

Coding "How I Work"

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A life hack is a simple, better way to do common ordinary tasks which then makes life easier. Many people utilize life hacks consistently. Generally, many learn life hacks through observation or pass them on through demonstration or by giving advice. For example, people with long hair might wear hair bands around their wrists; this makes cooling off easier on a hot day because they can easily put up their hair. Lifehacker is a blog that shares life hacks for people to “Do everything better” (Lifehacker, n.d.-a). The blog offers articles and videos on topics such as cooking, childcare, technology, and work. One series of blogposts is called “How I Work” (Lifehacker, n.d.-b). This series uses essentially the same questions to interview different successful people from different fields. Among other topics, the questions ask the interviewee about background, work style, workspace, organization, and coping mechanisms. Although none of the questions asks the interviewees how they became successful, the questions do deal with how to handle the workload of those who are highly productive. According to the Lifehacker website, over 50 interviews were published in 2018 alone and approximately 1 per week is published.

Methodology

For this data collection, 10 were chosen, 1 from a posting in 2018 and the rest from postings in 2019. The interviews were read and coded with an initial pass. A pattern developed after 4 interviews; words such as team, walk, and meet were common and it was clear themes were forming. Of course, because the questions are direct, certain thematic elements were common. All were asked how they recharge, therefore recharging developed up as a theme. That initial data was charted into a spreadsheet so that patterns outside of the obvious repetitions

could be more visible. It soon became evident that patterns of intentionality were present. This paper explores that data.

Participants

The interviewees are all women who are considered as productive in their field. Out of the 10 women, 3 are co-founders (Bradley, 2019), (Douglas, 2019c, 2019e), 4, with some overlap, are high-level executives (Bradley, 2019), (Douglas 2018, 2019c, 2019d). 2 are actresses and business co-owners (Bradley, 2019), (Douglas 2019g). Though not exclusionary of the others who did not mention their children, 2 women do mention each having a child (Douglas, 2019f, 2019e). Out of the 10 women, 6 are in careers for which they did not plan or initially pursue while the other 4 had already formed ideas about, or had experience in, their future fields (Douglas, 2019b, 2019d, 2019e, 2019g).

Findings

Thematic patterns emerged through coding and data compilation and analysis. For clarity, this section structures the finding by overall theme/category.

Teamwork and Delegation

The women work constantly. Most of the women emphasized their reliance on teamwork in their work place. The outlier, quantitative Futurist Amy Webb, delegates much of her decision making and, when in the office, spends 7am to 4pm writing in isolation without a break. The writing is then followed by 3 hours in meetings and responding to emails at the end of the day (Douglas. 2019h). Additionally, Hannah Glass works from home and interacts with colleagues during “monthly group meetings” (Douglas, 2019b). The remaining women interact with colleagues and participate in group dynamics at work. Dr. Katz-Jaffe and attorney Becca Heller both describe their workplaces and organizations as teams and explain how essential teamwork is

to the success of their work (Douglas, 2019d, 2019e). Sirita Wright explained, “you need a strong team around you” because entrepreneurship is challenging (Bradley, 2019). Most of the others said they rely upon an assistant or a manager to help; actress Kirsten Vangsness relies upon her personal assistant and her business managers (Douglas, 2019g). Dawoon Kang said the best advice she was given was to outsource tasks, she and Vangsness both claim the practice is a life hack (Douglas 2019c, 2019g).

Personal Interaction

Related to the concept of teamwork is a preference to connect with employees, colleagues, and customers. Vangsness explained that she is co-owner of a distillery where she works on weekends to bus tables and connect to others (Douglas, 2019g). Heather Dietrick seeks out people she normally does not deal with at work as lunch partners (Douglas, 2018). Amy Webb has breakfast with a likeminded executive (Douglas, 2019h). Courtney Napoles recounts that she bonded with a colleague in Grammarly’s San Francisco office. Napoles and her colleague video conference “every other week and often talk about work-related opportunities or challenges” (Douglas, 2019f). And Wright finds that her connection with her co-founders, one of whom lives just a 6-minute minute walk away, is invaluable (Bradley, 2019).

Workspace

Half of the women interviewed were mostly mobile or worked from home. Those who worked in an office, and Dr. Katz-Jaffe who works in a lab, stated they found it essential to maintain an uncluttered space. One outlier is Wright who has inspirational pictures and words posted on the wall over her desk. She explained that on her desk she has folders, clipboards, file folders and coloring books (Bradley, 2019). Other differences include Vangsness who generally works remotely (Douglas, 2019g), Hannah Glass who stated her favorite location to work is

outside in the sun at her home in Oakland, CA (Douglas, 2019b), and Napoles who said she uses her desk to prop up her feet (Douglas, 2019f).

Of the 10 women, half have 2 monitors on their desks. For most the monitors are there to provide ease with data analysis, for Webb it serves as a method of compartmentalizing. One monitor is for work and emails while the other is for writing books. At the time of the interview she was working towards completing her third book (Douglas 2018, 2019c, 2019d, 2019f, 2019h).

Side Projects

Even with so much time allotted to working, many of the women display generosity of time through their involvement in side projects. For 2 women, speaking at conferences is a favorite side project (Douglas, 2019a, 2019d). Others listed teaching, consulting, acting, writing, and performing. (Bradley, 2019), (Douglas, 2018, 2019c, 2019d, 2019f, 2019g 2019h). Additionally, Brown said she runs the education, cybersecurity, non-profit organization: Ms. GreyHat (Douglas, 2019a).

Recharging

When asked how they recharge, most of the women expressed brisk walks outside or other outdoor activities as a preference. Brown stated she “suck[s] at recharge” and feels that “unplugging” is true recharge. She then stated that she feels most refreshed from snowboarding in the winter or mountain climbing in the summer (Douglas, 2019a). Becca Heller also stated that she is not good at recharging. However, she does find taking long vacations beneficial (Douglas, 2019e). Glass and Webb specifically mentioned the sun while Napoles, Wright, Dr. Katz-Jaffe specifically stated walking. Kang and Dr. Katz-Jaffe both meditate. (Bradley, 2019), (Douglas, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2019e, 2019f).

Conclusion

As successful entrepreneurs, founders, executives and experts, the women interviewed are bound to have some commonalities. However, upon analysis, it is clear that hard work and the appropriate application of resources – personal, professional, technical – are two major factors which span across the sample selection. How your desk is set up might not be significant, but whether it is set up for your own best interest and work style is vital. One of the questions posed to the women was for the best advice they have received. The answers vary from short, pithy phrases like “change the channel” (Douglas, 2019a) and “Keep it cute or put it on mute” (Bradley, 2019) to full philosophies such as the general application of incrementalism (Douglas, 2019h). This mixture of “best advice” serves a purpose to the readers of Lifehacker’s “How I Work” series as well. Glass said her best advice was “Don’t compare yourself to other people. It’s not a race—trust your own process” (Douglas, 2019b). The compilation of data coded from the 10 selected interviews indicates these successful women trust their own processes.

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