

## Tips from *The Progress Principle*

Managers and employees all want to be successful and happy at work. But how do they do that? We studied 238 people working on creative teams – collecting nearly 12,000 days of data – to find out what made them happy and successful and what did not. In our book, *The Progress Principle*, we describe what we learned and how you can put that to work in your organizations and your own work. Here are a few key lessons from the book.

### **Understand That Inner Work Life Matters**

Inner work life is the continuous stream of emotions, perceptions and motivations that people experience throughout their workdays, as they react to and make sense of events in their work day. Positive inner work life not only makes employees feel happy and engaged in their work, it leads to better performance including higher creativity and productivity.

### **Celebrate Progress Every Day**

The single most important event leading to positive inner work life is making progress in meaningful work, even seemingly incremental progress or “small wins.” This is the progress principle. But given the demands of modern work, it is easy to ignore those small steps forward and focus on what still needs to be done instead. Take a moment each day to celebrate and recognize the progress that you, your coworkers, and your subordinates have made each day.

### **Deal With Setbacks Constructively**

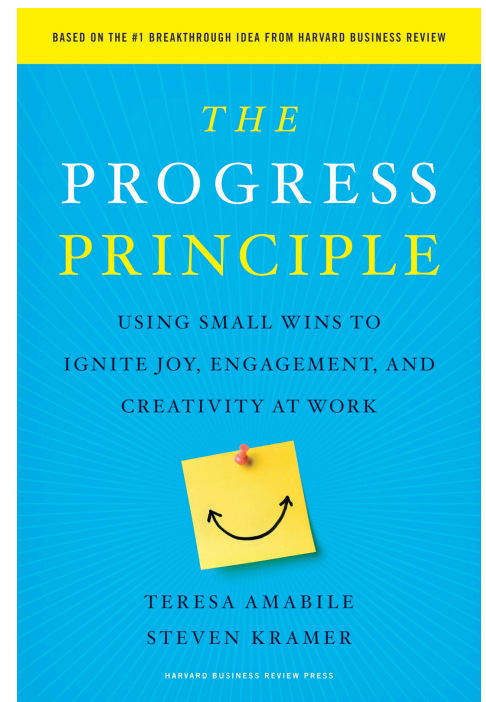
Of all the events that diminish inner work life, setbacks in the work are the single most important. However, organizations that deal with setbacks constructively are able to minimize their negative impact. These companies address setbacks quickly, and tend to view them as learning opportunities and challenges rather than as failures.

### **Supply Catalysts to Support Progress**

Catalysts directly support progress in the work. They include actions like providing clear goals, mechanisms for idea flow, and sufficient resources. Catalysts make it possible for workers to move forward in their work and therefore are critical for both performance and inner work life. The opposite of catalysts are inhibitors, which serve to block progress. Our research showed that the most successful leaders stayed attuned to the progress and setbacks of their teams, and consistently supported progress every day.

### **Supply Nourishers to Support Inner Work Life**

Nourishers directly support people’s inner work lives and include actions like providing encouragement and recognition. Because they support inner work life, nourishers also lead to better performance. Toxins are the opposite of nourishers; they serve to poison inner work life.



## **Build on Progress**

When people have made good progress in a task, that could be an ideal time to introduce new challenges. This is because their inner work lives, particularly their intrinsic motivation for the work itself, will likely be high as a result of their success.

## **Sweat the Small Stuff**

Seemingly small events can have a large impact on inner work life. We found that 28% of events that people said were of low importance actually had a large impact on their inner work lives. In particular, keep in mind that even small incremental progress supports inner work life – and even small losses can be demoralizing.

## **Minimize the Negative**

Negative events are more powerful than positive ones. Setbacks have a greater negative impact on emotions than progress, and the negative effects of toxins tend to be more powerful than the positive effects of nourishers. So, it is especially important to minimize the probability of negative events and to deal with them quickly and effectively when they do happen.

## **Take Your Foot Off the Gas (Once in a While)**

People tend to be most creative on days of low-to-moderate time pressure, when they are able to think, discuss, and explore for new solutions to complex problems. The worst time pressure is quite common in modern organizations – characterized by people splitting their attention between too many unrelated tasks, rather than being able to focus. High time pressure over extended periods of time leads to both poor inner work life and poor performance. However, when tight deadlines are unavoidable for brief periods, managers can support creativity by making sure that people understand they are on an important mission, and allowing them to focus exclusively on that mission.

## **Keep a Daily Journal**

Keeping a journal focused on progress and setbacks will help you in many ways. It will remind you to celebrate successes. It will help you to attend to the setbacks and deal with them quickly. It will make you aware of what is working and what is not, and can help you spot patterns to reinforce or dampen.