

The Mighty, Little Tomato
OR
How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love the Tomato.
By: Kariné Macri

In our ever changing, technologically powered world, the basic need to have our brains breathe has become a luxury many of us can afford but have no currency to purchase. The (mostly) almighty dollar cannot purchase peace of mind, though spend we do. Although, not having to worry about paying bills and coming up with tuition would be a nice break, ultimately and remarkably, peace of mind comes through practice, or through a little tomato.

Buddhist monks practice peace of mind, as do Christian Orthodox priests. They do so by directing concentrated energy and intention inwardly and outwardly, respectively. And what of us, the masses that are left with bills on the table, some of which we cannot find because they get lost in the shuffle of our consumerist nightmare of earning and spending money but doing so while managing a career, family, household and oh yeah, peace of mind.

The Pomodoro Technique <http://www.pomodrotechnique.com/>, invented in 1992 by Francesco Cirillo is a method I started using not too long ago and “have practiced the practice of peace of mind” through the simplistic brilliance of setting a kitchen timer and working under a controlled level of pressure. The basic premise stems from the fact that (most of) our brains love a challenge. The how-to model is taken straight off their website:

The basic unit of work in the Pomodoro Technique™ can be split in five simple steps:

- 1. Choose a task to be accomplished*
 - 2. Set the Pomodoro to 25 minutes (the Pomodoro is the timer)*
 - 3. Work on the task until the Pomodoro rings, then put a check on your sheet of paper*
 - 4. Take a short break (5 minutes is OK)*
- Every 4 Pomodoros take a longer break*

What they fail to mention in this model but is pertinent to the integrity of the model is that you MUST NOT be interrupted from your work during the 25 minutes. If you are, you must reset the timer. This is certainly not rocket science here, folks.

What I've done with this model is employ it to my daily tasks, particularly ones that are difficult to get started. For example, I had a big box of papers that had been shuffled around the house for the past 3 years. I kept ignoring this box because the papers inside were really not important. They did have reference value because they were the back-up receipts and statements from previous tax years but they really had no order and became a constant source of irritation for me, not to mention an eyesore. My peace of mind was being zapped every time I saw this box and it

started popping into my field of vision on a more regular basis as time went on. I kept putting off having to look in it because, like many “organized” people, I *had* to wait for a time when I had 7 hours at my disposal, my head was clear of mental clutter and the planets were aligned just so. I waited. Three years to be exact and that time never arrived. Two weeks ago, I set my Pomodoro timer (I have a digital one on my iPhone) and got only as far one inch through the stacks. I ticked off 1 Pomodoro and set it again (after my short break) because now I was pumped. That’s what the brain does. If you challenge it, it wants to keep working so when your 25 minutes are up you and your brain have a conversation that goes something like this:

Brain: Noooooooo, wait I want to keep going!

You: No, we must stop now. The timer has gone off and Francesco Cirillo has decreed we must indeed stop and take a small break.

Brain: But...But...

You: Oooh, shiny object on TV.

Brain: OMMMMMMMMM

You: Ok brain, timer is being set...and off we go tic, tic, tic, tic *NB I prefer to hear the timer ticking, and with the digital model you have the option of turning it off.

Brain: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, where was I, sorting, sorting, sorting, file, shred, file, file, shred, file, file.

Our brains want to “attack” a project we start but not finish especially when we turn it into a game of “last one there is a rotten egg.” Ultimately, the goal is to rack up Pomodoro points during the day so that you are being über-productive on a scale that makes sense for you. What I find happening is that my concentration levels are being really focused so that I’m getting more done in less time. Tasks that would take me 8-10 Pomodoros to finish are now taking me 4-5. As with most worthwhile things in life, practice is key. It took me 15 Pomodoros over 5 days (including an ‘I don’t want to do this now’ 2 day break) to complete emptying the box and I was done when I was done. Planets didn’t have to be realigned 7 consecutive hours did not have to be found but most importantly there was peace of mind being practiced.

Kariné Macri is a writing + language specialist based out of NYC. Through her company ThinkerExtraordinaire, LLC (<http://www.ThinkerExtraordinaire.com>) she specializes in clear thinking through clear writing for the government, the private sector and the public, handling proposals, resumes and copy. She is also an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Arts & Sciences at TCI College in Manhattan, teaching English Composition. For comments or questions about Thinker Extraordinaire, please write to: karine.macri@me.com.