



people  
make the  
difference

## People Make The Difference whitepaper

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By Craig Tegel

### **Would you pass the marshmallow test?**

Whether you're in a leadership position or not, self-control is a great ability that ought to be practiced often. Everyone's weaknesses are different, but a lack of self-control can result in a lack of productivity – no team needs to be brought down by poor productivity levels.

In the late 1960's, Walter Mischel conducted the now very well-known 'marshmallow test', where a child aged between four and six was put in a room with nothing but a chair, table and a treat of their choice (the marshmallow). They were then told if they could wait to eat the treat until their instructor came back in 15 minutes, they would not only get the treat in front of them but another treat as a reward for waiting.

Alternatively, if they decided to eat the treat in the time that they were waiting for their instructor to return, they wouldn't get the second treat as a reward.

We all know this test now as a great way to watch different people as they make different choices when it comes to exercising self-control and not giving in to instant gratification. Even when they followed-up the kids years after the first marshmallow test, they found that the kids who were able to wait out the 15 minutes were far less likely to have issues with drug addiction, behaviour or obesity. They even had better scores in their high school exams. Their ability to exercise self-control was reflected in their lifestyle and productivity levels.

### **Why is self-control important for leaders?**

There is the old saying 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' – one sure thing is much better than two things you don't have yet. This is usually the logic of the kids who eat their treat straight away. Unfortunately, this is not always a great logic for leaders to have.

Sometimes it might be tempting to tuck into the sure deal you've got in front of you, but if you wait just a little bit and put in the effort, the reward for your team or organisation could be twice as nice.

Self-control is also a great sign of emotional maturity, particularly when it comes to knowing your limits. Everyone has different abilities and limits, and knowing when to say no is an important skill, so that you don't become overloaded, burnt-out and inefficient. The self-controlled individual knows when they need to focus and when they can let their mind wander a little; they know when to push themselves and when to take a moment to unwind.

Teams follow the example of their leaders and a leader who exercises self-control is a huge influence when it comes to the whole team's productivity levels. If they see their leader crippling under a huge workload, they'll emulate that, creating an overworked team. If the team sees their leader delegating and only taking on what they can handle, they'll follow suit and become a productive team who knows their limits.

For some of the kids in the original study, the temptation of the marshmallow was too much to handle and they gave in quickly. For many of us today, the marshmallow looks a little different; phones, tablets, games, emails and the news are just some of the temptations we face when we're trying to get a job done. Like those kids, we know that we're sabotaging ourselves, reducing our chances of getting rewarded through our efforts, and yet we still think that momentary satisfaction is worth it.

*Are you and your team self-sabotaging? Do you give in too easily to the temptations of the distractions of today? If you would like to find out how to start exercising self-control and instil a respect for delayed gratification within your team so that your organisation sees a boost in productivity, People Make The Difference can help you with training workshops, one-on-one coaching and Coach On Call services. To find out more, call us on 0412 333 415 or visit [peoplesmakethedifference.com.au](http://peoplesmakethedifference.com.au).*