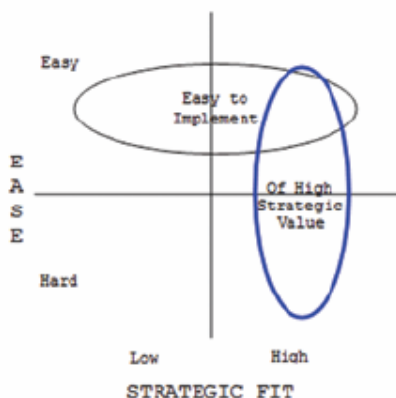


# LOW HANGING FRUIT

## 5 TIPS TO PREVENT CHOKING ON THE PITS

By Ann Latham

The urge to tackle low hanging fruit is strong. People like to see quick results, feel some progress, and get some things off the list and out of the way. But often people see low hanging fruit in all the wrong places. Tidying up loose ends, finishing projects already started, jumping on an exciting new idea, tackling the easy stuff first, and generally getting the house in order may seem harmless, but some of those activities may be a complete waste of time, and others are simply the floaters at the top of a bottomless pit. Below are five tips to help you select fruit carefully and avoid choking on the pits.



### 1. Develop Strategic Clarity

The first step is to get clear about what is really important, where you need to be a year or more from now, and the critical steps that will get you there. You need to focus on those steps. There is simply too much to do, too many distractions, and too little luck to expect success without focus. You will need to cut some corners, drop some projects, postpone projects, and the constant shuffling and deciding will drive you crazy if you don't get absolutely clear about your top priorities. In the diagram at the right, one axis represents ease of implementation while the other represents strategic fit. The easy tasks fall in the top two quadrants (the horizontal oval) and your absolute top priorities fall in the right-hand quadrants (the vertical oval). As you can

see, some of your top priorities may be easy to implement, while others are not.

Let's examine each quadrant separately.

### 2. Avoid the Temptation Zone

The Temptation Zone contains easy tasks and projects that are not of high strategic value (see diagram below). Don't do anything just because it is easy. Many tempting pieces of low hanging fruit grow in the Temptation Zone. These are compelling tasks, but not important tasks. Identify your compulsions and then stay away!

### 3. Dive into the Neglected Zone

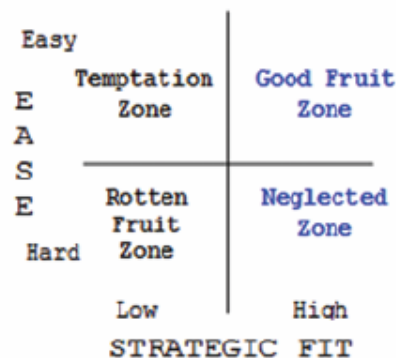
The Neglected Zone is filled with the important projects that are neglected because they are hard. They may be ill-defined, demanding, unfamiliar, risky, long term, requiring an investment - whatever makes them hard, you need to get on top of it and start now. Neglected Zone projects are, by definition, important to achieving your goals. If you wait until all the easy tasks are complete to start these, you will be way too late. Long term projects need attention early and regularly or they will never be completed. Unfamiliar, ill-defined or risky projects need attention because you need them to become familiar, defined and less risky. If they are destined to be failures, the sooner you know this, the better.

### 4. Avoid the Rotten Fruit Zone

Since these are neither easy nor appropriate, you wouldn't expect anyone to be slaving away in the Rotten Fruit Zone, but it is not at all uncommon. Picture the person driven to finish because they once committed to a project. Or the person whose identity is at stake. Or maybe it's an old project that no longer makes sense, but that no one has bothered to cancel. Power struggles, identity crises, compulsiveness, an unwillingness to let go, habit, momentum, face-saving, a lack of communication, a lack of well-defined direction - these are all common reasons why unimportant projects stay on the schedule no matter how painful they are.

5. Be Smart about the Good Fruit Zone

The easy projects with a strong strategic fit may be your source for quick results and building momentum. They may seem like no-brainer first steps. But they may also distract



you from tackling critical projects in the Neglected Zone, many of which will suffer from delays. Work these two categories in parallel, making intentional and informed decisions each step of the way. Perhaps this zone should be renamed the Dessert Zone. You may find this fruit more useful as a reward and a healthful dessert, rather than the appetizer.

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