The Day Planner

by Anne Schmidt

This entry discusses an artefact that was invented with the aim of helping ambitioned men (women didn't belong to the target group) organize their lives in a way that would foster success in their professions.[1] Among other things, the day planner was designed to enable its users to adopt a specific form of emotional (self-)conduct. And this, in turn, was supposed to give them solid foundations for optimizing their performance and productivity.

In its beginnings, the planner wasn't much more than a bunch of loose pages, size A5, held together with some binding. The economist, industrial psychologist, and ex-advertiser Gustav Grossmann published a leather-bound version of this predecessor to our modern organizers and time management systems in the 1930s and wrote a 200-page user's guide to go along with it,[2] detailing how buyers were supposed to use the binder book in the most efficient way.[3] Consumers could personally order the planner with user's guide from Gustav Grossmann himself, and it seems that more than a few of his contemporaries did so.[4] Self-employed as an advisor, occupational coach, and author of advice literature since 1927, Grossmann also sold the planner set in the decades after the Second World War.[5]

Der elementare Teil der Großmann-Methode
Stufe I

DAS GLÜCKSTAGEBUCH

oder

EINFÜHRUNG IN DIE METHODISCHE ZEITPLANUNG

von

Dr. Gustav Großmann

4. weiterentwickelte Darstellung der Methode

MÜNCHEN 51 · HOCHLEITE 9

Grossmann conceived of the day planner as an "instrument" that was supposed to support its user on his path to "growth" – that is, so long as it was used in accordance with the user's guide. It did this by helping him lead his life in a "rational" way. And part of leading one's life in a rational way was the "right" kind of emotional (self-)conduct. I would like to discuss how the day planner was supposed to assist ambitioned individuals live a happy life by getting them to organize their feelings in a particular way. To what extent could writing down wishes and keeping track of engagements give rise to feelings that enabled users to constantly increase their productivity? How were users supposed to better themselves, climb the ladder at their jobs, achieve economic success and thus achieve happiness simply by using the day planner in the fashion prescribed by the user's manual? Which feelings did Grossmann see as being necessary and why? Which feelings was the use of the day planner supposed to generate and which was it supposed to block out?

In order to "grow," to fulfil one's "wishes" and achieve one's "goals," to be successful and find "happiness," Grossmann believed one had to have a "good attitude." Grossmann wasn't the only one who thought so in the 1920s. People had to be "enthusiastic" about their duties and goals, and this "enthusiasm" had to be intrinsically motivated. Grossmann also thought that "drive," "enjoying work," and "love" were "necessary preconditions for successful work." He explained that: "The feeling of comfort signifies a fondness towards the comforting object, a desire to be near it, a joy in abiding one's time with it."[6] In contrast, he claimed that uncomfortable feelings undermined people's feeling of commitment, which in turn led to a drop in self-engagement. He viewed "despondency" as one of the main causes of failure.[7] He thought "fear," "anxiety," "grief," and "irritation" brought people to a standstill, and claimed that nobody plagued by these feelings could accomplish anything of note.[8] "The minus-feelings and minus-affects," Grossmann explained, "make connections between ideas and thus make the productive activity of consciousness impossible. [...] It is impossible to be full of consternation and try to find a solution. It's either one or the other!"[9] But how was the day planner supposed to help its owner block out "minus-feelings" and keep the "plus-feelings" coming? How were people supposed to use it in order for it to be able to fulfil its proper function?

Users were supposed to write down their "goals," "wishes," and daily "tasks" in the book at set times throughout the day. They had to distinguish between "life-long goals," "wishes" for certain phases of life, "plans" for the year, and "tasks" for the month, the week, and the day. The "goals," "plans," "wishes," and "tasks" were divided up into their own different sections: "life-plans," "plans for a phase of life," "plans for the year," "plans for the month," "plans for the week," "plans for the day.2 Before the day planner's owner wrote down his "goals," however, he had to have a clear idea of what his "wishes" were. When trying to come up with big "goals," like "life-goals" or "goals for a phase of life," the user was encouraged to dream and imagine different futures for himself, giving his fantasy free reign. The next step was to see if he was capable of realizing these "wishes" and "goals." After the user assessed whether he could realize a self-given "task," this "task" had to be clearly formulated and written down. Then, the user was asked to precisely lay out all of the individual steps that had to be undertaken to concretely actualize these "goals." After that, these individual steps were to be noted down in the "plans for the day," "plans for the month," and "plans for the year." Getting to know what one's own "needs" were, imagining a good future for oneself, assessing one's "wishes" and planning ways to fulfil them, all these ways of bringing one's "wishes" closer to reality were supposed to bring about feelings of "joy" and "pleasure." Even the act of writing these things down in the

planner was supposed to produce "joy."[10]

In order to get the most out of the book, Grossmann claimed, users were supposed to make every "wish" and "task" into "self-commitments" as soon as they hit the page and hold themselves to these commitments under all circumstances. He claimed that only by unconditionally following one's own schedule could one achieve security, "pride" in one's own capabilities, and "self-respect" and "self-confidence."[11] Users were supposed to keep their planners with them at all times and consult them multiple times throughout the day. By constantly reminding themselves of their plans and tasks, users could check whether or not they were fulfilling their tasks on time and doing everything they could to realize their "wishes." A sort of decentralized memory and conscience, the book compelled users not to let what was important get out of sight. It trained them to complete all the tasks that they had set for themselves in the most optimal way possible. It also reminded them to keep their commitments to others. It helped them avoid being constantly distracted by new things. It protected them from the many alluring diversions of everyday life and exhorted them to remain true to their own "needs" and "goals." It thus inhibited "distractedness" and demanded focus and concentration. It kept users from acting aimlessly or allowing their lives to be guided by others. It thus protected users from becoming overloaded and nervous. In doing all these things, it made it easier for users to respect themselves and be respected by others. It took a burden off the user's shoulder, and made sure that he felt well so that he could live his life with joy and pleasure.[12] But that's not all. Because users constantly checked and evaluated their progress in completing tasks, they could quickly discern when their projects hit a roadblock. If a project wasn't making any progress, then the day planner asked the user to find the causes of the problem in order to resolve them. In this way, the book was supposed to motivate users to take initiative. It was supposed to ensure that disappointment in the face of failures didn't lead to hopelessness and despondency. It demanded that users take charge of their problems, thus strengthening their confidence in their own capacities. And in doing so, it was supposed to promote self-confidence, which enabled users to experience feelings of joy and wellbeing.[13]

But the planner didn't just draw attention to its owner's problems. The idea was that by writing down all the minutiae of his projects and constantly checking their progress, the user could see where he had succeeded and take pleasure in this success. The book was supposed to make users "joyful" about completing the individual steps of a project, thus helping them put off the immediate satisfaction of their "desires," all with the aim of realizing their "higher goals." Like a fitness trainer, the planner prodded users to keep on track. It motivated them to set new goals, develop themselves further and take pleasure in their progress.[14] The day planner was supposed to keep the "plus-feelings" on the up, thus constantly increasing individual performance and personal "growth."

By aiding users shape their emotional (self-)conduct in conformity with a certain set of norms and giving support to the optimal development of their personal productivity, the planner promised more than just individual success, prosperity, and happiness. Developing one's individual abilities to the fullest was also supposed to further the economic welfare of society as a whole. And this, of course, was inconceivable if people did not govern their feelings in the "right" way. Grossmann claimed that the self-driven engagement of highly productive people would propel social "progress." Collective economic interests were thus seen as being closely dependent on the realization of individual interests. Leading a happy life and being optimistic and confident were thus not just private affairs, but were at once a universal norm and a social duty.

But what about those people who didn't want to submit themselves to this emotional regime or who, for whatever reason, were not capable of doing so? Gustav Grossmann and his followers had little compassion for the "malcontents," the "killjoys," "complainers," and "pessimists." Grossmann believed that people who weren't willing or weren't in the condition to manage their lives and feelings in the "right" way deserved to have to be bossed around by others while carrying out their menial, poorly paid work that destroyed their health.[15] Thus, in Grossmann's world, individuals' feelings and social status were closely correlated with one another. The capacity or incapacity to manage one's feelings in the "right" way was used to support and legitimate social hierarchies. Grossmann's elaborations sometimes even tended towards the claim that the humanity of those who did not conform to the norms of productivity should be called into question: Such individuals simply hadn't "turned out well," were "not healthy," were "strange," "unpleasant" and "disgusting." They lacked the "character and moral capacity for success." "From the perspective of the psychiatrist," he claimed, such people were "debilitated" or "stupid" and were to be written off as "subhuman."[16]

Rejecting the idea that people should be classified according to their social background, Grossmann followed one of the trends of his times in developing a different, supposedly more neutral and objective criterion for classifying people, namely the criterion of individual achievement. This served to legitimate and undergird old hierarchies: one was a worker now because one didn't achieve enough then. But judging people according to individual achievement could also produce new asymmetries.[17]

Moreover, claims about the "right" and "wrong" forms of managing one's feelings were not only used to classify people and justify social hierarchies within the German Empire, but were also used to construct hierarchies among whole peoples. In turn, these hierarchies could be used to rationalize global relations of domination: "Crying is a sign of despondency," said Grossmann, "and often occurs with people who have certain types of mental illness. Men seldom cry, and men who belong to the master people cry least of all."[18]

This discussion has hopefully demonstrated that, in the 1920s (and some even earlier), people engaged in

the rationalization movement had an intense interest in the question of how the productivity and performance of ambitioned individuals could be increased through *emotion management*. They developed various techniques, "apparatuses," and "instruments" like the day planner that were supposed to enable individuals to bring their emotional (self-)conduct in line with the norms and expectations of what a highly performing person was supposed to be. An analysis of objects like the day planner and the instructions for their use can show how such objects helped promulgate, translate, and put into practice historically and culturally specific emotional norms.

Two more finds seem important to me. The sketch makes clear that distinctions between people based on their individual achievements and those based in "correct" or "good" forms of emotional (self-)conduct could mutually determine one another to a great extent. Gustav Grossmann and his adherents thought that without the "right" feelings and the "appropriate" form of *emotion management*, productivity and improvement of individual performance were impossible. By drawing on forms of emotion management that conformed to a specific set of norms and outlining how these forms of self-management were connected with an individual's productivity, old classifications and established social hierarchies were legitimized while new asymmetries were produced.

Some works in the fields of sociology and history have claimed that techniques aimed at optimizing oneself and one's productivity and performance began to gain significance in the 1970s.[19] However, this analysis of the day planner shows us that self-optimization – Grossmann spoke of "self-formation," "improvement," and "growth" – was already an important topic at the beginning of the 20th century.

Further Literature

- Thomas Alkemeyer, Gunilla Budde, Dagmar Feist, "Einleitung [Introduction]", in *Selbst-Bildungen. Soziale und kulturelle Praktiken der Subjektivierung* [Self-Formations: Social and Cultural Practices of Subjectification]*, idem*, eds (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 9-30.
- Gustav Grossmann, *Sich selbst rationalisieren: Mit Mindestaufwand persönliche Bestleistungen erzeugen* [Rationalizing Oneself: Achieving Your Personal Best with Minimal Effort] (Stuttgart: Verlag für Wirtschaft und Verkehr, 1927).
- Gustav Grossmann, *Sich selbst rationalisieren: Wesen und Praxis der Vorbereitung persönliche u. beuflicher Erfolge* [Rationalizing Oneself: The Fundamentals and Praxis of Prepapring for Personal and Professional Success] (Stuttgart/Wien: Verlag für Wirtschaft und Verkehr Forkel & Co., 1933).
- Gustav Grossmann, "Der elemetare Teil der Grossmann-Methode. Stufe 1: Das Glückstagebuch oder Einführung in die methodische Zeitplanung. München 1953" [The Basics of the Grossmann-Method. Step 1: The Happy Day Planner or Introduction to Methodical Time Planning], in *Grossmann: Die Originaleinführung der „Grossmann-Methode,* HelfRecht – Studienzentrum GmbH, Hrsg. (Bad Alexandersbad: HelfRecht-Studienzentrum GmbH, 1983), 227–414.
- Stefan Hirschauer, "Un/doing Differences: Die Kontingenz sozialer Zugehörigkeiten [Un/doing Differences: The Contingency of Social Belongings]," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 43 (2014): 170–191.
- Thomas Steinfeld, "Pionier der Selbstoptimierung [Pioneer of Self-Optimization]," *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* 2 (2012): 16-24.

[1] I would like to thank Alexander Grossmann and the HelfRecht company for generously making some of the sources discussed here available to me.

[2] After the First World War, where he was severely wounded, Gustav Grossmann (1893-1973) studied philosophy, political economy, statistics, and psychology at the universities in Berlin, Freiburg, and Königsberg. After completing his studies, he went through a rapid succession of different occupations. He worked as an assistant for Walther Moede and Carl Piorkowski, influential figures in the field of industrial psychology. Industrial psychology was part of applied psychology, and is seen as being a predecessor of modern industrial organizational psychology. Its primary objects were the psychological aspects of optimizing productivity and performance. After his time as an assistant, Grossmann worked for a number of agrarian interest groups in East Prussia. In the mid-1920s, he took a job as head of advertising at a small publishing house in Allenstein (today Olsztyn), but he soon gave this job up to work in the advertising department at Oldenbourg Publishing in Munich.

[3] Gustav Grossmann, "Der elementare Teil der Grossmann-Methode. Stufe 1: Das Glückstagebuch oder Einführung in die methodische Zeitplanung. München 1953 [The Basics of the Grossmann-Method. Step 1: The Happy Day Planner or Introduction to Methodical Time Planning]," in *Grossmann: Die Originaleinführung der "Grossmann-Methode.",* HelfRecht – Studienzentrum GmbH (Hrsg.), (Bad Alexandersbad: HelfRecht-Studienzentrum GmbH, 1983), 227–414.

[4] It is impossible to say precisely how many copies of the binder and user's guide were sold. Grossmann's students, among them Werner Kieser, the founder of the Kieser Institutes, claim that Grossmann was important for the German economy of the 1950s and 1960s. Grossmann supposedly helped many businessmen achieve economic success, and is supposed to have personally coached some 17,000 people. The number of people who read his advice literature is thus in all probability much higher. Grossmann's 1927 classic "Rationalizing Oneself" was printed 28 times between 1927 and 1993. On

Grossmann's popularity see: Thomas Steinfeld, "Pionier der Selbstoptimierung," *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* 2 (2012): 16-24.

[5] Grossmann began calling the day planner the happy day planner, because, according to his son Alexander Grossmann, he thought the new title would do a better job of advertising the product.

[6] Gustav Grossmann, *Sich selbst rationalisieren: Mit Mindestaufwand persönliche Bestleistungen erzeugen* [Rationalizing Oneself: Achieving Your Personal Best with Minimal Effort] (Stuttgart: Verlag für Wirtschaft und Verkehr, 1927).

[7] Ibid. 180.

[8] Ibid. 71.

[9] Gustav Grossmann, *Sich selbst rationalisieren: Wesen und Praxis der Vorbereitung persönliche u. beuflicher Erfolge* [Rationalizing Oneself: The Fundamentals and Praxis of Prepapring for Personal and Professional Success] (Stuttgart/Wien: Verlag für Wirtschaft und Verkehr Forkel & Co., 1933), 330.

[10] Grossmann, "Der elementare Teil der Grossmann-Methode", 295-317.

[11] Ibid. 239.

[12] Ibid 258–69, 405–408.

[13] Ibid 290-91.

[14] Ibid 350-51.

[15] Ibid 260–66.

[16] Ibid 337, 405, 407, 411, 413.

[17] Stefan Hirschauer, "Un/doing Differences: Die Kontingenz sozialer Zugehörigkeiten," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 43 (2014): 170–91.

[18] Gustav Grossmann, "Wie werden Affekte zum Ausdruck gebracht? [How are Affects Expressed?]" *ratio* 23–25 (1933): 101.

[19] Einführend dazu: Thomas Alkemeyer, Gunilla Budde, Dagmar Feist, "Einleitung", in *Selbst-Bildungen. Soziale und kulturelle Praktiken der Subjektivierung,* idem, eds (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 9-30.

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