

The 80/20 Principle - Why Less is More!

by Ian Watson

In the late 1800's an Italian economist named Vilfredo Pareto discovered an interesting fact while researching the distribution of wealth in 19th century England. He found that only 20% of the population enjoyed around 80% of the available wealth, and was surprised to discover that this disparity remained consistent across all the different time periods and different countries that he studied.

This tendency towards *uneven distribution* was subsequently found to appear in all kinds of apparently unrelated areas of human activity. Traffic accident statistics, for example, suggest that around 20% of motorists are responsible for 80% of accidents. If you look in your wardrobe, the chances are you will wear 20% of the clothes you own around 80% of the time. Study your living room carpet carefully and you'll find that 20% of the surface area gets 80% of the wear and tear. Check out your music collection and you'll realise that only 20% of it gets played 80% of the time.

In the business world, it has been found that a typical company will generate around 80% of its profits from only 20% of its customers. If you work for yourself, you'll find that 20% of your activities will generate 80% of your income. If you have a range of goods and services on offer, only 20% of them will produce 80% of your total revenue. If you work to a deadline you will find that 80% of your productivity occurs in only 20% of the available time. And so it goes on.....

Some years ago I became interested in the 80/20 principle, and set out to discover whether it had any relevance to my homeopathic practice. I quickly came to the conclusion that I was prescribing 20% of the remedies I knew around 80% of the time (Phatak's concise little *Repertory* exploited this fact, omitting 80% of both remedies and rubrics that were infrequently used).

Not only that, of the information I had gathered in a typical case, I realised that only about 20% of it was being used to prescribe upon, the other 80% being largely ignored. This insight led me to wonder why I was writing down all that other stuff that I almost never used! When I looked more closely at my casetaking activities, it became clear that 80% of what was valuable in any given case emerged during 20% of the allotted time, and this seemed to be true regardless of whether I spent an hour with a client or fifteen minutes.

I also found that 80% of my referrals seemed to come from 20% of my existing clients. When I looked at my repertory (which I did rather frequently in those days), I tended to use 20% of the rubrics 80% of the time. And when I paid attention to my after-hours telephone support, you've guessed it - 20% of my clients were taking up 80% of my time. And they weren't the ones generating 80% of my income!

What is interesting about Pareto's principle, apart from the limitless number of

possible applications, is that, in common with homeopathy, it is essentially counter-intuitive. That is, it tends to go against what everyday 'common sense' would predict, yet it reveals a deeper underlying truth when you look into it more closely. And this same principle holds true in the realm of beliefs and behaviours as well.

In the last five years or so, I've spent most of my time (probably 80%) researching unconscious patterns and the ways in which they influence and determine a person's life experience. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it turns out that only a very few core beliefs (let's say 20%) have a massive and completely disproportionate effect on a person's behaviour, emotional well-being and general self-esteem. Anyone who has spent a lot of time 'positive thinking' and who has achieved a fairly minimal reward in relation to their efforts will understand this equation only too well.

I've also been amazed to discover how, in the field of personal transformation, major shifts in consciousness almost always seem to come about in response to the most subtle interventions. I would go as far as to say that the most spectacular results I have seen have been directly proportional to my ability to keep myself almost completely out of the way.

I haven't drawn any particular conclusions about this, except to acknowledge that the intuitive wisdom and insight of the taoist sages of ancient China seems to have stood the test of time. What I can say is that the 80/20 principle provides a way of understanding and working with the invisible realm, opening up a host of possibilities that would otherwise remain unavailable.

And the best part seems to be that on the dynamic plane, energy follows the same basic patterns, regardless of the field of action concerned. If we are truly able to grasp how the less-is-more principle operates in one area of life, such as homeopathy, we could just as easily translate that understanding into any other area of life, such as business, or finance, or wardrobe management.

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