

the



secrets

of highly successful PhD students



By Hugh Kearns & Maria Gardiner

ithinkwell.com.au

Who am I?

- Hugh Kearns
- Live in Adelaide, South Australia



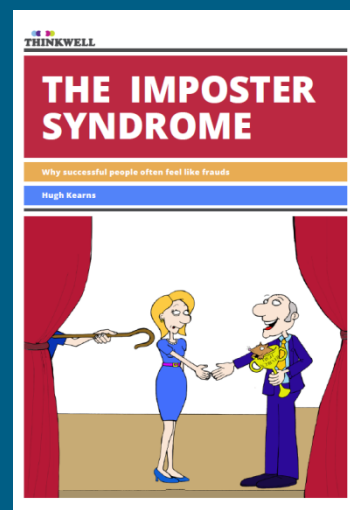
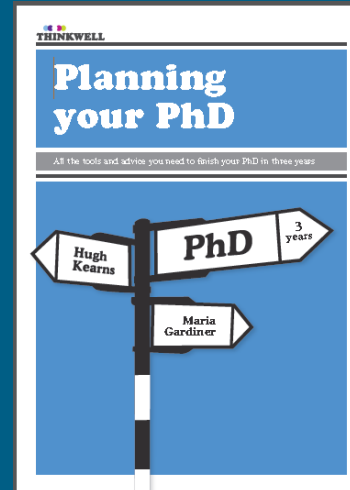
Flinders University • Lecture • Research • Self-management



Ben Bulbin, County Sligo, Ireland



Workshops and Books

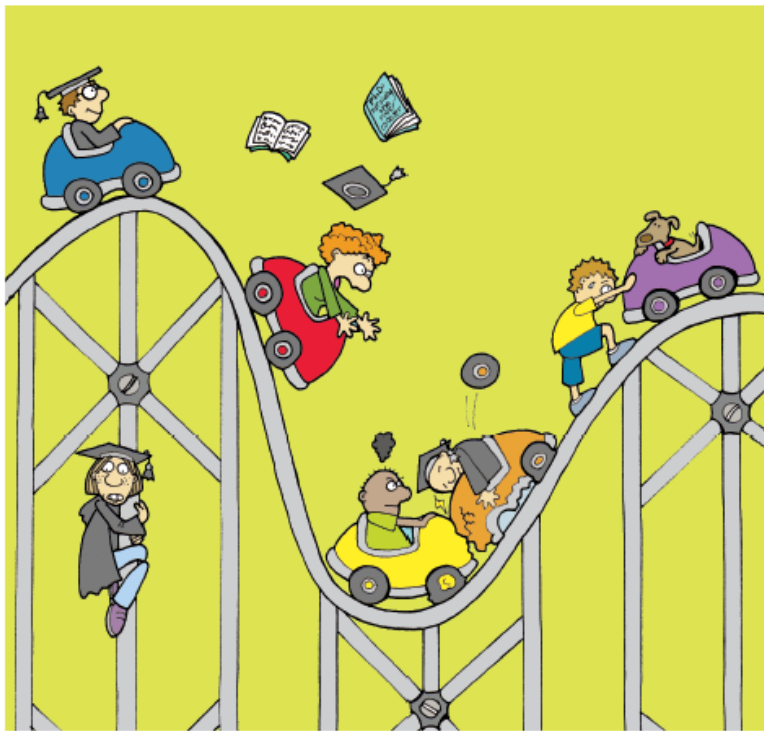


 **THINKWELL**

THE SEVEN SECRETS

of highly successful research students

Marla Gardner & Hugh Kearns



www.ithinkwell.com.au

Hard copy
Ebook

Home

Bookshop

Services

Resources

About Us

Clients

Research

Recent Media

Contact Us

Welcome to ThinkWell™

ThinkWell™ uses the latest psychological and educational research to develop workshops and materials to help you be more effective in your daily life.

We work extensively with doctors, academics, PhD students, CEOs and many others to assist them to:

- manage their time more effectively and perform better
- set goals and achieve them
- achieve sustainability in their career
- think more clearly and make better decisions
- reduce stress
- find out what is making them stressed
- learn how to evaluate and deal with emotions
- feel more content and confident
- spend more time with their family and those who matter

Latest News

New book - Time Management for GPs

Billed as the ultimate time management guide, this is tailored specifically for GPs and people in private practice.

New edition of The 7 Secrets

This favourite has been given a new look and feel.

Interview on ABC 891

Hugh and Maria talk about feeling overwhelmed.

[Recent media](#)

Books

ThinkWell™ has put together a series of books to assist a range of professions and positions, including doctors, academics, PhD students, CEOs and many other occupational groups.

These books are available via our [online bookshop](#).



Twitter

@iThinkWellHugh



COLUMN

The care and maintenance of your adviser

Graduate students bear as much responsibility as their mentors for ensuring that they are well guided through their degrees, say Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner.

Ever since the advent of graduate school, students have complained about their advisers. It is almost an article of faith. The adviser is never available or too available; gives too much feedback or not enough; is too critical or isn't providing enough direction; and soon. Exchanging horror stories with other students is a great way to bond. But advising goes both ways — and if, after careful reflection on their own studies and progress, students determine that they are not getting the guidance they require, they must get the deficiencies.

It is not surprising that advisers figure large in graduate students' conversations. In 2009, the US Council of Graduate Schools in Washington DC reported survey results showing that 69% of the 1,856 doctoral students who responded identified mentoring or advising as a main factor in PhD completion. Our own research at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and our experience at graduate-student workshops across the world suggest that the adviser-student relationship has a big impact on completion time. It certainly influences whether students are still smiling at the end of their degrees!

Students often assume that once they call someone an adviser, he or she automatically acquires all the skills of advising. After all, if your adviser is the world leader in stem-cell technology, he or she must excel at the seemingly simple task of advising — not to mention possess highly developed interpersonal skills and a keen interest in graduate-student development. Sadly, that is not the case.

Sometimes, advising is a weakness of an otherwise very accomplished scientist. This is not surprising. Mentoring tends to be a private business, and often the only model available is an adviser's own experience of having been advised. If it was good, they decide to copy that style and methodology; if it was bad, they do the opposite. There is no guarantee that either approach will provide the student with the guidance he or she needs.

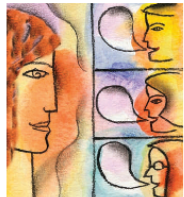
A proactive approach is necessary. If your adviser isn't looking after you in the way you need, then you need to look after them. At some point in the PhD journey most graduate students come to an important realization. This is my thesis. My name is written on the front of it. I need to become the driver. The sooner they

can do this, the better. If you're not getting feedback, clear direction or the necessary resources, then you must do something about it. What does this mean in practice? Let us take some examples.

MEETINGS

A comment we often hear at our workshops is, "My adviser is lovely but he/she is just so busy that we never get to talk about my thesis". And our response is, "Yes, your adviser is busy. All advisers are busy and will continue to be busy. Regardless, you need to organize meetings where you can get real face time and talk about your thesis." We're not recommending a quick chat in the coffee room or a brief word in the lab. No, we mean a lab meeting.

MEETINGS
A comment we often hear at our workshops is, "My adviser is lovely but he/she is just so busy that we never get to talk about my thesis". And our response is, "Yes, your adviser is busy. All advisers are busy and will continue to be busy. Regardless, you need to organize meetings where you can get real face time and talk about your thesis." We're not recommending a quick chat in the coffee room or a brief word in the lab. No, we mean a lab meeting.



do in the next two weeks, the next meeting. This all sounds very straightforward. But if more students followed these steps, many adviser-student issues could be resolved.

FEEDBACK

Again, to be skilled at practicing in a particular area, you need to be skilled at practicing it. This all sounds very straightforward. But if more students followed these steps, many adviser-student issues could be resolved.

Again, to be skilled at practicing in a particular area, you need to be skilled at practicing it. This all sounds very straightforward. But if more students followed these steps, many adviser-student issues could be resolved.

Again, to be skilled at practicing in a particular area, you need to be skilled at practicing it. This all sounds very straightforward. But if more students followed these steps, many adviser-student issues could be resolved.

Again, to be skilled at practicing in a particular area, you need to be skilled at practicing it. This all sounds very straightforward. But if more students followed these steps, many adviser-student issues could be resolved.

Again, to be skilled at practicing in a particular area, you need to be skilled at practicing it. This all sounds very straightforward. But if more students followed these steps, many adviser-student issues could be resolved.

COLUMN

Waiting for the motivation fairy

It's easy to give in to procrastination — but Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner offer some tips for getting your drive back.

"I love deadlines. I have the whooshing sound they make as they go by!"

— Douglas Adams

If you were trying to set up ideal conditions for procrastination, conducting a research project would provide them. Such projects tend to be large and time-consuming, completing a doctoral research project, for example, often takes three years or more. Deadlines and endpoints are often fuzzy and ill-defined. Then there's the reward structure you can put in a lot of effort with little to no positive feedback along the way, and the rewards, if there are any, take a long time to come. Add to this the fact that scientists are often perfectionists with demanding, if not idealistic, expectations, and it is little wonder that procrastination is the most discussed topic in our graduate-student and researcher workshops. Many researchers simply take for granted that they are at the mercy of the forces of procrastination, doomed to increased stress levels and stretched deadlines. But there are simple strategies for pushing yourself to get engaged. The first is to recognize the patterns that you're falling into.

Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner are at the University of Adelaide, Australia, and run workshops for graduate students and advisers (see thiswell.com.au).

useful, and you may well be, but it's not the thing you should be doing right now. So why is housekeeping, for example, so much fun when you're supposed to be working on your dissertation or a paper? It's a displacement activity, used to dispel the self-reproach or discomfort that we feel for not doing something else. Reading a novel or taking a nap



causes too much guilt. But have you ever, say, reorganized your folders to make it easier to find the files? It would speed up your writing, after all. Or perhaps you've diligently labelled all the cupboards in the lab to make it easier to find things.

Although these activities or excuses seem acceptable, their final flaw is that once they're over, you still haven't finished that article, started that experiment or written your dissertation. You probably have an increased sense of guilt because you're not making progress on your goal. And although you've found and read that reference, you still don't feel motivated to write. Sadly, while you were answering e-mails or counting the glassware, the motivation fairy didn't stop by and make

that difficult task look less daunting. Most people here have a standing, we like to leads to action, or, n you feel like doing s This model might we doing, such as watch walk. But it's not par tasks with fuzzy dea that you may never f and reusult that pa a hard-and-fast deadl different model.

MOTIVATION HUB

Some psychology ms leads to motivation, more action. You have ready, then you'll fe then you'll take mo ally had this experier running an analysis? decide to do it, and o yourself. "This isn't a not keep get. Of course motivated i strategies ca ditions that's the first pla ken down it steps, but tin you'll maket — which pring — the t you'll read ti or you'll m Second, yo deadline by tiny step. Se tomorrow is the need to to it. Third, immediate ri ing the com 10:00 a.m., y have a coffe

perhaps you should g... time you catch yourself engaging in displacement activities, remember that there's a way to recover that elusive drive. Follow out these rules and watch your motivation grow. ■

Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner lecture and conduct research in psychology at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and run workshops for graduate students and advisers (see thiswell.com.au).

e-mail exchange. It's you start the task, yo in and you'll find yo longer at it. So if the motivation ping off your lab c perhaps you should g... time you catch yourself engaging in displacement activities, remember that there's a way to recover that elusive drive. Follow out these rules and watch your motivation grow. ■

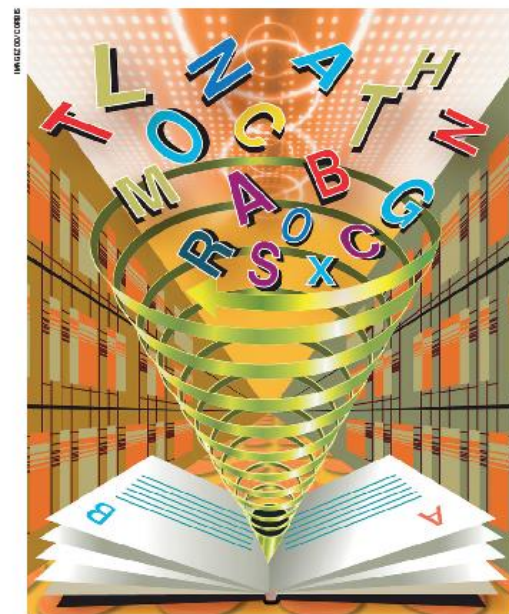
Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner lecture and conduct research in psychology at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and run workshops for graduate students and advisers (see thiswell.com.au).

EDUCATION US needs to improve science literacy to prepare workforce p.110

TURNING POINT Biochemist's high-risk research direction pays off p.101

NATUREJOBS For the latest career listings and advice www.naturejobs.com

CAREERS



COLUMN

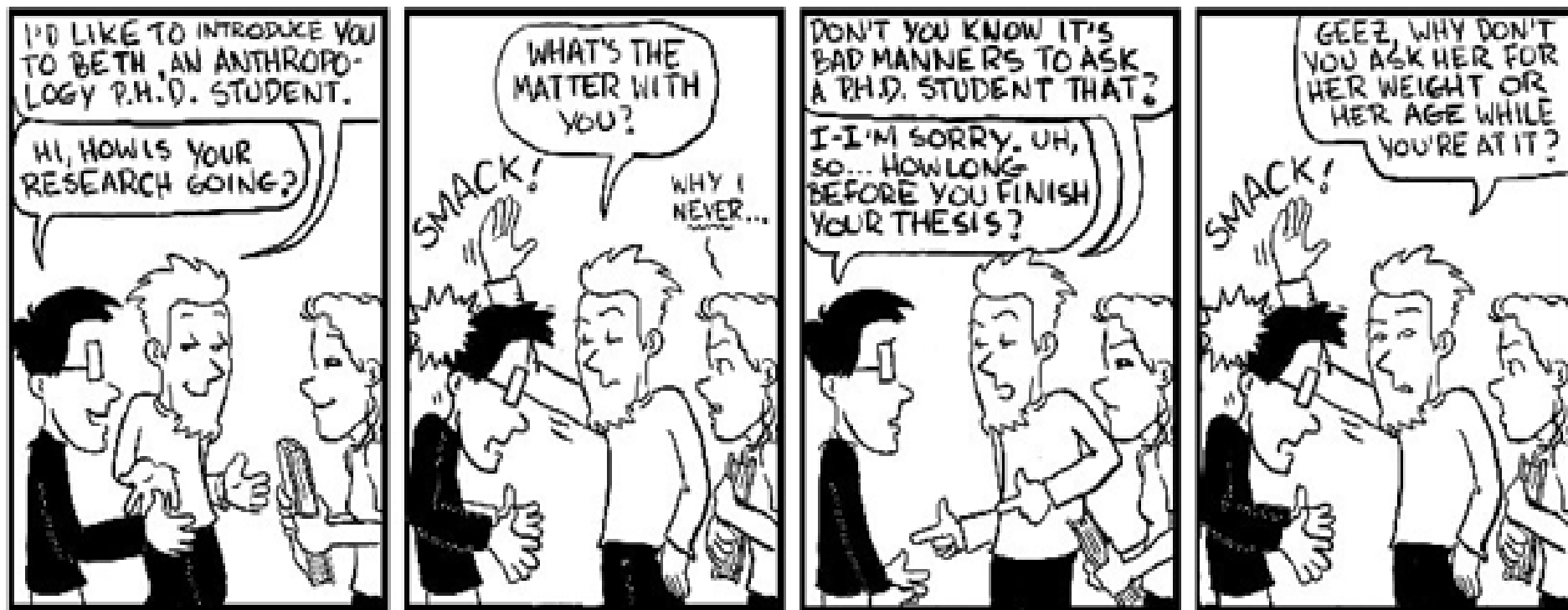
Turbocharge your writing today

Before you can tackle the overwhelming task of huge writing projects, you must first put aside some widely held myths, say Maria Gardiner and Hugh Kearns.

© 2011 Macmillan Publishers Limited. All rights reserved

7 Jul 2011
Vol 475 - Nature

Introductions



JORGE CHAM ©THE STANFORD DAILY

Overcoming Isolation!

Introduce yourself

- Discipline?
- How far into your research
- What is your research about?
- Keep it brief!



The Rollercoaster



Making it Hard!!

How could you make doing a PhD as hard as possible?

For example:

- Choose a broad topic e.g. global warming!
- Work full time
- Get married
- Choose a supervisor you hate

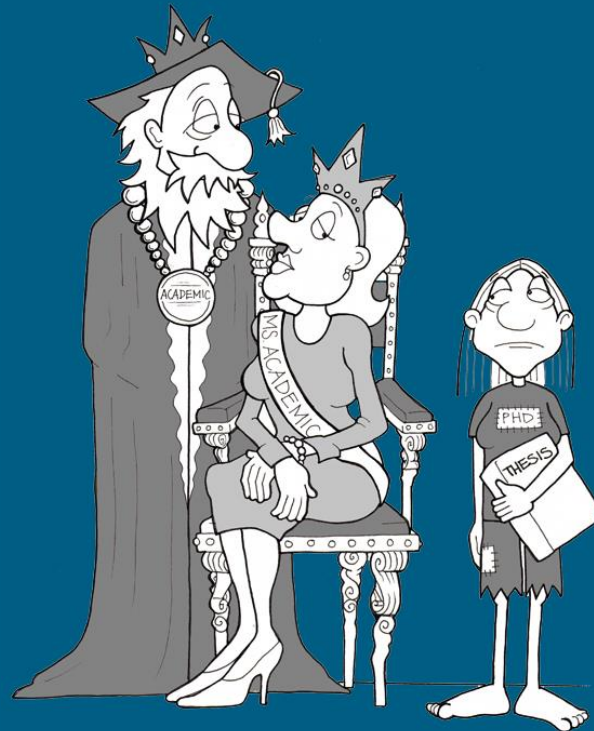
Making it Hard!!

- Renovate your house
- Change topic
- Leave writing till the very end
- Use data that's hard to get
- Use a unproven methodology
- Use expensive equipment you don't have
- Do it in another language
- Get sick – your supervisor gets sick
- Fall out with your supervisor
- Have two supervisors who don't like each other
- Choose a topic you know nothing about
- Choose a topic you love
-

secret

1

Care and Maintenance of your Supervisor



Learning Styles

People have Preferences



Thinkers

Do'ers

Reflectors

Theorists

Pragmatists

Activists

It's all about
the ideas

Let's write a
paper

Let's make a
difference

Trial and error

Learning Styles

Student

Thinkers

Do'ers

Reflectors

Theorists

Pragmatists

Activists

It's all about
the ideas

Let's write a
paper

Let's make a
difference

Trial and error

Lots of ideas – less action

Lots of action – less ideas

Reflectors

Theorists

Pragmatists

Activists

Thinkers

Do'ers

SUPERVISOR

Care and Maintenance Tips

Understanding priorities

Your Priorities

A LIST

1. Check emails
2. Check Facebook
3. My research
4. ..

Supervisor's Priorities

A LIST

1. Check emails
2. Teaching
3. Admin
4. Reports
5. ..
6. ..

B LIST

1. Research
2. Papers
3. ..
4. ..
5. ..
6. ..

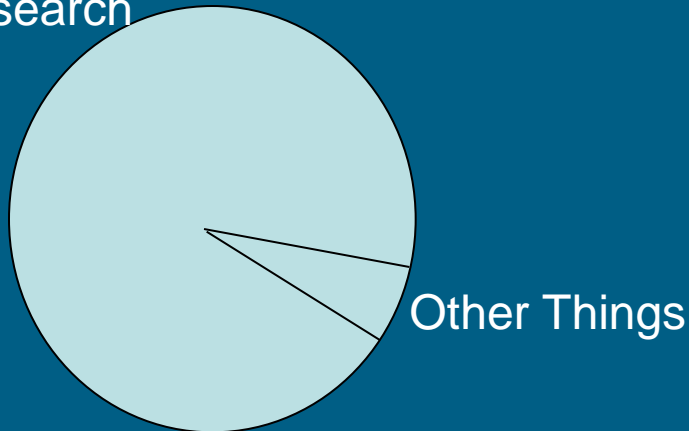
C LIST

1. ..
2. ..
3. ..
4. ..
5. ..
6. Your research

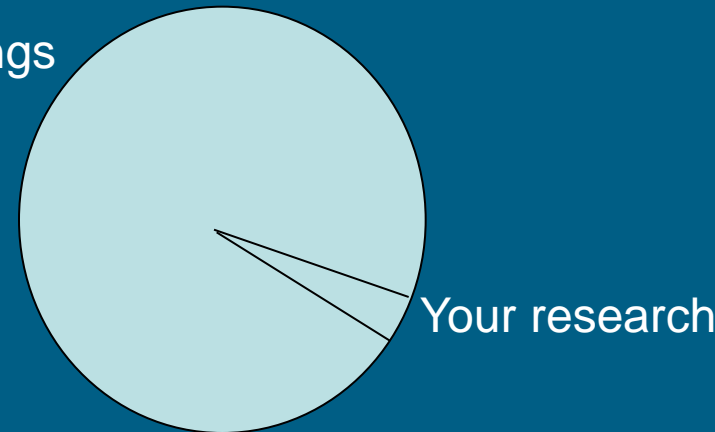
Care and Maintenance Tips

Supervisor's priorities versus your priorities

Your research



Other Things



What you think about

What your supervisor thinks about

Care and Maintenance Tips

It's your research

You need to become the driver

The need to be assertive

Passive - Assertive

Gentle stalking

Cultural issues

Care and Maintenance Tips

But they're so busy

They will always be busy

It's a supervisor's job

Care and Maintenance Tips

Meetings

The open door policy

Regularity v frequency

Different frequency at different stages

Even if you've done nothing!

AGENDA

1. What I did since last time
2. Questions/issues
3. Feedback
4. What I will do in next week(s)
5. The very Next Thing
6. The next meeting

You email before the meeting

You email after the meeting

Care and Maintenance Tips

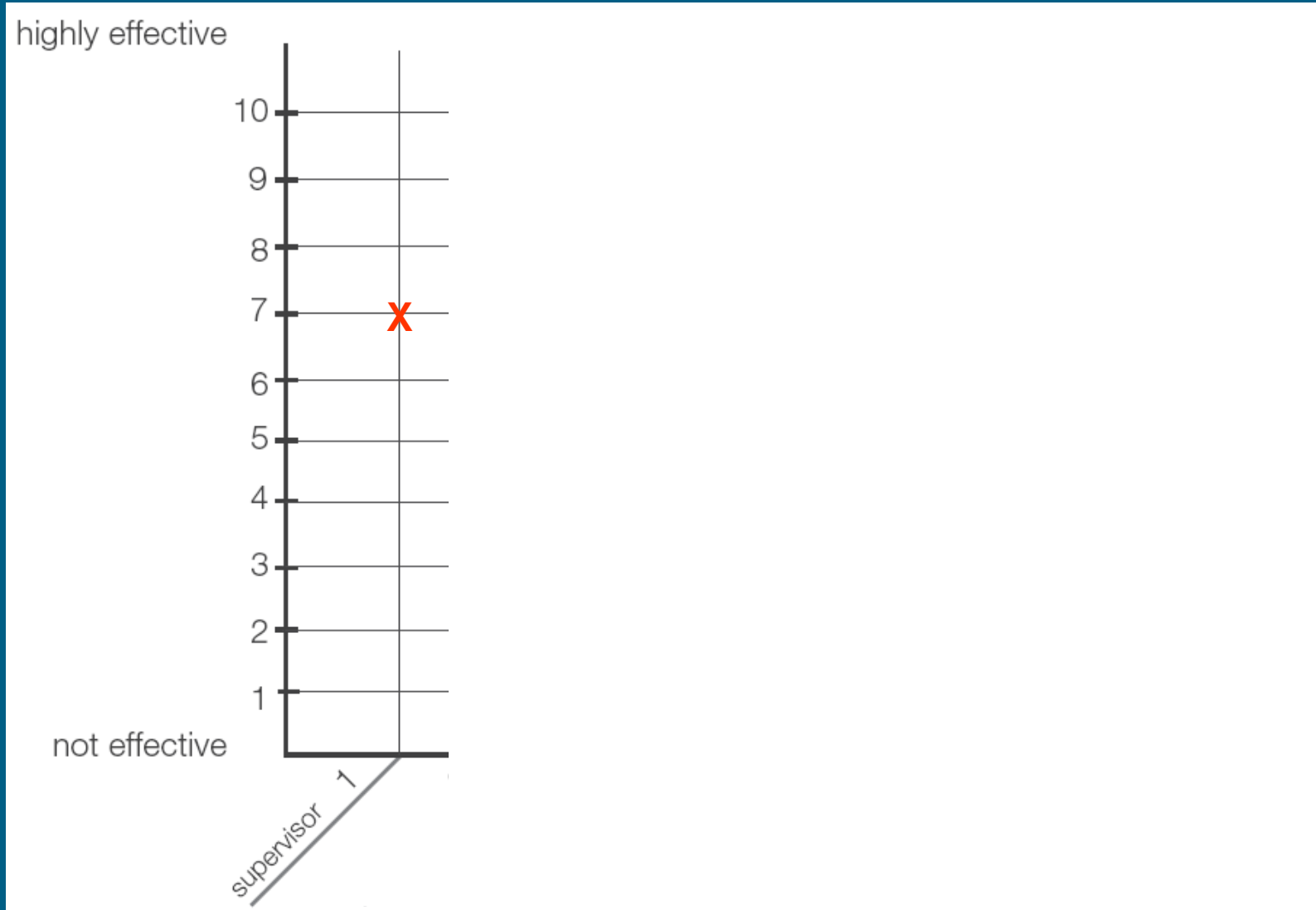
Difficulties

Power imbalance

Co-supervisors – the carrier pigeon phenomenon!

When it's not working out

Rate Yourself on Secret #1



secret

2

Write and show as you go:
This is show and tell, not hide and seek!



Write and Show Tips

MYTH 1:

I'll write when I feel ready. I'm not ready yet.

You may never feel ready

You have to write before you feel ready

That means NOW



Readitis

The belief that reading one more article will solve all your research problems.

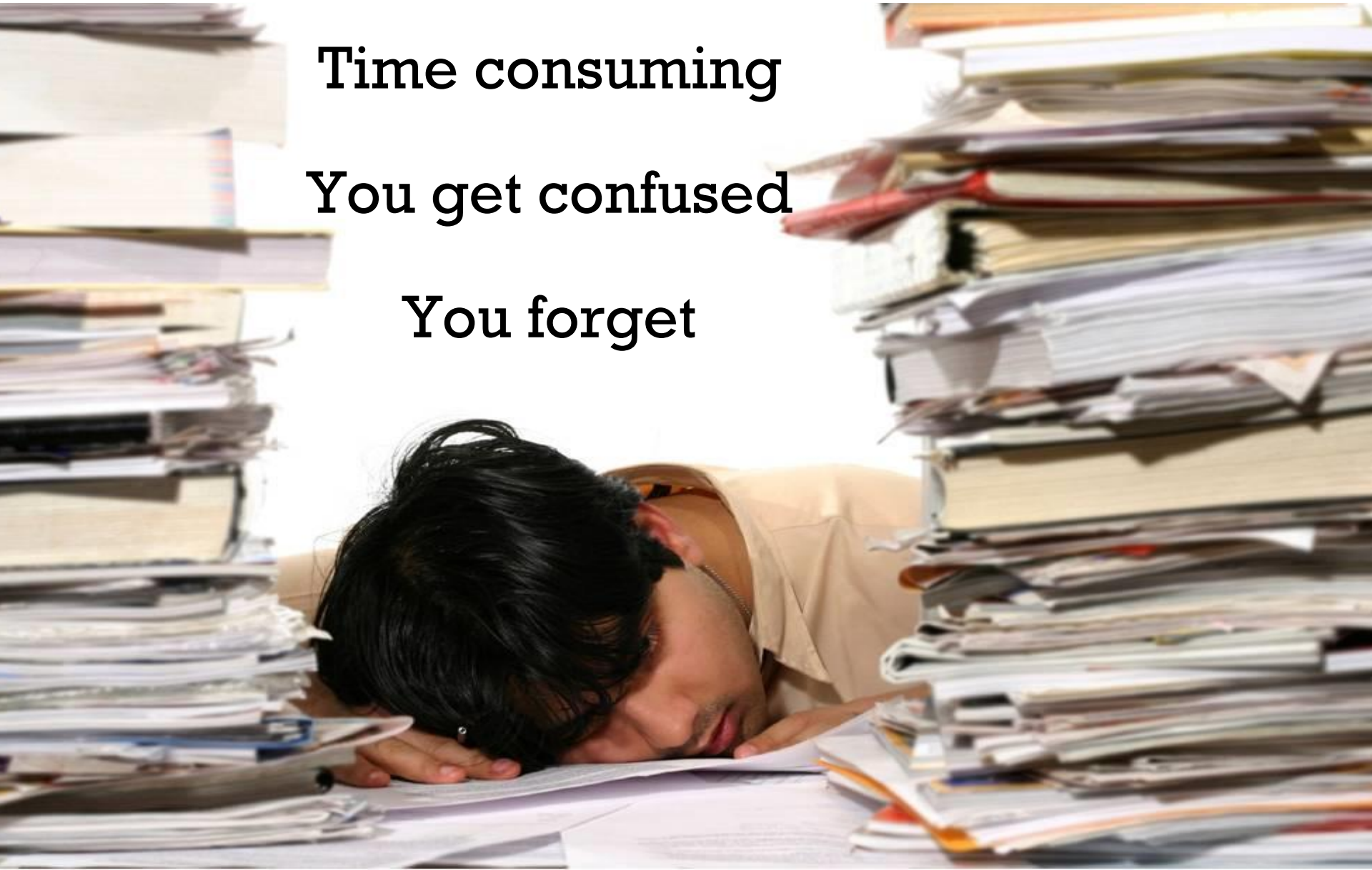


Problems with Readitis

Time consuming

You get confused

You forget



Experimentitis



The belief that doing one more experiment will solve all your research problems.

Write and Show Tips

MYTH 2:

I'll get it all clear in my head first and then write it down

Writing is not recording

Writing is a creative process

Writing clarifies your thinking



Write and Show Tips

Write early and often

Bingeing versus snacking

Write for 2 hours preferably in the morning

Nail feet to floor



Drafts

It's very hard to write final copy from scratch

Drafts

Zero draft

First draft

Second draft

Etc

DRAFT

As you write you develop your ideas

The Show Part

Unlike wine, writing doesn't mature in your cellar (or hard disc)

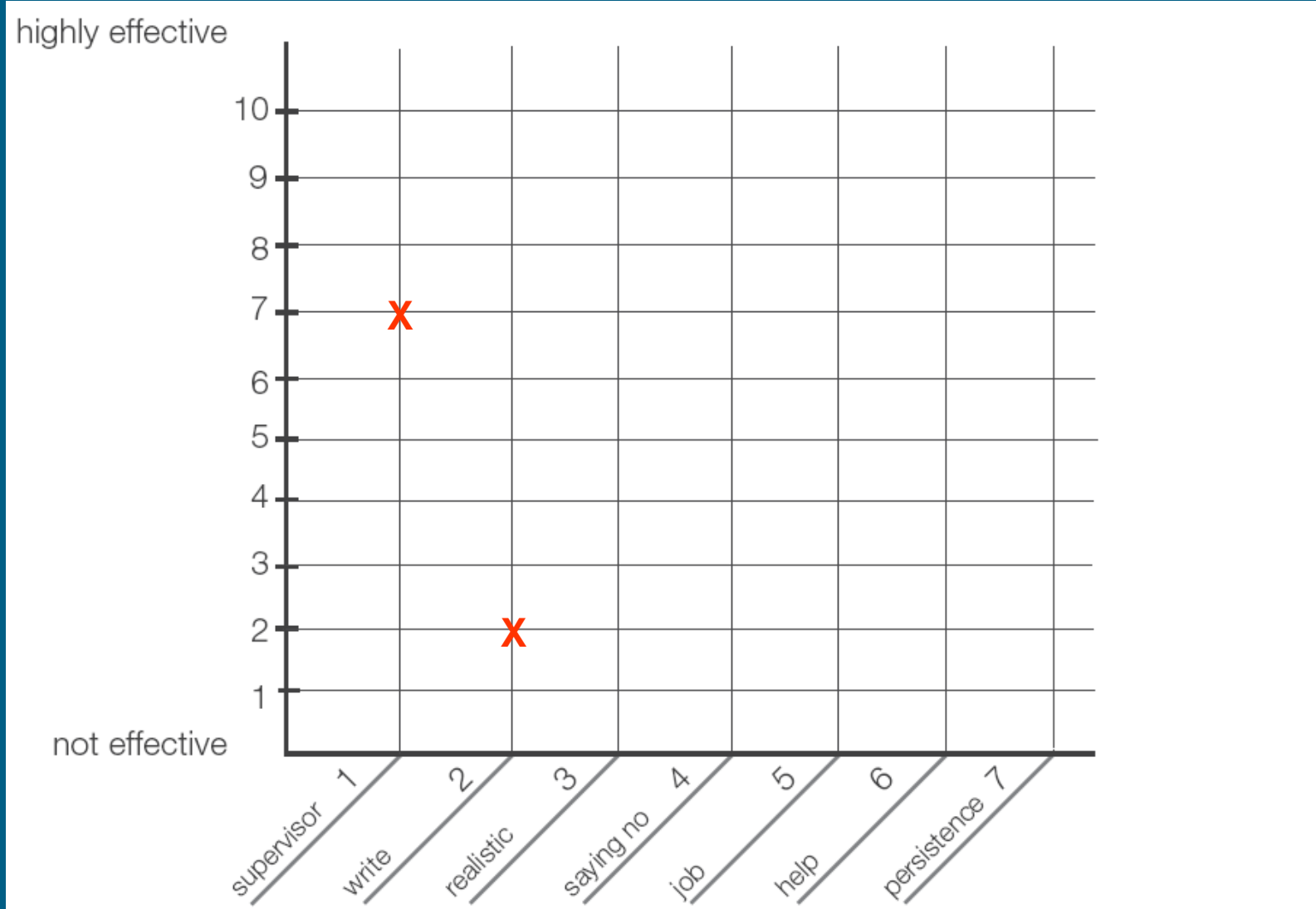
You have to get feedback

- Your supervisor
- Posters, conferences
- Papers
- Peers

Ask for specific feedback



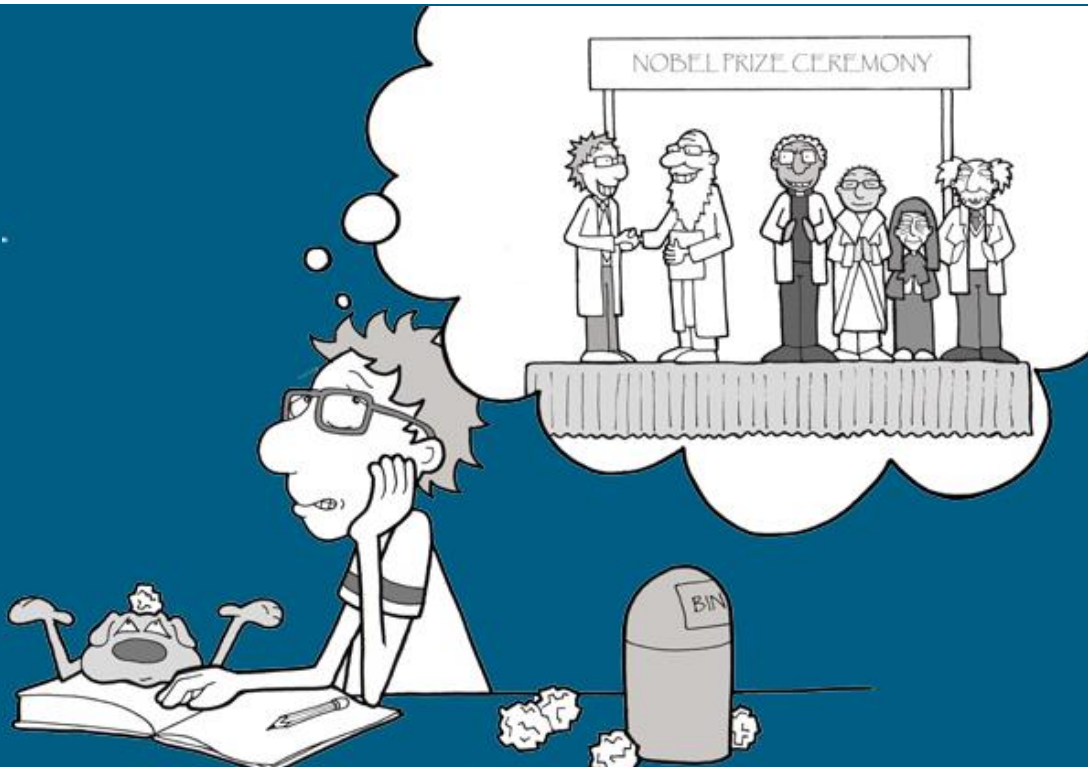
Rate Yourself on Secret #2



secret

3

Be realistic:
It's not a Nobel Prize



Perfectionism

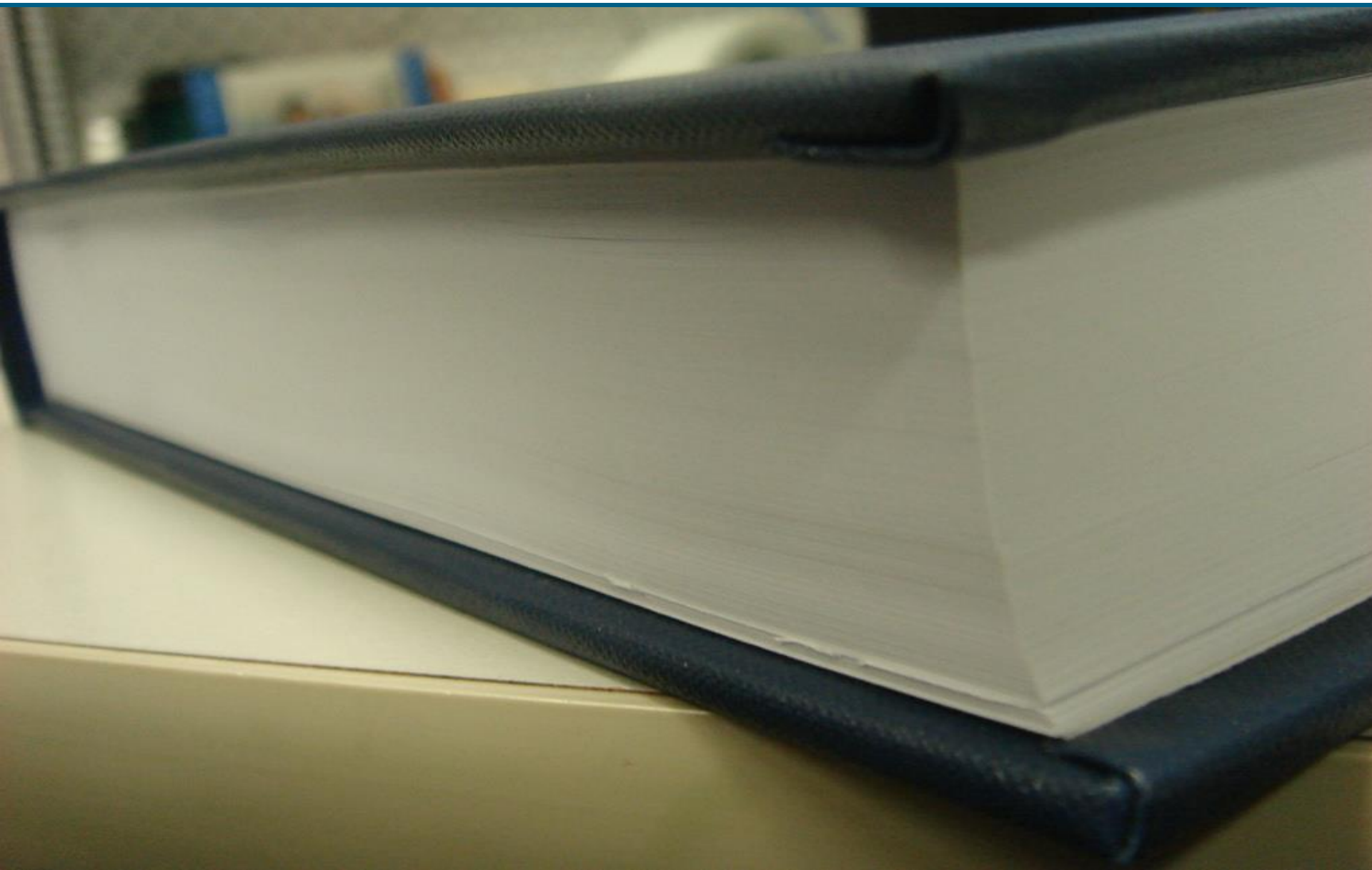
It's not a cure for cancer

Adding to the body of knowledge

You are
learning
how to do
research



My best selling thesis



Selective Perfectionism

Some things 100%

Some things 80%

Some things 50%

The Imposter Syndrome

That feeling that you're just one step away from being found out as a complete fraud!

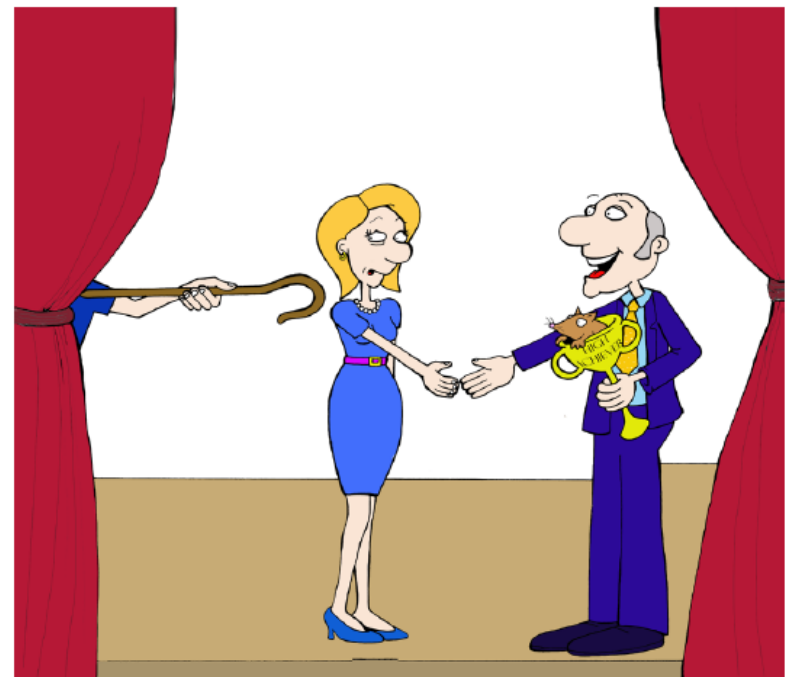
www.impostersyndrome.com.au

THINKWELL

THE IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Why successful people often feel like frauds

Hugh Kearns



Being Realistic Tips

Get evidence

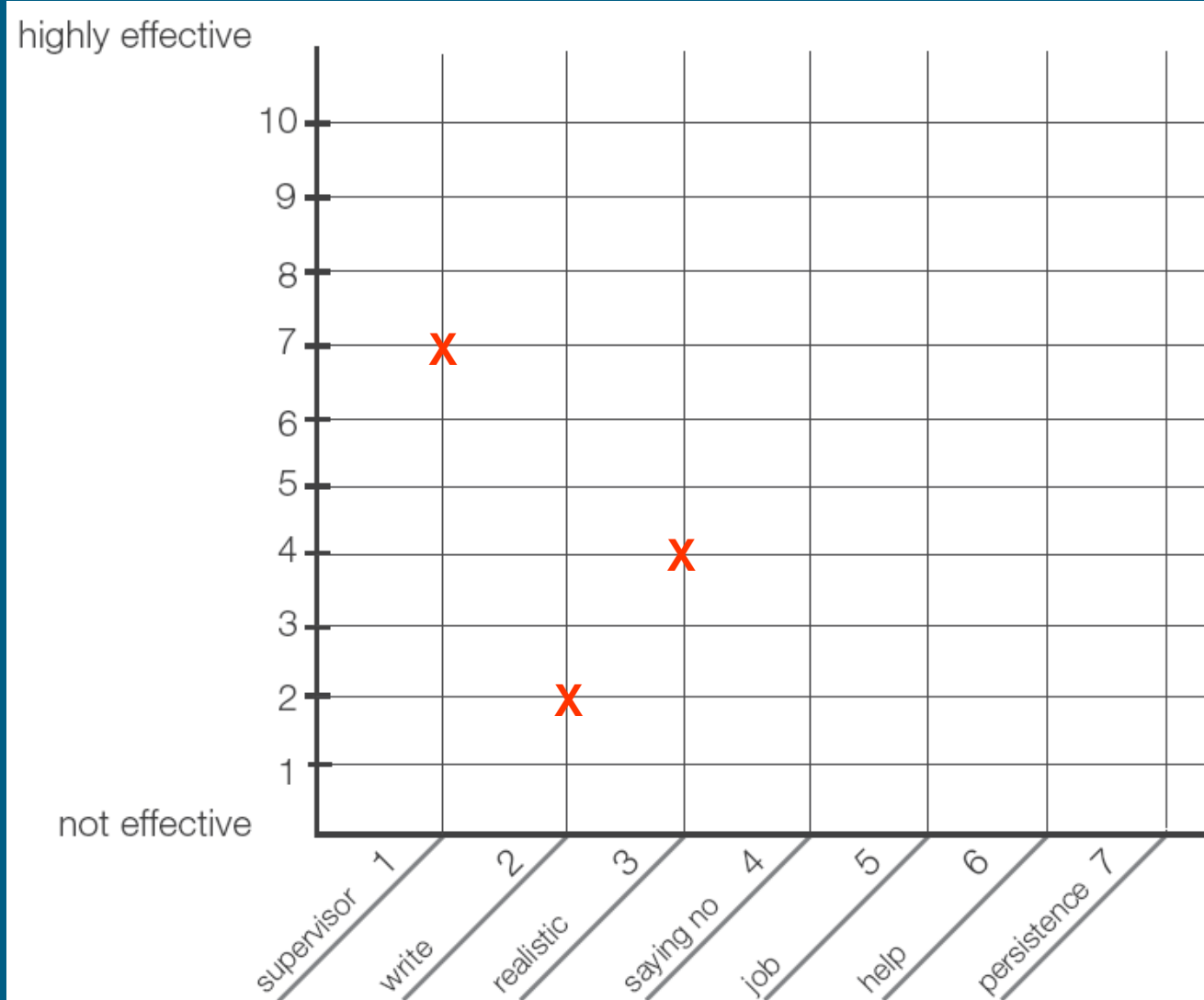
Try it out

Look at what's real

Just because you feel bad DOES NOT
mean that it is bad!

*“The Best is the enemy
of the Good”*

Rate Yourself on Secret #3



secret

4

Say no to distractions:

Even the fun ones and the ones you think you must do

Newton's Third Law of Distraction

For each and every action towards completing your research

there is an equal and opposite distraction.



The Secret Life of the Researcher



Distractions

Why is housework so much fun?

Displacement activities

- Tutoring, marking
- Grants, tangential projects
- Endnote, formatting
- Emails, Facebook, Solitaire



Emails

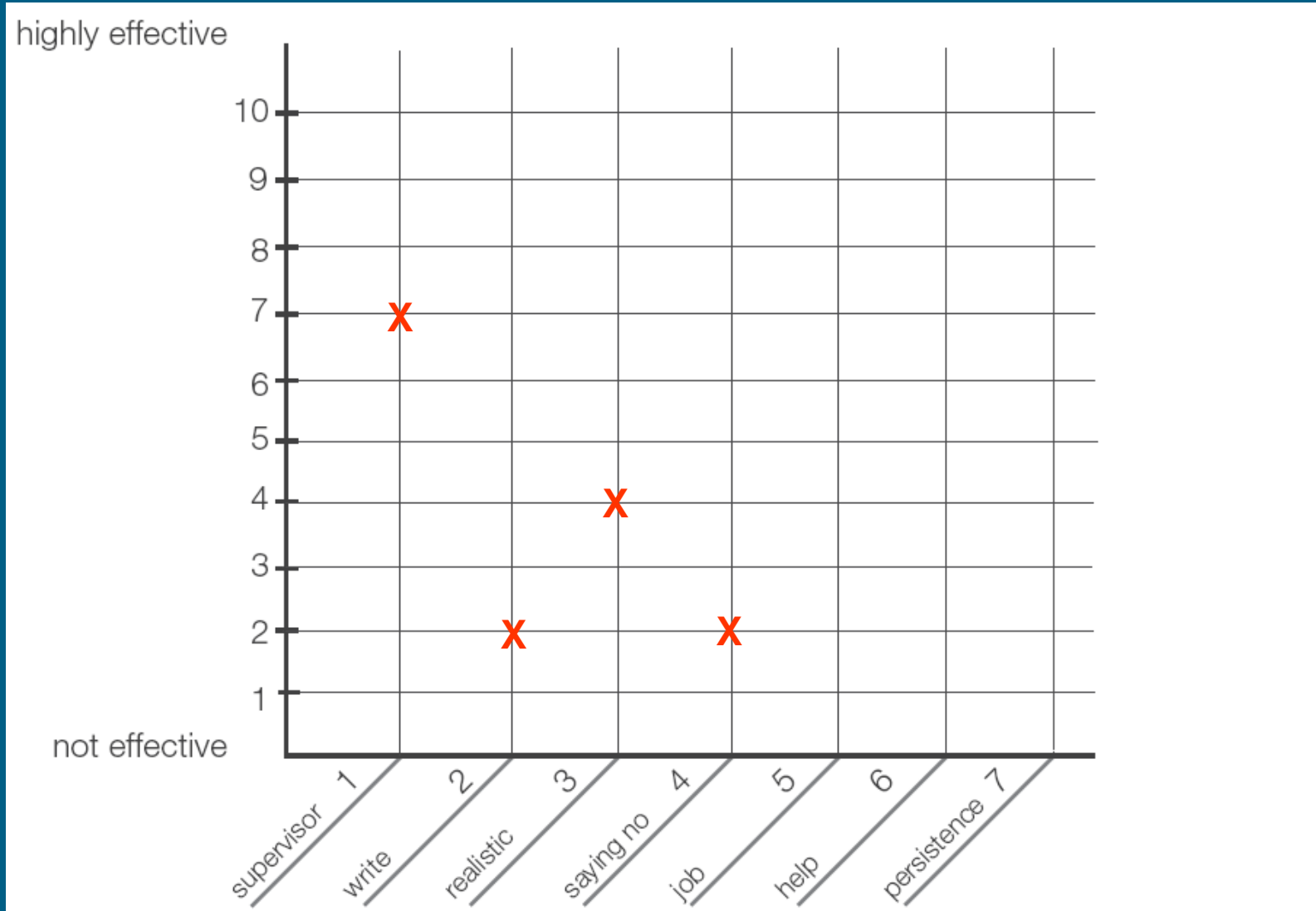
Number one excuse for not doing work

Don't check first thing in the morning

Email can
make you
dopey!



Rate Yourself on Secret #4



secret

5

It's a job:

That means working nine to five, but you get holidays



Guilt!



Yes, You'll Get Holidays!

If you know when to work, you know when not to work

You will get more done

Two real/golden hours a day

Parts of a job

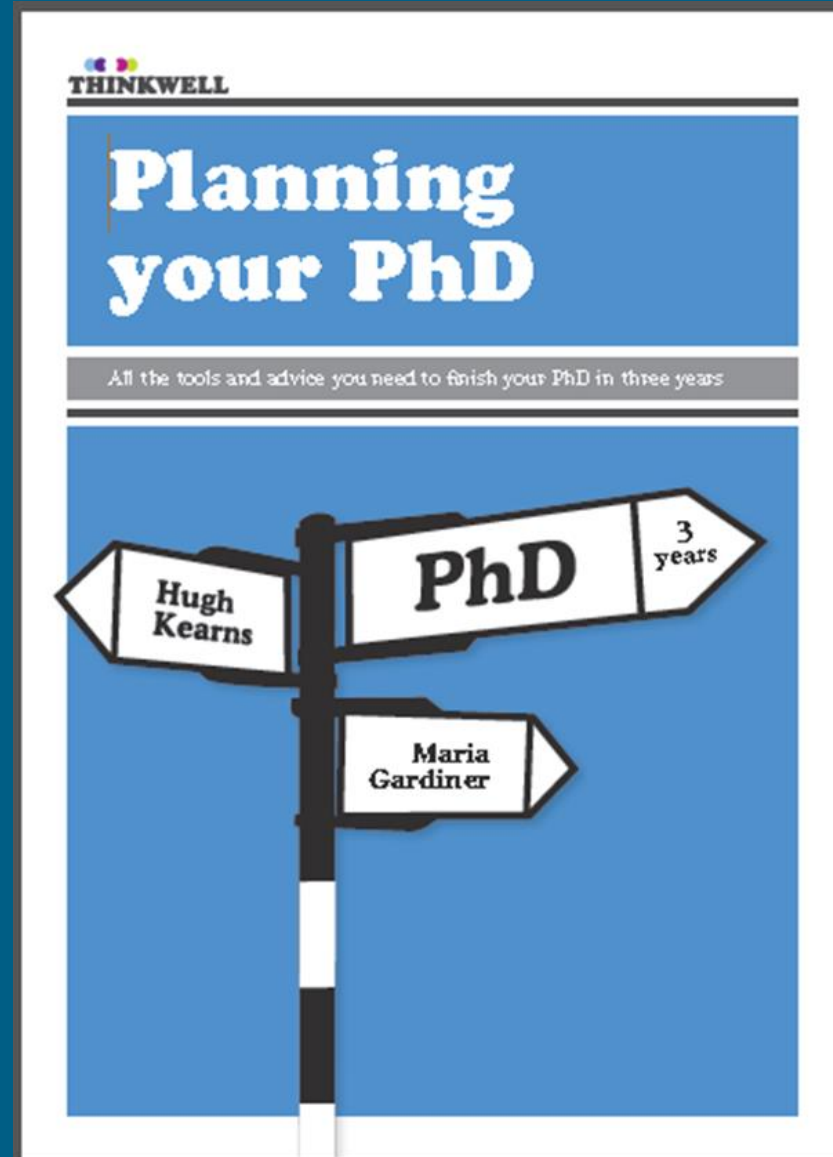
A Plan

Timeframes

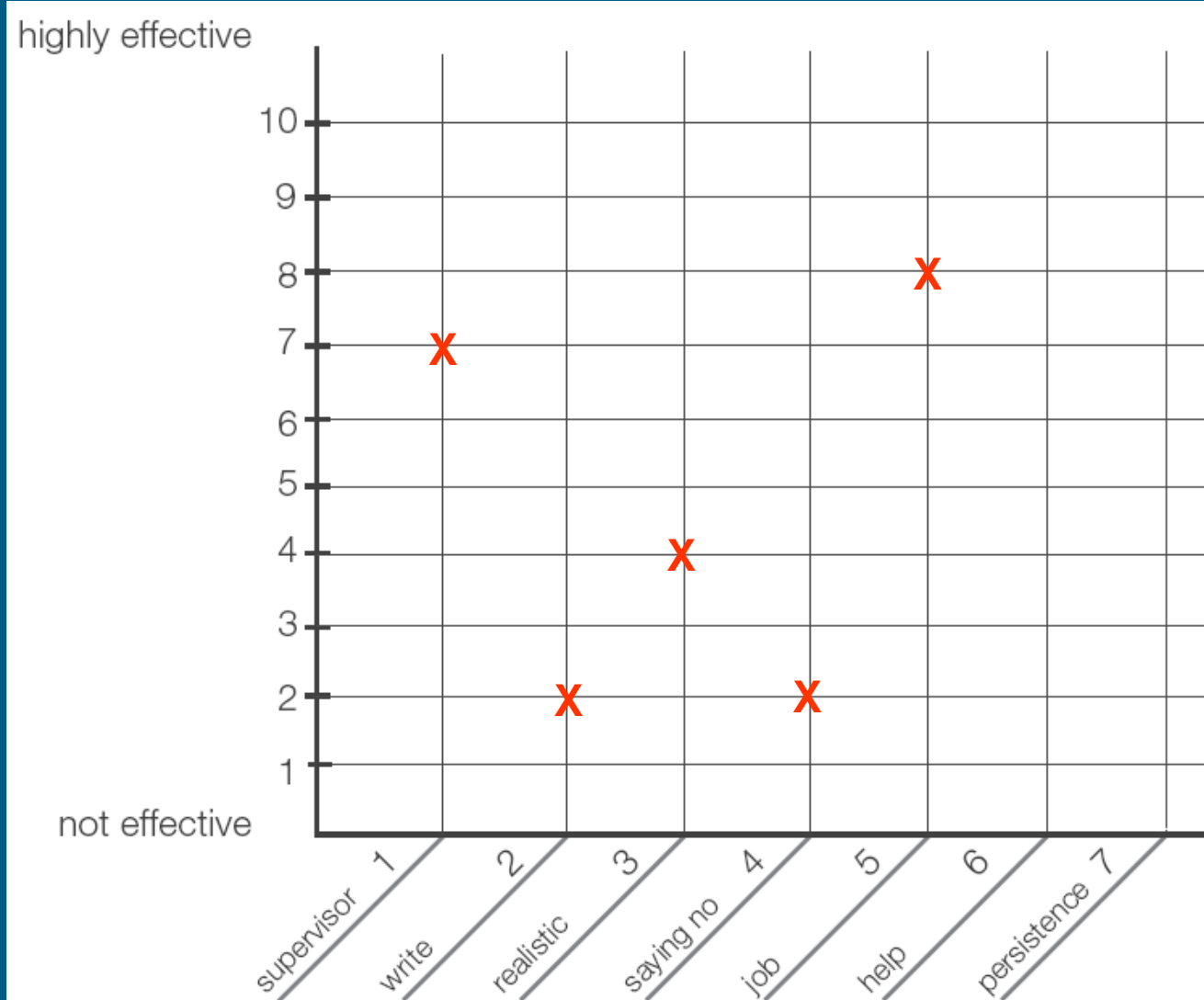
Accountability

A place to work

The equipment to do
the job



Rate Yourself on Secret #5



secret

6

Get help:

You are not an owner-operator single person business!



What's Okay?

- Editing ?– spelling, grammar, structure
- Formatting? – tables, figures, references
- Statistics consultant?
- Transcribing?
- Collecting data?
- Entering data?
- Technology?

At home –cleaner, gardener, babysitter

Get Help

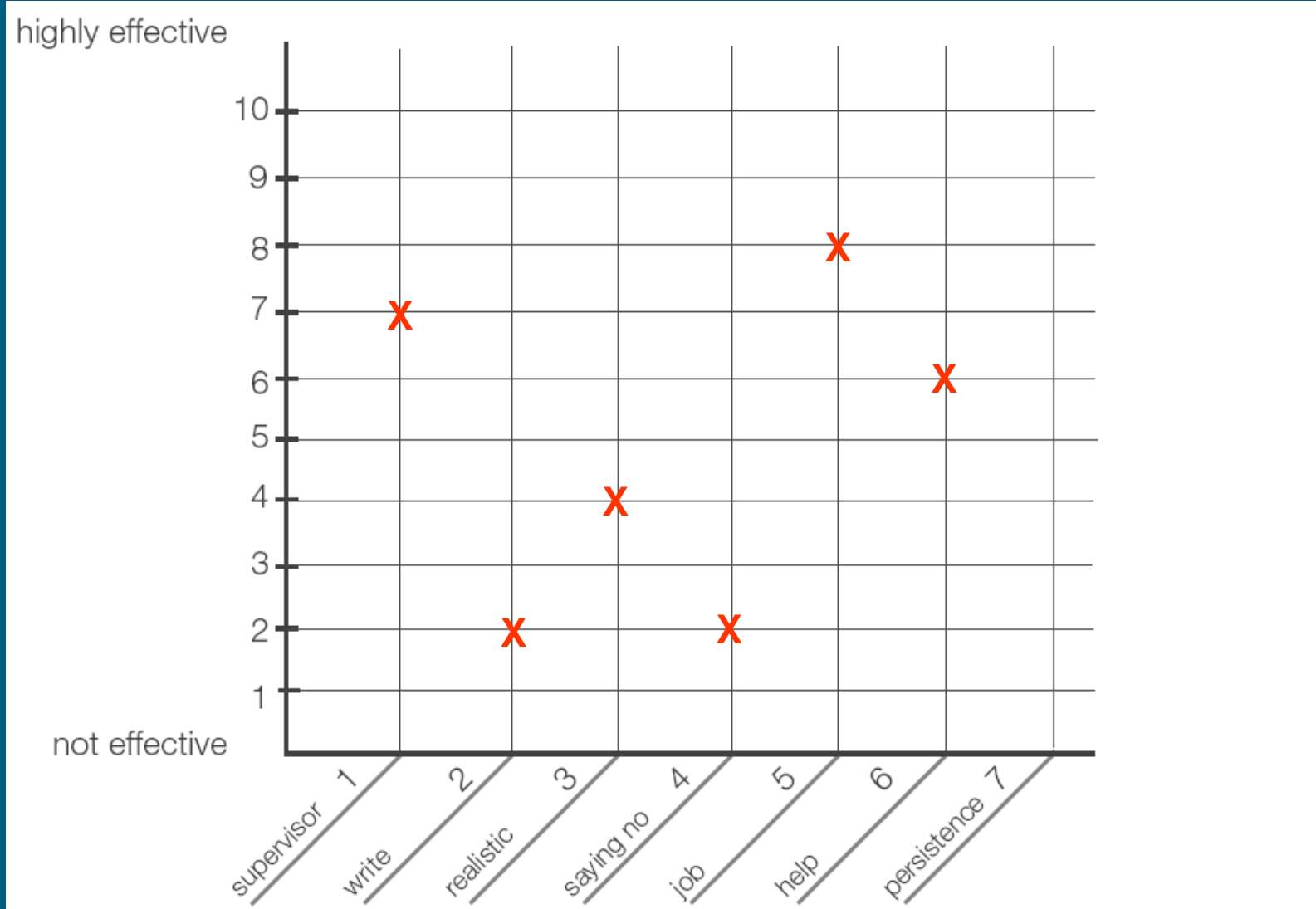
Your supervisor

- advice
- where to go (to get resources)
- finance

Researcher development programs

Find out what is available

Rate Yourself on Secret #6



secret

7

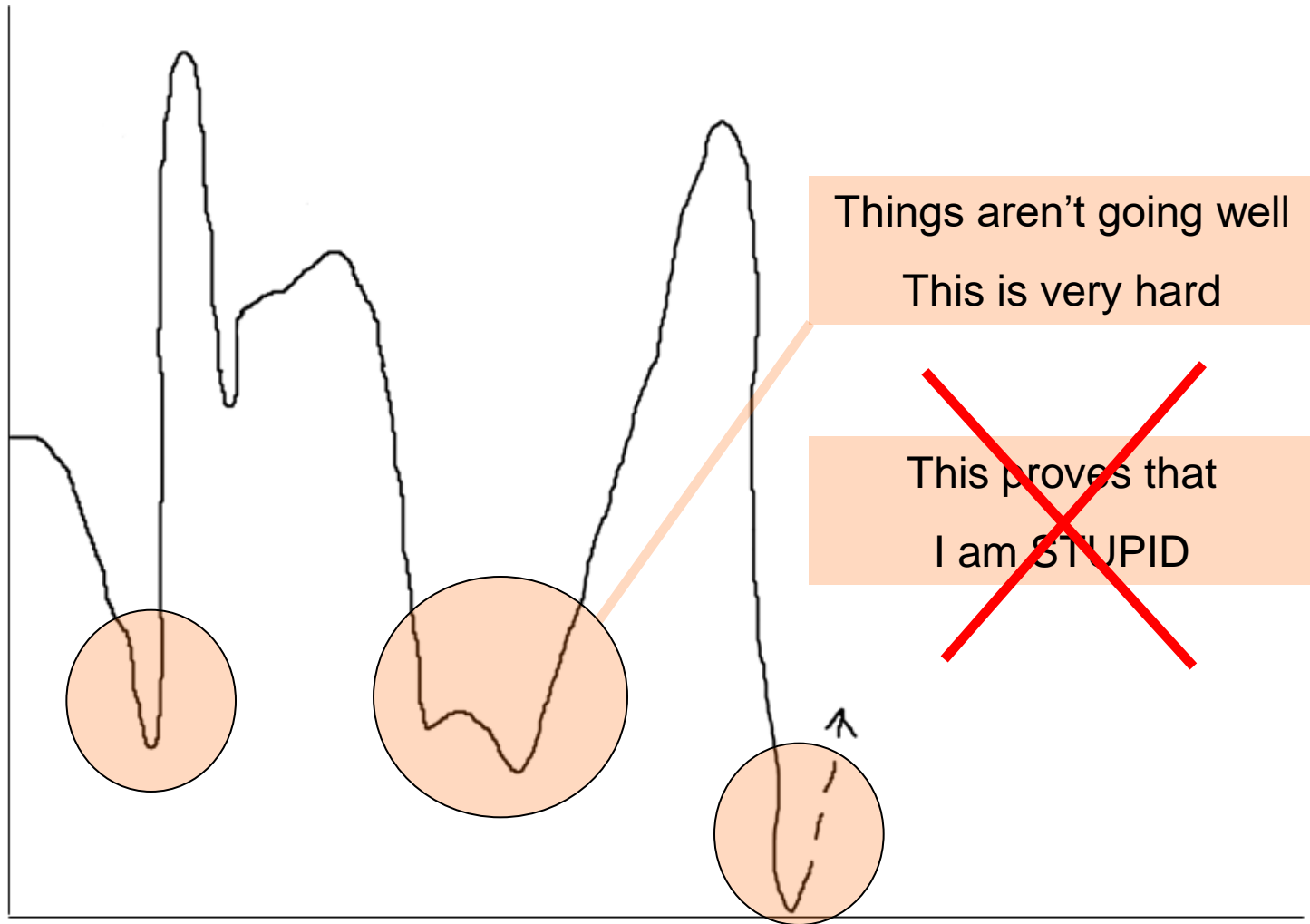
You can do it:

A PhD is 90% persistence and 10% intelligence



The Life Cycle of a PhD

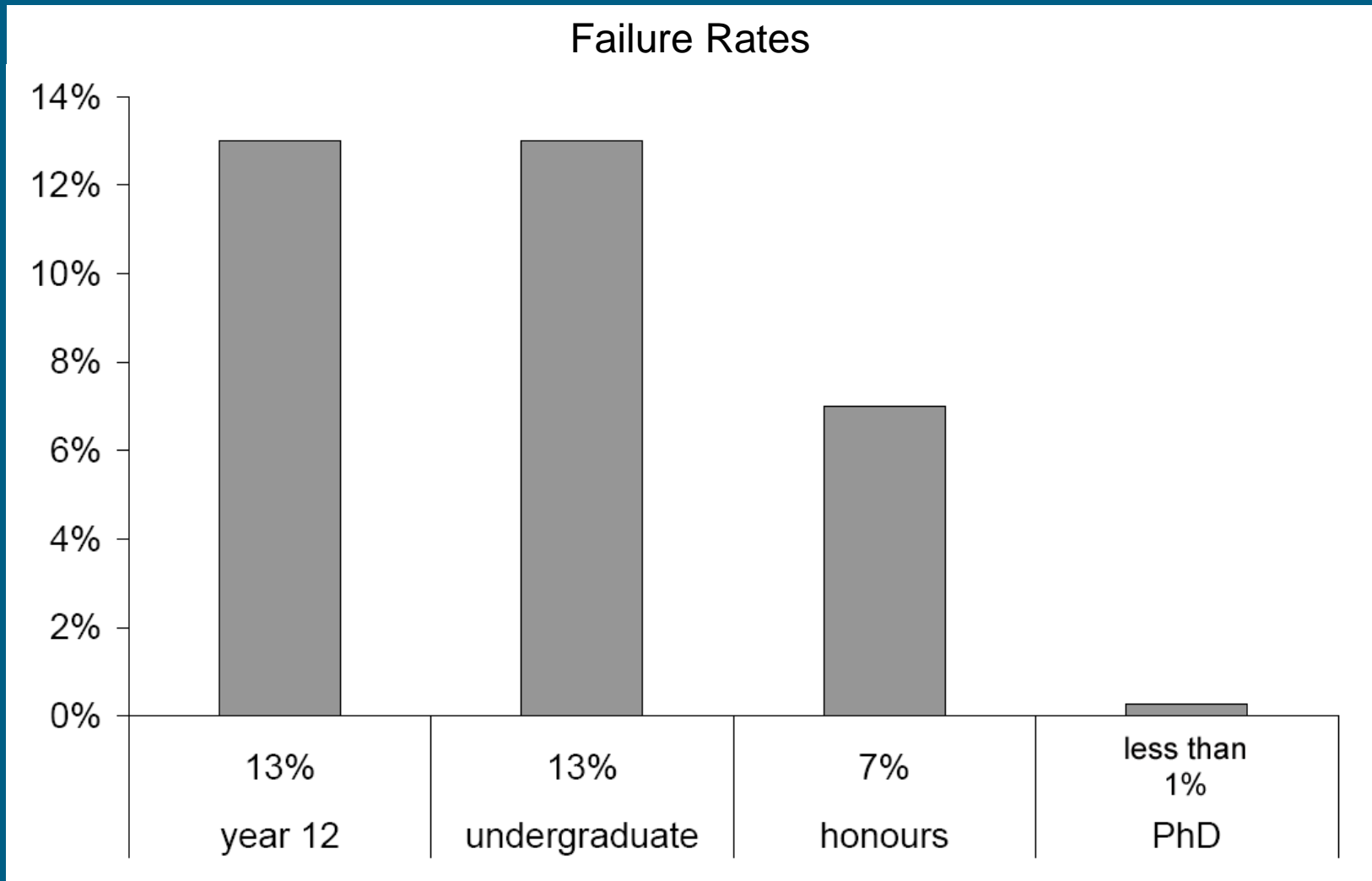
Positive
Feelings



Negative
Feelings

Time

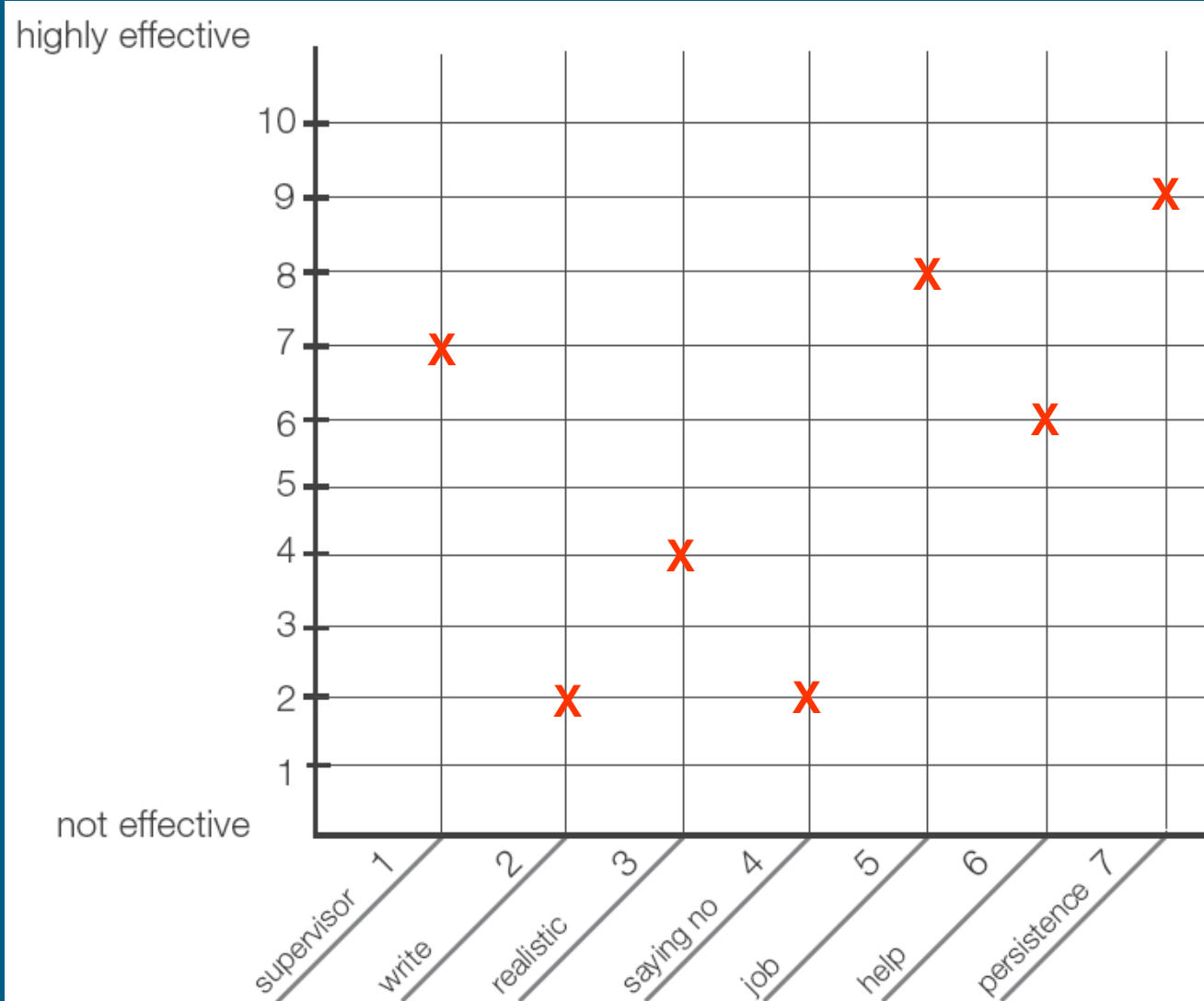
Your Worst Fear – It Rarely Happens!



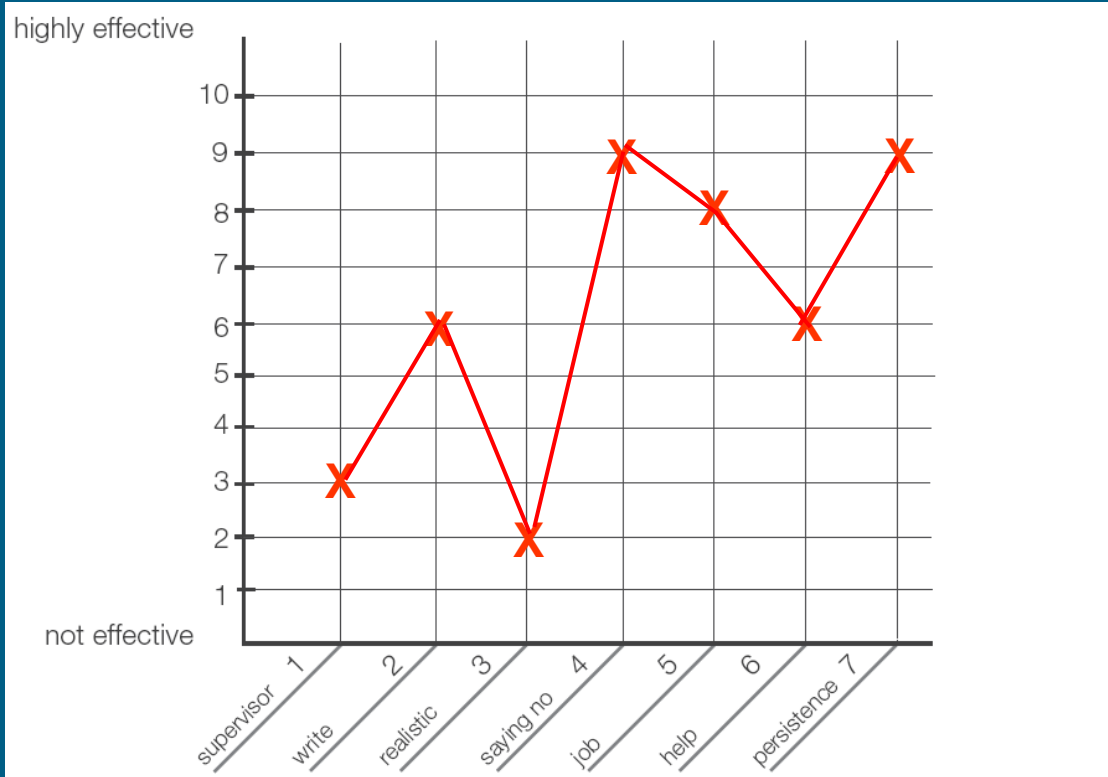
The Bloody Big Book



Rate Yourself on Secret #7



Now Do Something!



now do something:

Pick one thing you could do right now to increase your success

(hint: this is likely to be in the area with the lowest effectiveness score)



.....

.....

.....

secret

7

You can do it:
A PhD is 90% persistence and 10% intelligence



The Seven Secrets

secret

1

Care and Maintenance of your Supervisor



secret

6

Get help:
You are not an owner-operator single person business!



secret

2

Write and show as you go:
This is show and tell, not hide and seek!



secret

5

It's a job:
That means working nine to five, but you get holidays



secret

4

Say no to distractions:
Even the fun ones and the ones you think you must do

Newton's Third Law of Distraction
• For each and every action towards completing your thesis there is an equal and opposite distraction.



secret

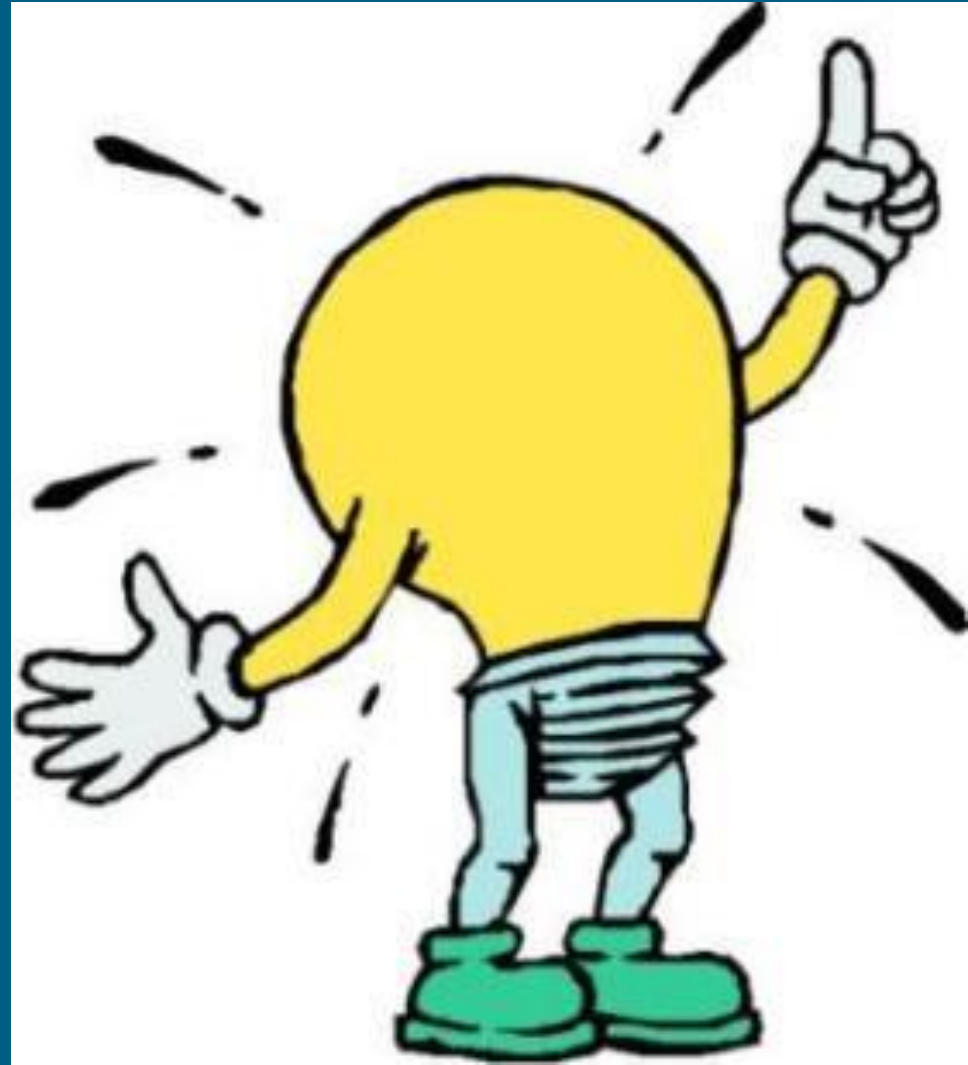
3

Be realistic:
It's not a Nobel Prize



Most Useful

What was the most useful thing?



And Finally Remember it's ...

JaFPhD

And Finally Remember it's ...

Just

a

F*****

PhD

 **THINKWELL**

THE SEVEN SECRETS

of highly successful research students

Marla Gardner & Hugh Kearns



www.ithinkwell.com.au

Hard copy
Ebook