Stupid Personal Growth Report - Mid year 2017

Abstract

In this report, I try to log the steps I have tried taking this year till now and how they have impacted the personal growth. I first present the steps I tried taking individually and then mention some of the unexpected issues I faced during the implementation of the same.

1. Introduction

One of the reasons I wanted to make a systematic change to my lifestyle is due to the fact that I was not really satisfied with where I was, and kept constantly feeling in a not so good head space in December 2016. One of the earliest things I came across that definitively proved to me that planning personal growth helps was an interview about her relationship with time by Prof. Jean Yang of CMU (https://goo.gl/y9noiX). This was reinforced by the interview of Mel Robbins (https://goo.gl/1GksJc) about how our brain works in relation to the preset conditions. Based on such observations, I have decided to plan some changes in the following sectors of my lifestyle starting 2017:

- Work Life

- Long Term Career

- Personal Life

- Financial Life

In the following sections, I discuss the goals I initially set for myself and then present the current status.

2. Work Life - Productivity

Some of the most influential aspects the I heard about time and productivity apart from direct contacts such as Sunayana and my advisors at IIIT and CMU came from a bunch of people such as Jean Yang, Marissa Mayer and Elon Musk. To mention a few, here are some examples:

- Jean Yang - I love my relationship with time. I aggressively batch trivial stuff such as emails and do them once every two days or so. I had to prepare a schedule for every holiday and get it approved from my Mom.

- Marissa Mayer - I dont think of productivity in terms of time. I think of it in terms of rhythm. I keep working non stop for six months or so and then take a break for a while.

- Elon Musk - If your peers are working 40 hours a week and you are working 100 hours a week, then you are going to achieve in 4 months what takes them a year to achieve.

Inspired from such things, I have decided to initially measure my current working potential and then subsequently try to improve the same. It seemed foolish to me that I was not actually measuring the amount of work I was putting in till now and I hypothesized that only people who have an accurate measure could come up with quotations/statements as above. In the first half of the year 2017, I have therefore measured the work hours I was putting in and have plotted in figure 1

From the figure, it appears that the pseudo productivity (as the number of work hours doesnt necessarily translate into productivity) is typically high, in the order of 80-90 hour work weeks during the semester and is generally low during
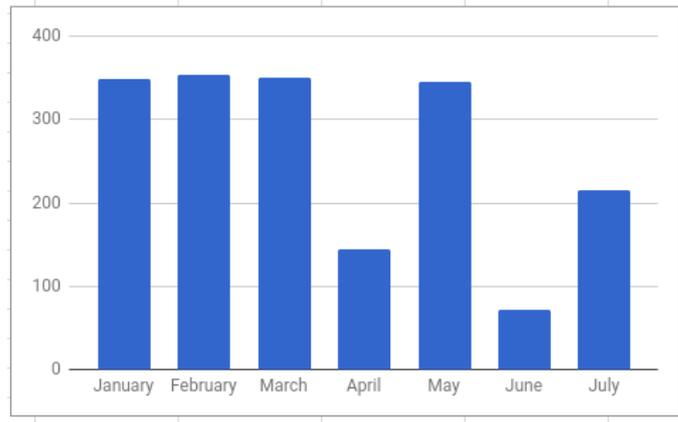
Figure 1. Chart depicting the number of work hours per month

holidays. I have also logged the typical behavior within a month and within a day and put them in figure 2. From this plot, it is clear that the weekends are huge loss in terms of work which I suspect if was the case during earlier times in career, i.e in IIIT. I am specifically worried about the Gaussian pattern that is formed in both the week as well as in the day plots. This typically shows that there is a buildup needed for full productivity eliminating which might be really helpful. I think this is a huge opportunity cost which I cannot afford at this particular point in my career. In addition, distributing the same number of hours somewhat evenly across the week might help reducing the stress levels and might lead to better enjoyment of research.

Figure 2. Chart depicting the distribution of work hours in a month(top) and within a day(bottom)

3. Long Term Career

My two biggest fears today are: unrealized opportunity and unfulfilled potential, in that order. In this section, I will concentrate on the former. It is very easy in research to get bogged down on current work and forget the big picture. Marissa Mayer describes this as a curtain method: You lay down a curtain and work on an idea just to realize that the market has moved on from the product sector when you finally try to launch the product. Today the field of academics is highly dynamic and therefore it is important to be vigilant of the changes and be relevant or one will be replaced due to value migration within a short period of time. Therefore, I wanted to be doing at least one thing every half year with super long term career prospects in focus. One such thing is a tutorial session - at a premier conference next year. The merit in this idea, my hypothesis is that I need to use the fact that I am working with the best researcher in my field and leverage it to catapult myself, like Richard Socher or Andrej Karpathy of Vision did in their PhDs. I believe that its a missed opportunity and would be incredibly depressed if I cannot do a tutorial session during my PhD. I have begun working on this and have got an initial set of topics shortlisted for tutorial session.

3.1. Topics

The tutorial will be of 3 hours and will cover approximately 10 research topics (which means I will have to finish working on all these topics before December).

- Should we bother grapheme to phoneme / Unitran vs Phoneme - **Work Completed**

- Input Format: Full Romanization - Text level - Misspelt - **Work Completed**

- What is the best representation? Union, Phone Mapping, Word to Phone, Transliteration, something else? - **Work Completed**

- Can we use acoustics to improve pronunciation Using different phonesets and predicting which set of phones are being recognized by ASR vs using Intermediate representation such as articulatory features - **Currently Working**

- Can we use signal processing to improve pronunciation Frame Replacement - **Currently Working**

- How do we proceed when we do have CodeMixed Input Data - **Work Completed**

- Applications: Navigation, News - **Work Completed**

- Can we reduce size - **Work Completed, but need to check**

- Leveraging found data -Can we detect boundaries? - **Currently Working**

- Can we learn postlexical rules - Pose as an open problem to the community(Active learning) - **I dont think I can finish this**.

4. Personal Life

In this sector, I tried to focus on the sleep cycle for the current session. Sleep is one thing I always neglected : during my stay at IIIT and also during the first semester at CMU. I heard in one of the interviews of Elon Musk that one of the things that stops his productivity is lack of sleep. It was also shown in a research study at CMU that the average sleep cycle of grad students is less than 5 hours which is very low compared to the amount required for optimal performance. This semester, I started tracking my sleep using Fitbit (thanks to Sagar :P) and have been able to get atleast 6 hours of sleep each night most nights. I am happy that there were occasions where I slept almost 9 hours which never used to happen before unless I was extremely tired.

5. Financial Life

This is one aspect where I never had clarity. I always heard during childhood that money was not important and worse, was the root of all problems. Thinking about it was demonized in a way. But recently I heard a talk where Nilesh Shah of Kotak said he heard from Warren Buffet that it is better to make such statements about money after earning it enough. I kind of liked this better. Other source which reinstated the same is a book titled 'I will teach you to become rich' by an NRI, Ramit Sethi. He gives a step by step method to get hold of financial life, starting from online savings account through equity

Figure 3. Chart depicting the distribution of sleep

investments. I really wanted to catch the financial life by the collar some time before PhD as I believe that will be a dominant factor determining what I do after my PhD and thanks to the amount of push given by Santu, I think I have finally started baby steps towards the same. I am for now concentrating on asset allocation and diversification into passive funds (Roth 401 in US and MFs in India) and aim to spend 4 percent of my time in a semester for enlightening me about things in this area. Figure 4 depicts my current scenario. Equity is underweight in the left chart while Indian part is underweight in the right. By the end of this calendar year I plan to make them to the predetermined allocations of 90 percent and 75 percent respectively.
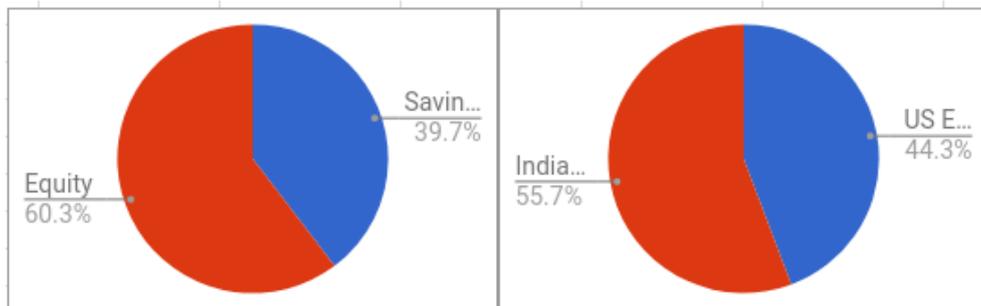

Figure 4. Chart depicting current asset allocation. Left shows the current allocation in terms of savings and equity while the right shows the allocation of equity in US and in India.

6. Issues

In this section, I try to log the issues I faced during the implementation of the set objectives. In retrospect, the issues boil down to a single reason: trying to optimize multiple goals simultaneously. Let me explain with an example. The productivity objective dictates that you spend most of the time in university. If there is some reason due to which it was not possible to cook food home, things start going wrong. Health objective dictates not to eat outside and financial objective dictates not to spend too much. So you end up working on coffee which is kind of a good optimization but there should be a better solution. Another example: Career objective dictates to attend every possible seminar in CMU while productivity objective dictates to stay on the current task. I have realized that the decision making process in such scenarios drains a lot of energy out.

6.1. Steps to mitigate the issues

I think one way is to aggressively plan the week ahead. I did observe that I work better when there are time stipulations provided I know them. Therefore, I am planning to time every seminar and research talk/defense that I am going to attend the next semester and see if that helps. Obviously converging to a set time table helps. Most of the issues get resolved if I can wake up at 05:30 which implies I need to sleep by atleast 23:00 which can be tough at times within the semester. I will try to constrain myself to stick to that time frame for the remainder of the year. Another aspect which I am planning to test out is the transition to a cooked vegan lifestyle. I have tried vegan, cooked vegan and raw vegan ways of eating during July and found that probably cooked vegan is a better fit for my taste.

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Figure 5. No caption for this

7. Shortcomings

One thing I grossly overestimated was my potential to read books. I put myself a goal of 25 books to read by the end of year. Till date, I have completed 8 books. While the books are non fiction, they are related to personal growth and therefore are a necessity. I think I will need to step this up at some point in future or I am going to fall short of the goal. Another issue I found with myself was the inability to finish the projects strong. Finishing things and being able to pull things off was something I was very proud of. This was the reason I took up an international challenge when my seniors left it off in 2015 and I believe being able to pull it off was a reason for my selection in CMU in the first place. But I find it more and more difficult today to finish projects successfully and within the time frame I set myself up for. There have been multiple instances in the semester where I felt literally completely dumb.

8. Conclusion

In this report, I have logged the steps I have tried taking this year till now and how they have impacted the personal growth. I believe aggressively planning week by week will help mitigate most of the issues I have faced. It becomes very important now to hold on to the current steps and then make some additional ones for the remainder of the year. To summarize though, I have a pleasant feeling about where I am right now, but the constant feeling I still have is that all the aspects of my life are bouncing in the air, and am trying to balance them like the guy in a circus, depicted in figure 5. The only problem - Once you try to catch one ball, you lose all of them. I am still not able to run away in research using my advisor. I will keep trying.