



The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work

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What *really* sets the best managers above the rest? It's their power to build a cadre of employees who have *great inner work lives*—consistently positive emotions; strong motivation; and favorable perceptions of the organization, their work, and their colleagues. The worst managers undermine inner work life, often unwittingly.

As Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer explain in *The Progress Principle*, seemingly mundane workday events can make or break employees' inner work lives. But it's forward momentum in meaningful work—progress—that creates the best inner work lives. Through rigorous analysis of nearly 12,000 diary entries provided by 238 employees in 7 companies, the authors explain how managers can foster progress and enhance inner work life every day.

The book shows how to remove obstacles to progress, including meaningless tasks and toxic relationships. It also explains how to activate two forces that enable progress: (1) *catalysts*—events that directly facilitate project work, such as clear goals and autonomy—and (2) *nourishers*—interpersonal events that uplift workers, including encouragement and demonstrations of respect and collegiality.

Brimming with honest examples from the companies studied, *The Progress Principle* equips aspiring and seasoned leaders alike with the insights they need to maximize their people's performance.

The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work Details

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From Reader Review **The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work** for online ebook

Jeff says

"The Progress Principle" states simply that progress in meaningful work is the single greatest factor when it comes to creating high functioning teams and work environments. Progress in meaningful work serves as trigger for positive perceptions, emotions, and motivations. This creates a virtuous feedback loop, greatly increasing workplace performance.

The tenor of the book echoes that of "The Happiness Advantage" and "Drive", suggesting that by supporting progress, providing positive catalysts, and nourishing staff, leaders can increase teamwork, creativity and performance.

Yevgeniy Brikman says

This book would've been far better as a blog post. It makes several important arguments in the preface and then repeats them over and over again for a few hundred pages, adding only a handful of valuable nuggets throughout the rest of the book. So, to save you some time, here's a summary that captures 95% of the book's content:

- * Making progress in work—small incremental steps forward on a daily basis—is one of the most important drivers of happiness, productivity, and motivation. Consider video games (e.g., experience points, progress bars, leveling up) and fitness (e.g., lifting a few more pounds every time you go to the gym).

- * Hitting setbacks in work—getting stuck, having projects canceled, being ignored, yak shaving—is one of the most important causes of unhappiness, lack of productivity, and loss of motivation.

- * Therefore, the main job of management is to (a) ensure that the work feels meaningful and (b) to remove all obstacles to daily progress. Do that well, and motivation, happiness, and high performance will take care of itself; do it poorly, and no amount of incentives or punishments will help.

That's really all there is to it. There are a few other bits and pieces in the book that are painfully obvious (e.g., provide support to your workers, don't ignore their opinions or insult them), some vague advice on how to facilitate progress, and that's it. So, in short: make small, incremental progress, every single day. Not surprisingly, this is also a guiding principle of agile and many other methodologies.

As always, I've saved a few quotes from the book:

"Most people have strong intrinsic motivation to do their work, at least early in their careers. That motivation exists, and continues, until something gets in the way. This has a startling implication: as long as the work is meaningful, managers do not have to spend time coming up with ways to motivate people to do that work. They are much better served by removing barriers to progress, helping people experience the intrinsic

satisfaction that derives from accomplishment."

"This pattern is what we call the progress principle: of all the positive events that influence inner work life, the single most powerful is progress in meaningful work; of all the negative events, the single most powerful is the opposite of progress—setbacks in the work. We consider this to be a fundamental management principle: facilitating progress is the most effective way for managers to influence inner work life. Even when progress happens in small steps, a person's sense of steady forward movement toward an important goal can make all the difference between a great day and a terrible one."

"The effect of setbacks on emotions is stronger than the effect of progress. Although progress increases happiness and decreases frustration, the effect of setbacks is not only opposite on both types of emotions—it is greater. The power of setbacks to diminish happiness is more than twice as strong as the power of progress to boost happiness. The power of setbacks to increase frustration is more than three times as strong as the power of progress to decrease frustration."

Fred says

Was prompted to read this book by review by Seth Godin. Primary concepts are pretty much a no brainers once they are explained. I recommend it because it brings light to the common sense we know, but need reminded that we do know. Plus the idea that creativity has many facets hopefully will empower a reader.

It continues to amaze me that current management dogma has largely missed the boat on these precepts. It is somewhat repetitive, but that seems to be a hallmark of current business related literature.

John Pestka says

Excellent and insightful. The authors make it incredibly clear that managers must realize and recognize that making progress in meaningful work is the top motivating factor for employees, leading to, as they call it, superior inner work life. I appreciate that it's another book backed by lengthy, significant research, this time following employees at various companies for months on end and asking them to do daily journal entries. Another book I highly recommend for anyone that supervises/manages people.

Penn says

This book talks about how the small progress well appreciated on time keeps up the momentum and helps in building success in the teams we lead.

I wanted to apply the progress principle on myself before applying it on my team. My personal takeaway- Every small progress made is more important than being perfect from the very beginning. All that matters is the progress made. Appreciating and supporting myself is the most important factor.

Always make sure there are more number of positive events and triggers at work place than the negative events. Negative events make more damage than we all can imagine.

The Progress principle (Power of meaningful accomplishment): Small wins are very powerful when aligned with meaningful work. Help your team find meaning in what they do by clearly defining ownership and connect it with the big picture, by appreciating the progress and by clearing the obstacles.

The catalyst Factor(Power of project support)

Clear goals, autonomy, resources,enough time,help with the work, learning from problems and successes, allowing ideas to flow.

The nourishment factor(Power of interpersonal support)

Respect during tough times, Encouragement, Emotional support, Feeling of inclusion.

Scott says

This book is a psychological look at the human side of management. Rather than measuring employees and productivity with simple numbers or behavioral psychology, the authors conducted a survey of employees at work to judge cognition, perception, and emotion. The employees were from numerous businesses, all with different management styles, goals, and operational environments. One theme was that employee[s invisible and inner perceptions, emotions, and motivations effect productivity. Utilizing different methods of measurement, the authors correlated factors such as business success, product success, helpful project management, task successes and setbacks, and communication as having an effect on employees inner work lives, and thus their productivity. Although some factors were based on external effectors, such as market forces, numerous methods of improving successes and preventing loss to these inner lives were developed. Techniques were given for both managers and individuals to become aware of, develop, review, and plan on progress to bolster their inner selves at work.

loafingcactus says

One of the main points of the book is a by-the-way in chapter 8 that isn't even mentioned in the chapter title. What doofs! So here's the deal: work nourishers, catalysts and a sense of progress matter. If you are manager, don't leave those things to chance. Instead, make a checklist and make sure those things happen for your people. There, now you don't have to read the book.

Sammy says

The whole book can basically be outlined by these ideas.

Journaling everyday with discipline is the most important contributor to progress and reflection. It also

contributes to self realization and happiness

Focusing on progress everyday no matter how small is the biggest contributor to growth.

Create positive feedback loops instead of negative because...negative happenings have a stronger effect on psyche than positive ones

Helping people helps you

Work that is meaningful is difficult and that's okay.

André Bueno says

Good book though I felt it was a bit redundant and long winded.

READING NOTES

CHAPTER 01

Inner work life has to do with how an employee feels about working somewhere and which direction you are shifting their feelings toward their goal. Do you make them feel good about being apart of the organization? Three components of inner work life: emotions, perceptions, and motivation.

CHAPTER 02

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Happiness boosts creative problem solving that can longer and build up over time

CHAPTER 03 and CHAPTER 04

Making progress in meaningful work is the greatest stimulant in promoting the inner work life

CHAPTER 05

Progress and achievement is important

Small wins and incremental change is powerful especially when aligned with meaningful work

Meaningful work: is it contributing value to someone? Does someone depend on you? Are you contributing towards someone?

Give people ownership

Make sure that the work in your organization is producing is progressing forward inch by inch and you're building up momentum

Keep the progress loop going and remove obstacles to make the job easier

CHAPTER 06

The Catalyst Factor (7 Catalysts):

1. Clear goals and time frames
2. Give autonomy
3. Provide access to resources
4. Given enough time
5. Given help and collaborating with others
6. Learning from success and failures

7. Allowing ideas to flow, being open to creative solutions

Know how to manage the work climate by knowing the 3 forces: Consideration for people and their ideas, does the organization promote collaboration?, Communication between lines of work are important.

Small wins are important for building momentum or work catalysts

Support inter divisional communication

Remove inhibitions that hinder progress and successes

CHAPTER 07

Nourishment factor

1. Respect your employees and their efforts. Especially when handling negative situations.
2. Encouragement of their work
3. Handling emotional situations with empathy.
4. Group inclusion and making sure everyone feels included.

Toxins

Minimize conflicts between teams by promoting clear communication between employees

CHAPTER 08

Manage your employees using checklists to ensure your subordinates feel there is constant progress that is occurring. The more they feel they are making constant progress (and are recognized for these actions)- the more they will feel they are working towards something worthwhile.

- PROGRESS PRINCIPLE CHECKLIST -

PROGRESS

Briefly describe 1 or 2 events today that indicated either a small win or a possible breakthrough.

CATALYST

1. Did the team have clear short- and longterm goals for meaningful work?
2. Did team members have sufficient autonomy to solve problems and take ownership of the project?
3. Did they have all the resources they needed to move forward efficiently?
4. Did they have sufficient time to focus on meaningful work?
5. Did I encourage team members to help one another?
6. Did I discuss lessons from today's successes and problems with my team?
7. Did I help ideas flow freely within the group?

SETBACKS

Briefly describe 1 or 2 events today that indicated a small setback or a possible crisis.

INHIBITORS

1. Was there any confusion regarding long- or short-term goals for meaningful work?
2. Were team members overly constrained in their ability to solve problems and feel ownership of the project?
3. Did they lack any of the resources they needed to move forward effectively?
4. Did they lack sufficient time to focus on meaningful work?
5. Did I or others fail to provide needed or requested help?

6. Did I “punish” failure, or neglect to find lessons and/or opportunities in problems and successes?
7. Did I or others cut off the presentation or debate of ideas prematurely?

NOURISHERS

1. Did I show respect to team members by recognizing their contributions to progress, attending to their ideas and treating them as trusted professionals?
2. Did I encourage team members who faced difficult challenges?
3. Did I support team members who had a personal or professional problem?
4. Is there a sense of personal and professional affiliation and camaraderie within the team?

TOXINS

1. Did I disrespect any team members by failing to recognize their contributions to progress, not attending to their ideas, or not treating them as trusted professionals?
2. Did I discourage a member of the team in any way?
3. Did I neglect a team member who had a personal or professional problem?
4. Is there tension or antagonism among members of the team or between team members and me?

INNER WORK LIFE

1. Did I see any indications of the quality of my subordinates' inner work lives today?
 - a. Perceptions of the work, team, management, firm
 - b. Emotions
 - c. Motivation
2. What specific events might have affected inner work life today?

ACTION PLAN

1. What can I do tomorrow to strengthen the catalysts and nourishers identified and provide ones that are lacking?
 2. What can I do tomorrow to start eliminating the inhibitors and toxins identified?
-

Roy Klein says

I've decided to stop reading this book halfway through.

The reason is that the book contains a small amount of simplistic advice, almost no practical methods for implementing this advice, and a large body of narrated stories of people who the writers researched. The narrative is interesting at first, but grows tedious and uninformative very quickly. I suppose the writer didn't want to throw to waste all the body of text she collected from her tests subject, but that doesn't make that body of text worth my time.

I have a feeling that the book could've been effectively shortened to a booklet or an essay while retaining most of its value.

Melvin says

An enjoyable reading addressing how positive and negative work environments arise and how they affect people's creative problem solving.

This book is based on a study conducted in a set of 7 companies in 3 different industries in which knowledge workers and professionals working on complex problems collected and reported daily diary entries about their *inner work lives*, i.e., their perceptions, emotions, and motivations during the work day. Although most questions asked for numerical ratings, the most important question, "*Briefly describe one event from today that stands out in your mind.*", allowed respondents free rein.

Why inner work life matters?: no matter how brilliant a company's or project's strategy might be the strategy's execution depends on great performance by people inside the organization. Unquestionably, performance improves greatly when workers have positive perceptions, emotions, and motivations about their work and their working environment. The *Key Three* positive types of events that are part of every workday and that influence inner work life are: (1) *progress* in meaningful work, (2) *catalysts* (events that directly help project work), and (3) *nourishers* (interpersonal events that uplift the people doing the work). *Of all of these positive events that influence inner work life, the single most powerful is **progress in meaningful work** [The Progress Principle]*. Hence, the best way to motivate people, day in and day out, is by facilitating *progress*-even small wins.

Conventional management practices for a healthy and productive working environment include hiring the best talent and providing them appropriate incentives, giving stretch assignments to develop talent, using emotional intelligence to connect with each individual, and reviewing performance carefully. Although these conventional practices are important, they miss a fundamental act of good management: ***managing for progress***.

The findings in this book are highly relevant to *Agile* software processes, due to their strong dependency on, perhaps motivated, individuals; Scrum Masters and Agile Coaches should *manage for progress* as one of their main responsibilities is to *remove roadblocks impeding progress of the development team*.

Nelson Zagalo says

Teresa Amabile e Steven Kramer, ambos professores de psicologia, realizaram um estudo com 238 empregados em 7 empresas, a quem pediram para todos os dias preencherem um diário das suas atividades, tendo tudo resultado em mais de 12 000 entradas que foram depois analisadas qualitativamente. O seu achado, dá nome a este livro, e apesar de ser bom, sabe a pouco. Não que o estudo não seja válido, mas porque a conclusão não difere tanto de outros estudos sobre motivação já existentes, e que são aqui completamente ignorados.

Este estudo interessava-me em particular, porque a variável de Progresso é essencial nas narrativas e nos jogos, e é por isso que a tenho trabalhado, no sentido de a identificar melhor para assim compreender melhor o seu uso criativo, desde logo entender melhor como nós nos movemos em função desse progresso. Mas o que aqui se apresenta é parco.

Ou seja, como resultado final Amabile acaba por nos dizer que aquilo que mantém as pessoas motivadas no seu trabalho, é receber feedback que dê conta dos avanços nas tarefas. E que para tal é preciso que os chefes e gestores, sejam capazes de dividir o trabalho, e esforço, e por sua vez sejam capazes de garantir que o feedback é realizado. Concordo em absoluto, mas isto é aquilo que já está contido na segunda variável de Deci, a "competência", de que já aqui falei antes, e que como digo também, já tinha sido identificado por

Vygotski, bastante antes. Ou seja, nada de novo.

Este livro de Amabile é curto, porque ao centrar-se apenas nas competências, esquece os outros dois princípios de Deci, a Autonomia e os Relacionamentos, sem esses ficamos com todo o processo coxo. Um empregado, sem autonomia, que seja obrigado a fazer apenas o que lhe mandam, que não possa dar nada de si para o processo, é um trabalhador desmotivado, o progresso só, não chega, é preciso significado, e esse advém daquilo que cada um faz com o mundo com que interage. Por outro lado, o trabalhador precisa de poder discutir essas tarefas com os pares, compreender como se equipara, o que faz melhor, ou menos mal, precisa de ter um espelho que contribua para correção e melhoramento.

Neste caso concreto, e já que Amabile escreve o livro orientado a gestores, as suas preocupações não deveriam centrar-se tanto no design do processo, mas mais nas pessoas, nomeadamente nos tais gestores. Porque se o Progresso é um bom indicador sobre como agir, não chega no caso do gestor ser apenas um bom técnico, é preciso ser-se muito mais na capacidade de relacionamento pessoal e social, enquanto líder.

Amabile limita-se no final a apresentar meia-dúzia de conselhos e recomendações aos gestores, baseados no tal Progresso, mas que não dizem muito, parecem simples senso comum, ficando a sensação que mais valia ter feito um livro para divulgar os resultados das entrevistas, dos diários analisados, e não se terem focado em criar grandes teorias, menos ainda dar grandes conselhos.

Publicado em <http://virtual-illusion.blogspot.cz/2...>

David Phillips says

This is a great book for leading other people. It helps those leading others to see what really matters to others. It helps focus our efforts at inspiring and motivating others and to help those we lead make progress along the way to meaningful work and a healthy inner life. Based on a year of research with multiple companies, this book is worth the leaders time and reflection. The more meaningful the work, the more healthy our inner life and the more progress we make in our work, the more effective the company and the more creative and production people will be.

Bernd Schiffer says

Good research, over time boring and repetitive narrative.

Amy says

Not bad. It's research, so it takes a while before we get to any practical bits. Once we did get into the meat of it though, there were lots of insights into how managers can cultivate productive work in their teams. I wish I had read this five years ago.
