

The Art of Being “Bad” at Things That Don’t Matter

1. I used to think I had to be the “reliable one.” The one who fixed the printer, organized the office birthday cards, and navigated every group trip. Then I realized: The reward for being good at things you hate is more inflow of those things. If you’re the person who “just gets things done, without categorizing what’s important and what’s NOT” you’re likely exhausted. It’s time to learn the most liberating skill in the world: Strategic Incompetence.

2. (The “Aha!” Moment) We’ve all seen it. The partner who “doesn’t know” how the dishwasher works, or the coworker who is “bad at spreadsheets” so they never have to touch them. It’s the act of leaning into a weakness to avoid a low-value task. The recognition: If you are always the “capable” one, you are paying a “competence tax.” You’re doing the work others are too “clumsy” to do. In other words you shouldn’t give you’r 100% in all the work that you do

3. This isn’t just laziness; it’s Cognitive Load Management. As popularized by authors like Erika Hall and researched in organizational psychology, People are always saying- “give a damn.” But When we try to be 10/10 at everything—from making perfect toast to managing a project—our brains redline. Strategic Incompetence is a survival mechanism to protect your focus for the things that actually define your life.

4. Why do people do this to us? And why do we let them? The motive: It’s a power play. By appearing “incapable” of small tasks, people force the “competent” person into a caregiver role. * The trap: We accept the work because we want the hit of validation that comes with being “the fixer.” We trade our time for a small ego boost.

5. The Defense Framework: You need to Fail on Purpose but You don’t need to be a jerk; you just need to be selective. The “Quality > Quantity” Rule: Pick two things to be world-class at. Be aggressively “meh” at everything else. When asked to do something outside your “Two Things,” use the phrase: “I’m actually not the best person for this; it would take me twice as long as someone who knows what they’re doing.” Stop Rescuing: If someone else is being strategically incompetent to dump work on you, let the ball drop. The world won’t end if the printer stays broken for a day.

6. Calm Empowerment: The Freedom of "Not Knowing" There is a quiet power in saying, "I actually don't know how to do that." It creates space. It forces others to grow. Most importantly, it gives you your life back. You aren't a Swiss Army Knife. You don't have to be useful in every situation. You are allowed to be "useless" at the small things so you can be extraordinary at the ones that matter.

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