to do certain things that, objectively speaking, require such a small amount of effort that it's downright embarrassing. If so, we can assure you that you're in good company. Even the most ambitious people you can imagine often fail to put forth the tiny amount of effort it would take to accomplish something they consider important.

This used to happen to Steve often. While working, he would tell himself, "I really should take a second to put this folder where it belongs right now because if I do, it'll save time and effort and spare me frustration the next time I need it." He was genuinely

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eager to bring order and convenience to his work environment, and this was one way he knew he could do it. How could anything be easier?

Yet, amazingly, Steve almost always violated his own good intention. It just felt like too much trouble to actually take a second to stand up, open a drawer, and put the file where it belonged. Too much trouble? How in the world could that be? Again, objectively, the amount of effort required was miniscule. But somehow, subjectively, it was enough to defeat a good intention that was intelligently designed to improve the quality of his work life and indirectly contribute to his future success.

Yes, it just doesn't make sense that Steve would avoid putting forth so little effort to achieve a desired result. But does it really matter that it doesn't make sense? What does matter is that, for whatever reason, the miniscule amount of effort required was just too much for him.

Now, you can certainly accuse Steve or anyone else, including yourself, of being just plain *lazy*. But *lazy* just doesn't stick. If you ask people who know Steve, for example, they'll tell you that he's an especially hardworking person. Press them, and they'll back that up with evidence. They'll point to many things he's done that required an enormous amount of sustained effort.

Lazy? We don't think so. Yet somehow Steve was unable—not just once, but time and time and time again—to put forth the fraction of an iota of effort re-

quired to keep his office better organized. He confesses that it's still a mystery to him. But he's learned that *not knowing why* is a poor excuse for pretending that it isn't so.

So, again, if it feels like goo to you, it's goo. It doesn't matter if it seems like it should be easy. If it's goo, it's goo. And remember, if it's goo, you might neglect it. And if you do neglect it, you're depriving yourself of success.

AVOIDING GOO IS HARD WORK

Remember Rob? Rob will tell you that whether he's trying to do the goo or is *busy* avoiding the goo, the goo makes his job miserable.

You see, when Rob said that goo "sucks," he wasn't kidding. Goo literally sucks energy out of you. Avoiding unpleasant work is itself hard work! Although it obviously doesn't accomplish a thing, it does use up energy that you could otherwise use for success-producing activities. So avoiding goo is wasted work. You *pay* for it but you get nothing in return. It's like paying a rental fee for an office you never use. It depletes your resources without giving you any benefit at all.

Wait, it gets even worse. If you're avoiding things you know you should do, you can only scold yourself so many times before your self-confidence and self-esteem start to suffer. This can set off a vicious spiraling of toxic emotions that can actually make you avoid even more, punish yourself even more, and waste

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even more of the energy and hope you need to be successful.

AN EXTRA HELPING OF GOO FOR EMPLOYEES

If you're an employee, there may be an extra helping of especially repelling goo on your work plate. This is goo that your employer put there. It's made up of demands that not only require you to do things you don't feel like doing, they require you to do things you perceive as being unreasonable, unnecessary, or even at odds with the very purpose of your job. This goo is *stupid goo!*

Now, before we alienate employers, we should make it clear that even those demands that you experience as being the dumbest and most infuriating may be legitimately important and necessary from your employer's point of view. But legitimate or not, it's how you perceive these demands that matters. Yes, if it's stupid goo to you, it's stupid goo.

It can be maddening when your employer requires you to devote time and effort to actions, tasks, and projects that you experience as interfering with your ability to do your job.

Craig, a frustrated department manager for large manufacturing company, complained bitterly to Steve about the "stupid" demands his employer put on his work plate. We believe he spoke for many employees when he insisted, "I can't do my *job* because my *damned job* keeps getting in the way!"

What Craig was conveying is that the stupid goo his employer kept putting on Craig's work plate prevented him from energetically and enthusiastically pursuing the real purpose and substance of his job.

Now remember, it doesn't matter whether Craig's complaints and the complaints of every other employee who feels the same way are valid or not. What matters is that there's definitely stupid goo on their work plates, and that sets the stage for a drama that, at the very least, wastes lots and lots of energy. The drama features a clash between, on the one hand, an unusually intense desire to avoid doing dumb, wasteful, and unpleasant things and, on the other hand, the realization that their employer may be more likely to punish them for neglecting their *darned job* than for neglecting the *job* they assumed they were there to do!

In addition to our work with clients, we've both had firsthand experience being overwhelmed by employer-initiated stupid goo.

For Chris, it happened when he worked for a snack food business and was responsible for buying the key ingredients for fifteen factories. Due to a reduction in administrative resources, he was forced to enter into a very complex IT system detailed information for every buy he made. He loved doing the deals, but he hated the IT system, which he felt robbed him of valuable time and sanity. So, when another company offered Chris a position he believed would be less *goeey*, he jumped at the opportunity.

For Steve, it happened when the small mission-

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focused health care organization he worked for was swallowed up by a much larger organization with, shall we say, “different priorities.” He watched in horror as the stupid goo on his work plate grew exponentially. (Picture a scene from a bad science fiction film!) The “stupid” things he was required to do took more and more of his time and energy away from things that he believed really mattered and that he loved to do. Pissed off, drained, and unsatisfied, he eventually threw in the towel. After thirty-five satisfying years and a long list of successes that he had gladly worked hard to achieve, stupid goo did Steve in.

Fortunately, Steve did manage to learn some valuable lessons about stupid goo before he quit. He learned, for example, that it takes far less effort to fill out a simple two-page form than it takes to fill out the very same form that you think of as “that stupid, unnecessary, waste-of-time “#\$@%!!! form.” The former is just work. The latter kicks and screams and fusses whenever you get near it.

So even if you’re convinced that you deserve a promotion, a salary increase, and a medal for having way smarter priorities than your employer, unless you’re ready to throw in the towel, it’s worth learning how to get through the stupid goo. Until you do, like all goo, it will suck energy out of you and pose a threat to your success.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. What are the most important tasks or projects you need to get done?
2. Which ones are you already neglecting or at risk of neglecting?
3. Which ones are you actively avoiding?
4. Which ones do you start but quit before you're done?
5. Which ones do you do but with so little enthusiasm that the results may suffer?

NOTES
