Science Societies

Set Aside Time to Grow

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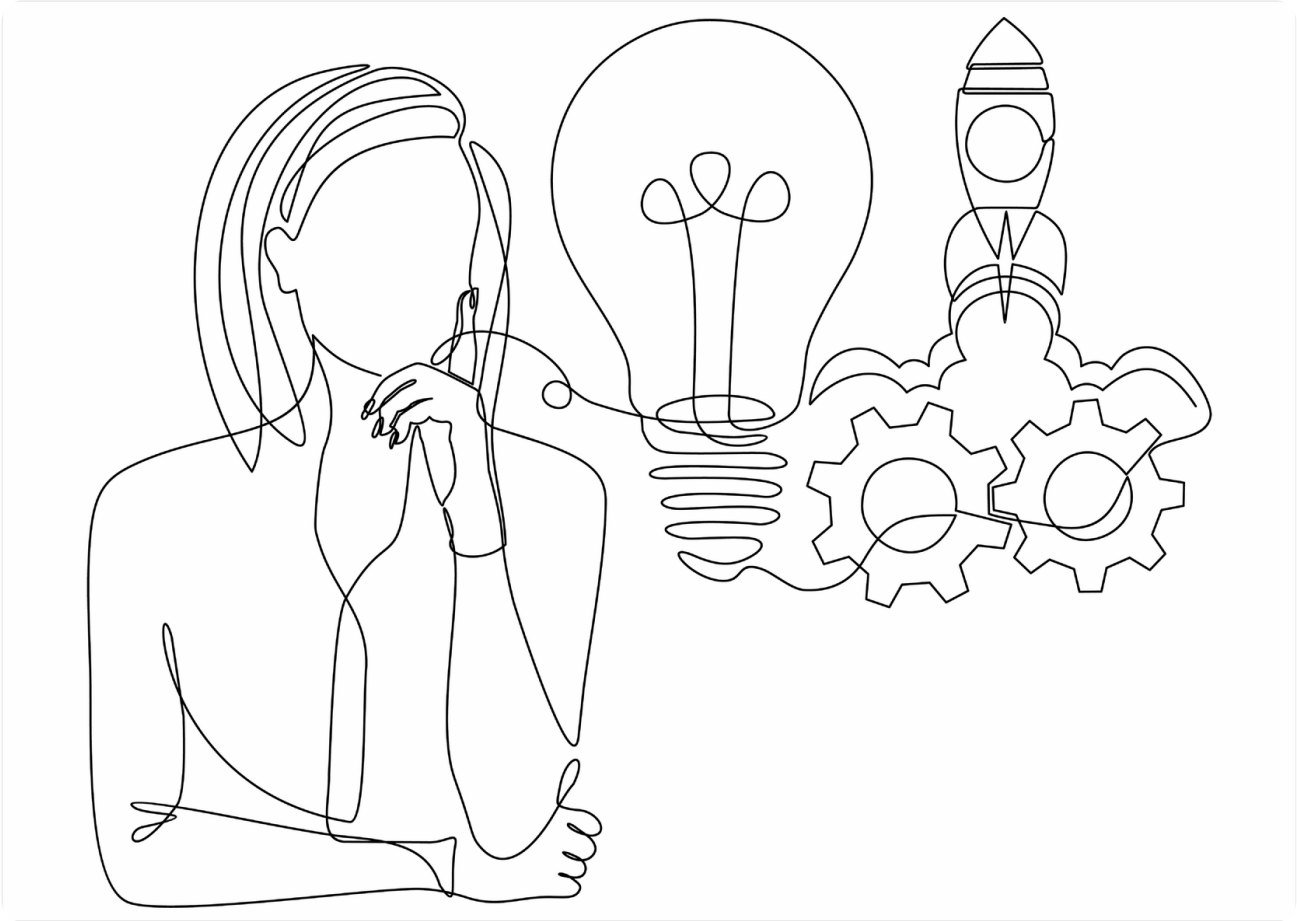
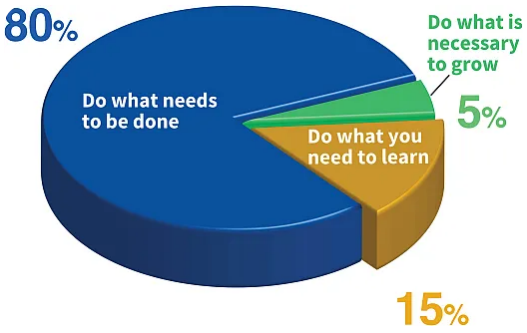


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Greetings! I hope my message finds you well, after a safe return from our Annual Meeting in St. Louis. It seems like just yesterday that we were together, renewing acquaintances and making scientific friends. The meeting events and speakers were inspiring! As an active participant, I am sure you returned home a little tired from the intense learning and social schedule, but reinvigorated by the energy, optimism, and new ideas that you heard and shared with our Tri-Society colleagues.

Once back in our regular routine, it can be hard to keep the momentum going. Like me, you probably wrote down several exciting new research questions, learned of key papers and reports that you should read, and met wonderful scientific friends that you would like to keep in touch with. Faced with the daily challenge of keeping body and soul together and looking at your already too-full "to-do" list, it is difficult to imagine how to fit in more activities. Where to get started?

The author John C. Maxwell offers a brilliant suggestion in his book, *The 360 º Leader*, which is as much about leading yourself as it is about leading others. Paraphrasing Maxwell's advice on managing priorities, you want to get to the point where you can focus your time in this way:



John C. Maxwell, author of The 360o Leader, advises us to focus our time in this manner.

- **80% of the time—Do what needs to be done**
- **15% of the time—Do what you need to learn**
- **5% of the time—Do what is necessary to grow**

In a 40-hour work week, this means that you will spend 32 hours on tasks that have short-term deadlines, such as measuring, monitoring, and reporting. Six hours are dedicated to learning that you need right away, such as data analysis or reference readings. This learning also adds to your overall knowledge, as part of your professional development. The last two hours are reserved for growth activities that are an investment in future you.

With great understatement, Maxwell admits, “This may not be easy to achieve, but it is what you should strive for.”

Most of us are capable of filling every hour with tasks and appointments. When you are leading an overly busy life with a multitude of responsibilities at work and at home, it seems impossible to set aside two hours per week for “blue sky thinking.” Yet, that is exactly what you need to do. Genuine blue sky thinking draws on curiosity rather than on knowledge or experience. It opens up new avenues of thinking that you pursue in an open-minded way.

Give Creative Thinking a Chance

To give creative thinking a chance, give it the time and attention it deserves. This may mean making an appointment with yourself, which is written into your calendar. At the designated time, gather the materials that you need—maybe those key papers and reports that are on your “must read” list following the ASA Annual Meeting? Take those along with your notebook, and move away from your normal work area to a quiet, peaceful spot. Libraries and parks are ideal for reading and creative thinking. If you are not able to leave your office, then change your position. Some people set up a “thinking chair” in their office to use solely for that purpose. Others use exercise time to stretch their mental muscles while doing physical activity. The main thing is to avoid

restraining any idea that comes to your mind during your thinking time. Forget budgetary constraints, analytical limitations, lack of suitable equipment, policies, and other restrictions. Instead, say to yourself, “If there were no barriers to success, what could I achieve?”

Maybe deep thinking and introspection comes naturally for you. Even if it does, setting aside dedicated time for creative thinking helps you to be intentional. Instead of waiting for the muse to strike, or filling pages of your creative thinking journal with ideas that remain unrealized, a scheduled time for growth is an opportunity to be more deliberate and notice the regularity at which creative ideas “bubble up” into your stream of consciousness.

Act on New Ideas

Such a growth mindset will get you a certain distance, but once you have narrowed down and identified your favorite new idea(s), you need to take action. Now is a perfect time to reconnect with the scientific friends you met at the ASA Annual Meeting. Please do not feel shy to reach out to any ASA member or Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) for advice, mentoring, or as a friendly reviewer. A friendly reviewer is a person who kindly provides a high‐level evaluation of your idea. Because they are doing this in a friendly way, they will acknowledge, encourage, and listen to you while also telling you the truth about your idea. Sometimes we do not want to hear the truth—no one wants to know that others perceive their idea to have errors, flaws, or uncertainties—but it is part of the process of growing your best idea.

Thomas Edison’s quote, “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work,” is a perfect reminder that failure is not the end. It is just the beginning of a journey toward success.

After receiving feedback from a trusted ASA member or CCA, you should be able to focus in on the most promising aspect of your idea for an upcoming trial, research proposal, or program development. Please try to resist the temptation to add more projects to your already busy schedule!

In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins writes:

"Most of us lead busy, but undisciplined lives. We have ever?expanding "to?do" lists, trying to build momentum by doing, doing, doing—and doing more. And it rarely works. Those who build the good?to?great companies, however, made as much use of "stop doing" lists as the "to do" lists. They displayed a remarkable amount of discipline to unplug all sorts of extraneous junk."

As this quote illustrates, you can get further by making purposeful decisions about what you will do and what you will not do. Your self□discipline translates into a clearer vision and purpose because you have chosen and prioritized actions based on what you can accomplish in a reasonable amount of time. In a complex world, you have selected the factors that can have a bigger impact and differentiated them from factors that have less or no impact. You have understood that success comes from doing the things that matter, rather than all the things that you could do.

Let's keep the momentum going from the ASA Annual Meeting to help you reach your goal! Stay involved with the ASA member network, which extends across the USA and around the globe. Keep in touch with your section and community for updates and next steps. Watch for more information in *CSA News* magazine, our journals, and other publications. And above all, be kind and patient with yourself.

Please do not hesitate to contact me and the other members of your ASA Board of Directors, as well as your section and community leaders with your ideas, stories, comments, questions, and concerns. We look forward to hearing from you!

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