

# 41 Fruit, Postcard & Keyring

We often finish any time management programme with this activity. We ask the participants to choose, and write down, three objectives arising from the work we've done on the programme.



Saying it is one thing,  
but if you really want to make a difference,  
you have to persist, persevere, and stick at it.

The first should be a short term objective - something that could be completed say in the next 7 working days.

The second objective should be medium term - something that can be achieved within two months.

The third objective should be a life change - something profound and permanent, that the individual wants to change about their life, and in particular, how they use time in their life.

Examples of each might be:

Short term objective: start and maintain a 'to do' list on Outlook

Medium term objective: design and deliver a project according to the principles discussed on the programme

Permanent, for life: stop blaming time as an excuse for not doing something.

Once these three objectives have been chosen, the participant then is offered

the chance of reinforcing these by being given, respectively, a fruit (eg orange, banana), a post card, and a key ring.

The fruit will symbolise time passing. The deal is this: if the participant takes the fruit, they undertake to put it on their desk, and not remove it until their short term objective has been met.

The post card encourages signing off of an assignment, within a specified and agreed time. If the participant takes the post

card, they have to write their medium term objective on it, keep it visible on their desk. They then have to get it signed off when the objective is completed, and send it back to me by no later than 1 month from the day of this programme. If two-thirds of those taking the post card return their cards by the agreed date, we offer an additional half day programme, for free, for those participants.

The key ring is a permanent, daily reminder of the change

they are committed to making. Any participant taking the key ring must attach it to their regular bunch of keys, and as they do so, associate the key ring with their life-changing commitment. The idea is that every time they see the key ring (at least twice a day) they will recall the commitment to change they are making. Once the commitment is embedded, to the extent that they no longer need the key ring, then they should do one of three things with it: throw it

away; pass it on to someone else who can use it in the same way; or return it to us – we have a sweets jar of key rings returned in this way.

Once all this has been explained, each participant has then the choice as to whether they take a fruit, post card or key ring away. We make it very clear that there is no requirement to take any of the three objects – but if they do, they are committing to the deal implied.

This activity is a powerful metaphor at a number of levels.

Firstly, each object is a very powerful reminder of an obligation made, which depends entirely on the individual to deliver, or not. The fruit will sit on the desk, and start to rot; the postcard will also be on their desk, always in their line of sight; and the key ring will come into view at least twice daily

Secondly, the three objects, once explained, confront each participant with a

decision: do I take it, or not? This encourages each participant to look inward, and ultimately, either be honest with themselves, or take a step forward – on any or all of the three options. As such, the decision requires some degree of self awareness and reflection.

Thirdly, the activity encourages and rewards self-discipline. Through the three objects they can see benefit and reward from undertaking a task and delivering on it.

Finally, and this is something we say: though commitments are easily made at the end of the programme, they are not so easy to deliver 'back in the real world'. We have been running this activity now over 10 years – perhaps 60 or more times. Only twice have we had to offer the additional half day – ie only two groups have ever managed to return two-thirds of their post cards. This perhaps, is the key message: saying it is one thing, but if you really want to make a difference, you

have to persist, persevere, and stick at it... and it has to be important enough to beat off all the other activities clamouring for your limited time.

“If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten” (R. Kipling)

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