ADVANCED PROPERTY SYSTEM
2021.08.26

AUTO-PILOT DEVELOPER

Effective property development relies on the ability to maximize resources and amplify time management. Technological advancements have recently enabled the automation of rudimentary administrative tasks, allowing property developers to build a work system around their projects. Automation relieves workload and frees up resources to focus time on the essential development activities that cannot be systematised.

You can find a link to the form-based questions here.

10.1 SMART WORK
Time is the most valuable resource available to a developer. Every professional in the world has the same amount of time in their day. Even the wealthiest, most powerful real estate moguls only have 60 minutes in every hour and 24 hours in their day. Creating exceptional work therefore requires learning techniques that enable us to manage our time efficiently. Using time economically allows us to deliver increasingly complex developments to the highest possible standard. Working *smarter* and not *harder* is a crucial skill when growing your development business and involves relying on technology to do some of the heavy lifting.

10.2 EIGHTY TWENTY
The 80/20 Rule, or *Pareto* principle explains how setting priorities can be an invaluable tool to time management. The rule states that 80% of the overall *value* of a group of things is concentrated in only 20% of those things. Using food as an example, a typical restaurant will find that 80% of the meals ordered come from only 20% of the items on the menu. To this end, the relationship between time and effectiveness (or value) is also inversely proportional. This means that reaching 80% effectiveness in a particular endeavour only takes up 20% of the total time that it takes to complete it, and vice versa.

The same rule applies to our goals and work effectiveness in the context of a property development. You may find that out of the ten most important development goals you can generally expect to be 80% effective overall by achieving only two. The time that it takes to unlock the last 20% of your objectives will, on the contrary, take up 80% of the total project time. With the Pareto principle in mind, prioritization of your objectives becomes key to leveraging your work efficacy.

10.3 MANAGING THE MIND

What we think is very important, and our thoughts have a direct relationship with our abilities to execute work efficaciously. In life, we will become as successful as our thoughts allow us to be. We will be as rich as we think we deserve to be. Humans are highly intellectual beings, and we tend to live up to our most dominant thoughts. Managing these thoughts can be critical to achieving success, or at least in reaching our version of success. At the start of every development, ask yourself the following leading questions to help establish your frame of mind.

- What do I really want?
- What do I think I hope to gain from this development?
- How is this project serving my specific goals?

We experience an overwhelming number of negative thoughts every day, so keeping an optimistic mindset can be a challenge. Reminding yourself that you are better than you may think and that you deserve more than you have come to believe will help you gain perspective in the context of your project. By avoiding self-defeating statements, you can constructively work on strengthening your self-image. Property entrepreneurship is a constant and lonely struggle, so it is vital to stay motivated, positive, and healthy. Establishing effective habits are a useful tool to maintain a healthy mindset. Your goals should be rehearsed over and over until they become part of your daily routine. The following diagram of shows how these internalized principles and patterns of behaviour overlap to shape your habits.
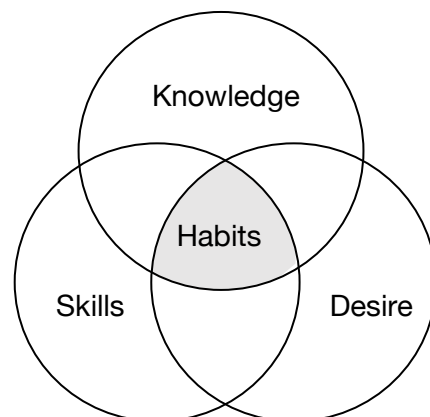
10.4 HOW TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS

Work in and of itself is not an accomplishment. Avoid falling into the trap of endless *busyness*, by constantly reminding yourself of where you are heading in your *business*. Goal setting starts with making the decision to clearly define your desires before you begin. Once your outcome is determined, you must execute the necessary actions consistently and with determination to slowly build yourself up. Failing to make any decisions will leave you feeling out of control – as if you are being led by external forces. Simply put, you can either let your own goals guide you, or you can react to events in your life as they occur.

You have two choices when it comes to goal setting.

- Choice 1 – Be positive. Write down your goals and your 'how to' list. Follow your list.
- Choice 2 – Don't write down your goals; just carry out tasks as they occur to you.

In property development, it is worthwhile to put your goals into writing and review them daily. Once these goals have been physically set out on paper, the actions that lead to accomplishing them need to be determined. The activities you complete in reaching your goals can be described as your *how-to* list. It details the steps that you need to follow, in sequence, to get to your destination. Having a written list of goals, and a list of actions associated to those goals means that you have a plan and can begin allocating time to achieving it.

Exercise
How long has it been since you took twenty minutes, two hours, a day or even a whole week to sit down and plan your life goals as if your future really counted it? Put two property goals in writing, with five *how-to* steps alongside each goal.

10.5 MASTER YOUR WORKSPACE
Our work environment has a fundamental influence on the work we produce. I personally believe in having a highly organised and uncluttered workspace, but the way you arrange your space is a subjective decision. Some believe that their desk should be in a state of 'organised chaos' and draw inspiration from many, different visual influences. I often find myself able to be more productive in a calm, clean environment free of distractions. Indexing books and organising digital storage is a helpful way to save time when searching for specific files or locating a particular reference.

Exercise
What is on your desk right now? Consider your environment and arrange your workspace according to your preferences in terms of location, light levels, and spatial arrangement.
Pro tip: Here are some ideas to apply in your office.
  – Tools
    Allow yourself to easily access the tools you need to perform tasks. For example, if your work relies on using coloured pens or post-it notes, make sure they are nearby and in good supply.
  – Comfort
    Adjust your computer screen height to match your posture and assess the ergonomics of your working position. Does your chair serve the purposes of your everyday tasks?
  – Space
    Consider the major colours in your workspace and adapt them where possible to create a calming mood. A space with increased natural light and views to the outside will bring out a boost in productivity.

Master your desk, and you will master your work.

10.6 TIME BLOCKING
Time blocking is the action of setting aside time every day for the critical tasks you need to accomplish. This can be done on a notepad, a list or scheduled in a calendar. Blocking out your digital calendar first thing in the morning can be an extremely useful planning aid. Also important is setting aside adequate time for thinking, reflecting, and planning. Deadlines should be marked on your calendar and broken down into smaller tasks spaced out over time. If you are using Outlook to block out time, you can create an action list inside the description portion of the calendar block. Sufficient time can then be put aside and devoted to carrying out tasks to avoid last-minute calamities.

10.7 LEARNING TO SAY NO
Avoid overcommitment to tasks that aren't important by offering your refusals politely and pleasantly. The second page of the Negotiation Rules of Engagement template is a useful guide to practice saying *no*. This should be your default answer to tasks that require large investments of your time with little or no payback. When asked to commit to these high-energy-low-return tasks, try to avoid saying 'let me think about it' or 'I don't know' as it gets people's hopes up.

Exercise
I hereby give you official permission to say *no* to three people that have asked you to devote time to something that you believe doesn't serve your core interests. In exchange, calculate the time that you have saved, and allocate it to a personal project that believe to be personally enriching and have been meaning to do for some time.

10.8 BATCHING TASKS
Group categories of similar tasks together so that you can handle them in batches. For example, responding to emails or making payments can be batched together to save time. Grouping tasks together will also help you avoid interruptions when concentrating on completing core activities. Keep a focussed to-do list (5-8 items max) of critical tasks to do every day and scratch them off as you go. Completing tasks and crossing them out can be very satisfying and this small motivational trick will help you build up a strong work ethic.

10.9 POWER TECHNOLOGY
The advancement of artificial intelligence and web-based tools has resulted in the invention of many automated applications that can help accomplish tasks in a super-human way. Time management programs can help save hours, weeks or sometimes months of project time. Personally, I have found that the best tools for property development can be found in the *Microsoft 365* subscription package. The power of these programs is drastically underrated, and they remain undiscovered by the majority of professionals in the real estate industry. Most developers rely on basic processing applications such as Word, Excel, and Outlook to carry out administrative tasks and have not noticed the other applications that have been included for free with their subscriptions.

SharePoint
SharePoint is a web-based collaborative platform that integrates with Microsoft 365 applications. Like a basic *intranet* (or local server) it can be used as a secured repository for development data storage. SharePoint is a formidable tool for management of documents due to its highly configurable nature. For instance, it can be used as a program for collecting information by linking it to other applications. In this way, each application feeds information straight into the same database. In the context of a property development, apps can be created to perform integrated tasks including some of the following examples.
–   Data gathering
–   Saving attachments from emails into a dedicated folder
–   Automatically compile lists (such as sales enquiries)
–   Search for data in a file (such as a .pdf) and add to a table
–   Organise and process documents (such as invoices)

Power Automate
Power automate is a tool for automation using connected applications in the Microsoft family. It can be used to create workflows connected to the cloud that automatically take care of tasks in the background. Broadly speaking, Power Automate can be configured to handle many of the administrative tasks in our day and save significant time in property development projects.

Flows
A *flow* describes a series of actions (or workflows) that are linked together into a sequence to carry out a specific task. It typically relies on a trigger, which results in a specific automated action. The order, type and timing of these actions can be customized to specifically deal with the functions of a property development project. Some flows are very straight forward, such as using triggers to send automated notifications or emails. They can, however, be built up into a complex set of instructions and they don't require the use of coding or programming. Writing a flow is highly logical and can be started from a basic template. A flow can be modified by substituting actions from a list of functions in the drop-down menu.

Exercise
Consider the administrative activities in your business that take up a lot of time. Are there any tasks that are waiting to be automated? Identify one example of a task in your business that you think can be automated, and list the actions required to complete this task on a piece of paper. *Le voilà* - you have just written the blueprint for your first *flow.* Now all you must do is translate your steps from paper to digital instructions that can be carried out by your flow.

If you are interested in building automation tools, you can explore the different templates and start building your first flow here. To see how these flows can save time in your business, you can access the documentation automation toolkit here.

Teams
The facilitation of online meetings has increased rapidly due to the need for isolation caused by the global pandemic. A spike in usage has put pressure on software companies to advance online meeting technology by finding ways to improve connectivity and increase functionality of applications linked to these platforms. As a result of higher competition, the costs of using programs such as Teams or Zoom has plummeted, resulting in broadened accessibility for individuals or small businesses. One theory about the future of property development is that communication will be largely based on the use of communication platforms such as Teams. It is believed by many that Teams may even replace the use of email in the near future. This is not such a farfetched idea, as many companies have reorganised their *post-pandemic* work systems to suit a more flexible way of working. New communication strategies rely on video calls, simplified file sharing, and chat functionality – all features that are now available to the Teams app.

10.10 ONLINE
Using the internet as a tool to support property projects is a greatly underutilized strategy and has huge potential in the future of real estate developments. Digital applications that are hosted online can now be used to drive sales, monitor occupation of completed buildings and save time in project management or job administration. The web provides great power to property owners, who can market sales online to an audience of thousands at the click of a button. Developers can study their audience with greater accuracy by creating live research polls that capture streams of data from a focussed group of customers.

10.11 PROPERTY TECH

Rapidly changing technology has resulted in several key innovations affecting the property industry. Digital applications can connect to physical buildings or properties through the Internet of Things (IoT). This has resulted in more convenient ways of collection of property data, the development of improved building maintenance systems, better property data management, and faster communications between landlords and tenants. Innovations in building operations through the use of technology can translate directly into lower management expenses as well as a higher level of control for building users.

Technical improvements are replacing traditional management tools, and increased automation allows landlords to reduce their operational footprint, thereby lowering expenses. Online tools based in the cloud allow for the smart management of data, which can be viewed on a live, management dashboard. Having easy access to information allows for informative, proactive decision making which bolsters mid- to long-term property planning. Connectivity plays a vital role in the future of property management and operations. One example of this in a completed development could be the use of an online digital platform that is linked to a community of residents. An online website can help organise the gathering and distribution of information such as news, events, and building communications.

10.12 REPORTING

When it comes to understanding development performance, summarized reporting can be automatically generated by the system from live property data. Building information can be collated and graphically represented in legible charts (infographics). Software systems can process and consolidate large, complex data streams from multiple sources into a concise dashboard specifically set up to be managed by the property owner or developer.

Automated reporting also uses technology to intelligently communicate with customers, investors, development partners or financiers such as the bank. Report outputs from the system help ensure that developers always have the latest information on hand and can easily share this data with other members of the project team. Some examples of reports that can be automatically generated and managed by a property system include the following.
 − Project programs
 − Team tasks and resources
 − Feasibility studies
 − Cashflows

10.13 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

The project program task template provides a detailed description of the actions performed by each member of the team during the project work stages. Building an effective project program and resource allocation lists can help save time, and reduce the time required to coordinate the actions of the project team. By following the description of services across the project work stages, developers can easily understand the individual roles of each professional at a glance, providing essential support where required.