

Good Work Hacks

Each hack is organized by



Category

Admin, Distractions, Email, Environment, Goals, Meetings, Time Management, Wellbeing



Utility

How useful it is, scored out of 100



Difficulty

Determined by combining scores for the complexity and required willpower of each tip

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Time-boxing



100



3



Time management

Time-boxing will improve your life. At the core it's simple: assign a fixed period of time to a task, schedule it and stick to it. It works because it touches on so many aspects of behaviour: single-tasking and focus to achieve more and feel less stressed, prioritising work to observe deadlines, frequent feelings of accomplishment, and being transparent so people can see what you're doing and help. The tricky bit is chunking the tasks and estimating how long they'll take, but this skill improves rapidly with practice. Key to this is time-boxing into a shared calendar and taking commutes, meetings, and other commitments into account.

Prioritise

☆ 97.5 📊 3 ⏪ × Time management

The modern worker has a thousand things to do at any one time. These should be ruthlessly and methodically prioritised. Otherwise you'll consistently add less value at work. Find ways to avoid being distracted by tasks that jump to the front of the queue like email and alerts (see below). You also need a system for prioritising tasks – a simple one will do, and will always be better than none. So list out the tasks you have and, whether it's a score out of 10 or colour coding, do it and stick to it.

Say no



91.3



2



Wellbeing

Stop trying to please everyone! It's much easier said than done, we know, but by overloading yourself with work, not only do you risk being unable to complete tasks and meet deadlines – the quality of ALL of your work is affected. Sometimes it's best to politely decline so that you can focus on the most important work. If you do it right, colleagues will understand and respect you for it.

Move!



82.6



3



Wellbeing

Moving does a lot for you. It gets the blood flowing round your body, can break you out of that daydream and helps stir creative thoughts. It's good for you and the perfect tonic to our desk-bound lives. Try a wearable that alerts you when you've been inactive for too long. Or take a walk for that call, or even that meeting.

Control your devices



82.6



3



Distractions

Don't let them control you. We check our phones between 150-221 times a day, depending on which study you're reading. Even having your phone in sight, without touching it, has been shown to reduce performance in tests, according to a study at the University of Southern Maine. Clear your desk of distracting devices and see how much more you get done, with fewer distractions.

Take short breaks

☆ 78.2 📊 2 ⏏ Wellbeing

Building regular, short breaks into working time increases focus and productivity, studies have shown. One popular way to implement this is the Pomodoro Technique, named for the tomato-shaped timer used by the method's creator, Francesco Cirillo. You use the timer to break work up into short periods, usually 25 minutes, with regular micro-breaks of around 5 minutes. Play around to find what timings suit you best.

To-do lists



69.6



2



Goals

To-do lists are fundamental. They aren't a complete solution to time management (time-boxing takes the idea further) but they are essential. Think of a typical day: we're rushing around from meeting to email to work conversation to conference call, picking up countless tasks along the way. We need to log these tasks somewhere and then ensure that we action them when we finally get a moment of calm. For a lot of people, the next steps are to prioritise them and then schedule them. But it starts with to-do lists.

Eat well

 69.6  3  Wellbeing

Loading up on sweets and crisps won't sustain you over hours of hard work, and will almost certainly result in a crash. This is particularly harmful to productivity as your brain burns more glucose when trying to exert self-control. Eating foods that slowly release energy over time is better for your health and productivity. Think unprocessed, whole foods and a lunch with a balance of protein, veg, fat and carbs.

2-minute rule

☆ 69.6 📊 3 ⏏ Time management

If a task can be done in less than 2 minutes, don't write it down or put it into a system or discuss it or think about it... just do it. Of course if you have a more important, more urgent job at that same moment, that one will win. But in general we often procrastinate or feel overwhelmed when sometimes it's better to just get on with some small tasks, build momentum, clear the clutter and gain a degree of control. This works very well for full inboxes, and tends to be more effective when it's not mixed with longer tasks. Devote 30 minutes to getting 2-minute jobs done and you will have completed 15 (at least!)

Control social media



65.2



3



Distractions

Taking a sneak peek at what your friends are up to on Facebook during the working day is common. But social media can be a toxic distraction. One click of a photo can quickly escalate to 20 and unthinkingly uploading content can get you into trouble. Take control, don't let social media control you. Schedule "social media time" into your calendar for 5 minutes twice a day. By setting aside time to check social media, you can limit its impact on your day.

Choose when to check email



65.2



3



Email

Every time we get a ping indicating a new email, comment, or notification of any sort, our brains get a dopamine hit. Dopamine is the neurotransmitter responsible for feelings of reward and pleasure, and it can get addictive. This is why it's so easy to succumb to constantly checking your emails, as each new message, however mundane, releases dopamine, at the cost of productivity. Combat this by scheduling set times to check emails, and allocate other times to producing your best work.

Organise your workspace



63



3



Environment

And keep it organised. Spending several minutes excavating the detritus on your desk as you frantically try to find a document is not a good use of your time. Keeping an orderly work space will make you more efficient and calm and exude an aura of control. A self-imposed clean desk policy is a good place to start.

Start earlier



56.5



3



Time management

Not easy, but simple and effective. From Richard Branson to Michelle Obama, high performers are often also early risers. Whether it's to fit in a morning workout or an extra hour of distraction-free work, getting up early means you literally get a head start in the day on almost everyone else.

Breathe



56.5



2



Wellbeing

With increasing workloads, varied work, colleagues in multiple timezones and devices pinging all around us, it's no wonder we're a more stressed workforce than any before. We need simple ways to decompress. Breathing is the simplest. If you feel your mind buzzing with too many things and it's spinning out of control... focus on your breath and try to slow your breathing down a little. Just 90 seconds can be enough to get you out of the cycle of automatic negative responses and the resulting physiological reactions. Better still, find 10-15 minutes a day to meditate. Amongst many other things, meditation helps us to gain better control of our mental meanderings and leads to happier, more useful and more productive thoughts. Try the Headspace app.

Turn off alerts



56.5



3



Distractions

Alerts alert. That means they get your attention. That means they take your attention from whatever it was you were doing. That's fine if the alert really is important and urgent. But for most of us, most of the time, it's not. The thing we were doing is more important. So mute alerts, pause them, go into airplane mode. This is about reclaiming control of where your attention goes, and applies to email, Whatsapp, Slack, Skype, internal messaging services – everything. Going full-screen (F11 on a PC or $\wedge + \text{⌘} + F$ on a Mac) is a fast, effective way of muting alerts. Another way is to change your status to 'Do not disturb' on your various communications platforms.

Shorter meetings



54.3



3



Meetings

The Babylonians created the concept we now call an “hour”, though they probably didn’t have 21st century business meetings in mind at the time. An hour is a nice, round number but that’s about all it has going for it as a universal time allocation for gatherings. Parkinson’s Law says “work expands to fill the time available for its completion” so if we set aside an hour for every meeting, the meeting will take that time, though we won’t necessarily get more done than if we had allocated it less time. So the advice is to either vary meeting length depending on the agenda (and of course sometimes 60 minutes will be right!) or to universally apply a shorter time, e.g. 30 or 45 minutes. This forces everyone to get the most out of the time you have.

Site blockers

☆ 52.2 📊 2 ⏏ Email

Why expend precious energy on exercising self-control, when you can simply remove all temptation? There are numerous programs available to block access to your most distracting websites for set periods of time, for all operating systems and browsers. Install and activate these when working to free yourself of the burden of choice.

Productivity tools

☆ 52.2 📊 3 ⏪ × Time management

Tech might be responsible for the majority of our distractions, but it can also be harnessed for greater productivity. There are a whole host of apps, tools and programs out there that can make your life easier and more efficient, whether it be syncing your social media posts or reducing the blue light from your screen at night to improve sleep quality. Invest some time in getting the hang of a carefully-selected few, and enjoy a productivity boost. Some of our favourites: scribblet.codeplex.com/, screencastify.com/, getpocket.com, grammarly.com, boomeranggmail.com.

Plan ahead

☆ 52.2 📊 3 ⏪ × Time management

Sounds like a no-brainer. We all know that proper planning helps us make better use of our time. So plan ahead. At the beginning of each week, work out the non-negotiables (meetings, deadlines, etc.) then schedule the remaining tasks around them. By creating a scheduled agenda of your activities (try an app like Spark Notebook) you will be more likely to follow through with each task and less likely to procrastinate.

Single-tasking



52.2



3



Distractions

Do one thing at a time. Do NOT multitask. This is very difficult. Even if you minimise distractions from devices, tech etc, there are still your dear colleagues who may approach you. And even if you can isolate yourself from them, there are still the swirling thoughts in your mind! You're writing a report, but your brain keeps reminding you of that task your boss gave you before lunch and that just triggered a series of thoughts about your last review...aaaggghhh!!! It happens to all of us, so don't beat yourself up too much when you get distracted. Just always be clear about what single task you are supposed to be doing (e.g. have it written somewhere) so you can get back to it as quickly as possible post-distraction.

Sound & music



50



1



Distractions

Research proves that people who listen to music generally finish their tasks faster and are better at generating good ideas in comparison to those who don't listen to music. However, pop music interferes with information processing and reading comprehension, so be selective with what you listen to while working, and save the top 40 chart bangers for non-working hours. Instead, try listening to white noise or ambient sounds, which have been proven to help with concentration. There are plenty of sound generators out there; try Noisli, a fantastic free background noise generator for both productivity and relaxation. Great when you need to block out a noisy environment.

Write it down



50



1



Admin

The moment you are assigned a task, it looms in your face: big, important, unforgettable. However, it often does end up being forgotten. Oops! We've all been there. So write it down, make it memorable (hand-drawn visuals, however ridiculous, are effective) and make tasks stand out somehow so when you come back to your notes it's clear what you still have to do. This could be in some task-management software, a google doc, Word, Notepad, or an actual paper notepad. The important thing is that you have a written log somewhere.

Break tasks down



50



2



Time management

Start with writing down the first thing you need to do, however basic. You're much more likely to get started on a task (i.e. not procrastinate), especially on something big, when you see the small, manageable steps required to complete it. This will also help you avoid overwhelm and maintain momentum, and ultimately execute in a big way

8020 rule



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3



Time management

Also known as the Pareto Principle, this rule states that that across all industries, activities and contexts, 80% of results come from 20% of causes – e.g. 80% of sales come from 20% of clients; 80% of software problems are caused by 20% of bugs. When it comes to your work, target the 20% of tasks and actions that will get you 80% of your results, and you'll have turbocharged your effectiveness with less effort, minimising time wasted on low-yield activities.

Be true to yourself



47.8



3



Wellbeing

Heed the timeless advice inscribed over the temple of the Greek Delphic oracle: know thyself. Know your most and least productive times of day, and schedule accordingly. Know your biggest distractions (Facebook? Compulsive email checking? Chocolate buttons?) and control for them accordingly. Know your ideal working environment and try to create it wherever possible. Knowledge is power, and the more we have on ourselves, the easier we can create conditions for maximum productivity and success. Know your mood too. If you feel in the mood to write, go with that flow – you may write twice as quickly and three times as well.

Avoid visual distractions



47.8



3



Distractions

When you need to engage in deep work, the most likely distraction is a visual one. So hide the phone, turn off pop-up alerts, and put some headphones on to signal to colleagues that you're in your own zone. If there's something else in your field of vision that might grab your attention (like a clock or a permanent news channel on a big monitor), remove it or reposition yourself so it's not bothering you.

Sleep



47.8



3



Wellbeing

We all know sleep is holy, essential for the proper running of every bodily function. Sleep deprivation raises stress hormones, and wrecks your ability to concentrate, control impulses, emotionally regulate, retain information, and basically everything important for productivity, and functioning as a human being in general. Do your health as well as your work a favour, and get a proper night's sleep, every night

Run meetings well



47.8



4



Meetings

More often known as time-wasting, sleep-inducing group torture sessions, meetings are frequently badly run. It's a lose-lose and a waste of everyone's time. However, if run effectively, meetings can be a powerful tool for team motivation, morale and (you guessed it) productivity. Set a clear agenda for the meeting, and set goals at the end with clear assignments, so everyone knows what they need to do by the next meeting. You can also banish devices, send out important information in advance, be more selective about attendees, and merciless with timekeeping

Batch similar tasks

☆ 45.7 📊 3 ⏪ × Time management

Jumping from one disparate task to the next is inefficient and wastes precious brain juice as your mind scrambles to grasp each new task randomly thrown its way. Minimise this by batching together similar tasks, so your brain can more easily focus on something specific, and has less adjusting to do as you move from one thing to the next.

Fewer meetings

☆ 45.7 📊 3 ⏏ Meetings

While there's no denying the necessity for meetings, they are a frequent productivity drain. Minimise this by simply having fewer. This will free up time in your calendar for productive work, and force the meetings you DO hold to be more focussed and efficient.

Focus on outcomes



45.7



3



Goals

This is a little mind hack you can employ with yourself to laser-focus your efforts and keep you motivated when the going gets tough. Think about the end goal of what you are trying to achieve, rather than on the “how” and all the tasks along the way. That way you’ll get clarity on what you are really working for

Effective above efficient

☆ 45.7 📊 3 ⏪ × Time management

Before getting efficient, first prioritise effectiveness. Efficiency allows you to do something quickly and well, but effectiveness determines what you choose to do in the first place and how well you do it. It's no use being hyper efficient at a task that has little to no effectiveness when it comes to achieving your goals. Decide on what is effective first. And carrying out a dry/quick-&-dirty/rehearsal version of the task, be it a draft, a sketch or a prototype, will help immeasurably with the quality and effectiveness of your final output. No one gets it 100% right the first time.

Delegate

☆ 43.5 📊 2 ⏪ × Time management

Only do the work that only you can, and delegate the rest wherever possible. Try outsourcing to others who have the relevant skills and can do it faster and better than you. Trust your colleagues to do things, rather than micro-managing every task. This will empower them, and free you up to do what you do best.

Ignore the news

☆ 43.5 📊 2 ⏏ Distractions

Can you remember being more productive and encouraged at work as a result of something you saw in the news? News outlets make money largely from negativity, which is not only not going to help you, it's more likely to bring down your mood and negatively affect your ability to work. Save the time you would spend on consuming the news for productive work.

Change the scenery



43.5



2



Environment

Being slumped over a keyboard in the same artificial lighting for hours on end, day in and day out, is going to harm your productivity more than help it. If you can, get outside in nature for a refreshing break. There have been countless studies on the benefits of being out in nature. Even just looking out of the window can freshen you up, while also giving your eyes a necessary break. Failing that, simply looking at an image of a natural scene can have similar calming effects, and help you focus.

Long breaks



43.5



2



Wellbeing

While regular, short breaks are important to keep you fresh and focussed, don't skimp on taking a longer break during the day – typically the lunch hour. A longer break allows you to fully unwind, and to take a 30 minute walk around outside, or a 20-minute nap, and sit down and eat a proper meal away from your desk. These are all essential activities for overall health and wellbeing, which will spill over positively into your work.

Time yourself



43.5



2



Time management

There's nothing like a time limit to spur you on to get more done. Setting yourself time limits on your tasks, and then timing yourself while doing them, will inject a sense of urgency. Even if the deadline is entirely self-imposed and nobody else knows about it, it will still have the effect of urging you on. And shortcuts (worth learning, for programs like Excel, email, etc.) can save minutes each day, adding up to entire days saved over a career.

Be positive



43.5



2



Goals

There is a direct link between self-control and positivity. Think about it: are you more likely to cave in and eat an entire pack of cookies while wallowing in your feelings and procrastinating when you're feeling positive about life, or when you're sad and needing comfort? The more positive your mood, the easier it is to exercise self-control and focus on the tasks you need to complete. Do what you need to do to stay positive.

Follow up after meetings

☆ 43.5 📊 2 ⏪ × Meetings

After a meeting, having a clear list of actions which are assigned to specific people with set deadlines is essential to ensuring things move forward. It's worth having someone responsible for keeping track of and chasing these tasks, to ensure they get done before the next meeting

One small change

☆ 43.5 📊 2 ⏪ × Goals

A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. Even the biggest achievements are composed of hundreds of small actions. Incorporating small, incremental changes to your habits gives you a much higher chance of succeeding than a sudden, huge change that jars your system and is more likely to demotivate you sooner. Want to learn a new language? Learn just two new words per day. Over time, these small, painless changes, which took so little effort to get started, will build up, and it will get easier to increase the load over time.

Flow



43.5



2



Distractions

Getting into a state of “flow” means being completely absorbed in an activity: focussed, in control, and creative. Read: productive. While we have all experienced falling into a flow state at random and emerging, blinking, an hour later having blasted through a load of work, there are also ways of stimulating this state. Distractions are anathema to flow, so nix those first of all. Having specific rituals before beginning work can help, alongside ensuring you are invested in the work, and that the task is just challenging enough to stretch you without being too hard.

Drink water



41.3



1



Wellbeing

It hydrates your body and fuels your mind. So simple, yet something many of us fail to do. Being well hydrated promotes better focus, energy levels, and sleep. Aim for 8 cups a day. If you're forgetful, the iDrated app will monitor how hydrated your body is, keep track of the last time you had a drink of water, and tell you when you are due to drink again, allowing you to keep track of your daily water intake. No excuses now

Drink coffee responsibly



41.3



2



Wellbeing

Caffeine is a powerful stimulant that, when properly employed, can up our energy levels and productivity game significantly. Get too reliant, however, and it'll be as bad as any addiction, with lessened effect. Dose strategically between 09:30-11:30 AM and 1:30- 5:00 PM, when your body's cortisol levels drop, and you will most benefit from a boost.

Make a public commitment



41.3



2



Time management

Simply telling someone else about a task makes you more likely to do it. Once made public, a mix of pride, shame and sense of responsibility will keep you on track to fulfill a commitment more than a promise you've merely kept to yourself.

Acknowledge your success



41.3



2



Goals

While it's important to keep looking forward and barrelling toward your goals, it's equally important to take a moment and acknowledge the things you have already accomplished. Give yourself a little pat on the back! By recognising the fruits of your efforts, you will keep yourself motivated, which will in turn ensure you continue to achieve your goals.

Don't reread emails



41.3



3



Email

Incorporating a strict “one-time only” read policy on your emails will guarantee that you read with greater care and attention, and will retain the information better than if you skim read, then forget. You’ll reduce the chances of forgetting important messages, and of course save time by not re-reading emails or scrolling through your inbox.

Help others in meetings



41.3



3



Meetings

It's easy for meetings to get hijacked by the biggest and loudest personalities in the room, but showy doesn't always equal best. Do your part in encouraging all participants to contribute to the conversation, and you might uncover gold that will help everyone.

Be on time



41.3



2



Meetings

Start at the start. Be on time. According to a recent study by Bain & Company, a meeting that starts five minutes late will be eight percent less productive. When given a precise time limit for meeting objectives, people are more likely to work harder to accomplish them. Be clear on the amount of time you need to commute to your meeting and also be conservative in your calculation – allow an extra 15 minutes for delays.

Kill your darlings



41.3



3



Meetings

We all get irrationally attached to certain ideas or ways of doing things, either because we are used to them, because we came up with the idea ourselves, or because we simply like them (they're our "darlings"). But this can come at the cost of real productivity and progress, if the beloved method is actually not that great. Learn to see things more objectively in terms of their true effectiveness, and let go of what isn't serving your greater purpose, however painful that might sometimes be.

Work from home



39.1



1



Environment

Though this might not be for everyone, working from home can boost some people's productivity significantly. There are any number of reasons why this might be, but it's likely to do with the refreshing effect of having a change of scenery now and again. That, alongside skipping a stressful and draining commute, elimination of usual office distractions (noisy phone conversations, colleagues making chit-chat over your desk, etc.) and cutting out decisions such as what to wear to work or where to eat lunch, contributes to more focus available for getting good work done.

Productive procrastination

☆ 39.1 📊 2 ⏪ × Time management

Nobody's perfect. We all procrastinate sometimes. However, you can upgrade your procrastination time to make even that productive. Get non-work related tasks done while procrastinating: run errands, read or listen to a podcast to continually develop and expand your mind. That way, rather than feeling guilty and a little bit dirty, like you might if you spent that same time scrolling through social media, you can come out the other end of your procrastination time feeling like a more knowledgeable, or more organised person.

Your biological prime time

☆ 39.1 📊 3 ⏪ × Time management

For most people, we are most alert and productive within the first few hours of waking, typically 9-11am. You probably already have an idea of when your biological prime time is. Exploit this, and schedule in your most important work for these times, when you're performing at your best.

Be realistic



39.1



3



Goals

Perfectionism is enemy to productivity. In setting goals, we should choose ones that stretch us but that still reside in the realm of possibility. Having goals that are too lofty will demotivate us because we won't really believe we can achieve them (with reason), and can harm our progress. Instead, setting goals that are realistic will give us more incentive to pursue them, and allow us to enjoy the success of completing them.

Control social media

☆ 69.53 📊 3 ⬅️ × Wellbeing

Don't let them control you. We check our phones between 150-221 times a day, depending on which study you're reading. Even having your phone in sight, without touching it, has been shown to reduce performance in tests, according to a study at the University of Southern Maine. Clear your desk of distracting devices and see how much more you get done, with fewer distractions.

Set clear goals

☆ 39.1 📊 3 ⏏ Goals

Ensure that your goals are as clear as they can be. Setting vague goals deprives you of the focus you need to achieve them. Consult yourself. Consider why you want to achieve your goal. If your motivation is not solid, you are unlikely to stick with it. Also, get clear on how you will go about achieving it. Finally, ask yourself what the consequences are for not meeting your goals. Write these down and review them every so often.

Just start



39.1



1



Time management

Don't sit around and wait for great things to happen to you! Starting a task can be the most daunting part, and we end up wasting time procrastinating and worrying about what could go wrong. Often we just don't want to get going. The secret to getting started is ensuring you have broken your large, overwhelming tasks into small manageable chunks and then getting to work on the first one.

Devices in meetings



39.1



3



Meetings

We all know how distracting our electronic devices are at the best of times. Their allure can become all the more powerful during a snooze-worthy meeting, further lowering concentration levels and engagement, and putting off whoever is speaking. Pre-empt this by enforcing a ban on all devices during meetings.

Break bad habits



39.1



2



Time management

The overwhelming majority of things that prevent us from being productive are just a result of bad habits. We open Facebook and next thing we know half an hour has disappeared. We forget to eat well again so we're sluggish throughout the day. We don't schedule in tasks so we get lost and overwhelmed. Make the effort to break your bad habits, and you'll reap the benefits in the long run, with higher productivity and an improved quality of life in general.

Love your job



39.1



4



Goals

You're happier, more productive and more efficient when doing something you LOVE.

Sometimes you may struggle to love your job and its challenges, but having a positive attitude will help. Use your initiative to find the parts of your job you enjoy doing, and make those a bigger part of your role

Show compassion

☆ 39.1 📊 3 ⏪ × Goals

When you feel helpless...help someone else. In doing so, not only are you making the world a better place, you are empowering yourself and reinforcing your (perhaps weakened) self-belief.

Focus on the present



39.1



3



Distractions

Dwelling on the past never made anyone more productive. Mindfulness, the idea of being present in the moment, has helped countless people in all areas of their lives, and you can employ it at work to keep you on track. Focussing on the present can help with anxiety too, as that is essentially a fear of a negative future outcome.

Systemise



39.1



4



Time management

For faster, error-free work, set up a system so that you can't fail. Automation is the name of the game. It could be something as simple as enabling spell checks, spreadsheet checks, or automated email forwarding. Anything that takes the effort and decision-making out of small, everyday tasks will pay off in huge dividends over time.

Start and end on time



37



1



Meetings

Start and end on time - no exceptions. Simple rule, big results. Just knowing that there's no flexibility on this will change everyone's behaviour, allowing for maximum efficiency in the time allocated.

Get ergonomic



37



2



Time management

It's such a pain in the neck when you have... well, a literal pain in the neck. Sitting in an uncomfortable chair or using equipment that is not optimised for hours on end every day is going to have an effect on your health, physical comfort level, and ability to work well. There are all sorts of innovations in workspaces now, including standing desks and more ergonomic equipment. It is worthwhile investing (or getting your company to invest in) some of these, for the good of all.

Use your commute



37



1



Time management

Ahh the commute. The bane of every office worker's life. This is essentially dead time, but you can utilise this to get more things done. Rather than staring bleakly into someone's armpit on the crowded train, harness this time to learn, read, work, meditate. If you have a half-hour commute, that's an hour every day that can be spent on any of the above.

Unplug



37



3



Wellbeing

It is far too easy to get pulled into checking work emails at home, or even on the way home on your phone. This age of constant connectedness creates a pressure to always be productive, making unplugging a challenge. Ironically, unplugging is essential for optimal productivity. When you're away from work, over evenings and weekends, make the effort to fully unplug and give your attention to your family, loved ones, and leisure time. This is the only way to guarantee that you'll return to work replenished and ready to take on anything

Meeting roles



37



3



Meetings

To ensure your meetings are productive and not soporific, assign specific roles for participants, e.g. timekeeper, notetaker, chair. Active involvement will keep attendees engaged, and ensure maximum group output.

Do not do to-do lists

☆ 34.8 📊 2 ⏪ × Time management

If it isn't scheduled in, it isn't getting done. To-do lists are essential in that they clarify what needs doing (see tip #7), but they can make us feel like we're doing something useful when it's really little more than procrastination disguised as productivity. Worse, when we inevitably fail to cross off all the items on our list, they can leave us feeling discouraged and incompetent. Instead, timetable tasks that need doing, which will force you to get realistic about how long each item will take, and give you a structure in which to complete them.

10,000 hours



34.8



4



Goals

Malcolm Gladwell popularised the idea that it takes 10,000 hours of dedicated practise to master any skill. Following this principle should allow you to eliminate activities that you are not willing to devote this much time to. Think you want to learn to play the banjo? Willing to practise for 10,000 hours before you're any good? If not, drop it, and move on to your top priorities.

Find lost hours



34.8



4



Wellbeing

Reclaim time that would otherwise be lost to you. Standing in queues, travelling from place to place, sitting in a waiting room... these pockets of time all accumulate. Make use of them to get small things done, whether it's listening to an interesting podcast, reading a book, or brainstorming some new ideas.

Short- and long-term goals

☆ 34.8 📊 3 ⏏ Meetings

It's difficult enough trying to keep yourself motivated, let alone an entire group of people, like your team. Setting shared goals is a surefire way to have everyone aligned and working together. In doing so, set both long- and short-term goals. The long term goals are useful for giving you all a grand vision to work towards, while the short-term goals will help keep you encouraged and sustained along the way.

Visualise success



34.8



2



Goals

A technique used by athletes and successful entrepreneurs alike, visualisation is a powerful tool. Having a clear, compelling and inspiring vision for your goal will goad you into working harder and help you to imagine the steps required to get there.

Reward yourself

☆ 34.8 📊 1 ⏏ Goals

For this to work you need to ensure you do only reward yourself AFTER you have completed your task, NOT before. Hands off that chocolate bar! But giving yourself a further incentive to get your work done will only help. It's also worth keeping records of your completed tasks, which can often be reward enough in itself. This allows you to see the progress you've made, keeping up momentum.

Rituals



34.8



2



Goals

Do you brush your teeth every day? Hopefully the answer is “yes, of course!” It’s a ritual that was probably ingrained in you by your parents from a very young age. That is the power of a ritual – do something enough and it’ll become second nature. We don’t need to expound the benefits of brushing your teeth, but there are other rituals whose benefits might seem less obvious. For example, taking a minute to make your bed in the morning. That might seem uncorrelated to being more productive at work, but it sets you up on the right note for the day. Most high performers have rituals, and there’s a good reason: rituals help get you into a flow state, in which you can produce your best work.

Eric schmidt's "9 rules of email"

☆ 34.8 📊 4 ⏪ × Email

Eric Schmidt, software developer and business powerhouse, created 9 rules for email. Here are his top 5 - See if any of these make you more efficient with your inbox: 1. Respond quickly. 2. When writing an email, every word matters, and useless prose doesn't. Be crisp in your delivery. 3. Clean out your inbox constantly. 4. Handle email in LIFO (last in, first out) order. 5. Ask yourself, "What should I have forwarded, but didn't?" ... Maybe you could find the rest out for yourself!

Be flexible



34.8



2



Environment

Transpose popular project management methodology onto your own personal management. Being “agile” is a desired trait for any business, so why not try to be agile yourself? The popular SCRUM agile framework sets a number of tasks in service of a larger goal, which are completed in sprints of a week or so. Try applying that to your own work.

Log all your ideas



34.8



3



Admin

You never know when a random idea that has no application now might be a game changer later on. Keep a log of all your ideas in a place where you can easily go back and find and add to them, whether that's a dedicated notebook, or a file on your computer. Over time this may become an inspiring source of innovation. At the very least it will make a fascinating collection to look back over.

Take control when you can



34.8



3



Goals

Many of these tips are about exercising greater control – over yourself, or your schedule, or your environment. It is important to have control where you can, as chaos and feeling out of control are not conducive to productive work. However, it is also vital to accept when things are not in your control, and concentrate on the things that are.

Make work fun again

☆ 34.8 📊 2 ⏪ × Time management

Probably the number one motivator for any activity is the amount of fun we have doing it. Injecting fun into even the most thankless of tasks will help keep you productive over time. It's all about how you frame activities in your mind. You can see them as boring, or you can gamify them. Like in a game, set yourself challenges or even invent narratives to amuse yourself (the bomb will detonate if I do not finish this report by midday – best to keep these in your mind though!) Or set up a bit of friendly competition with your colleagues to keep everyone extra motivated. Whatever adds some excitement to your work.

Natural light



34.8



1



Environment

Who doesn't love a bit of sunshine? The health benefits of sun exposure include vitamin D, better moods and improved sleep. All these will help keep you at your productive best. If you can, try to work by a window, where you will be exposed to natural light.

Learn to touch type properly



34.8



3



Admin

Think about how much time you spend typing. Learning to touch type could, over a fairly short period of time, save you hours. You can also save your neck the endless looking up and down from the keyboard to the screen, promoting better posture.

Listen actively

☆ 69.53 📊 2 ⏮ × Meetings

Active listening: a perpetually underrated superpower. We may take for granted that we listen and are listened to over the course of a conversation, but you'd be surprised how little we actually retain: research suggests that its only 25 - 50% of the things that we hear. Active listening ensures that you are fully focused on the speaker and therefore properly taking in what they are saying, rather than half-listening to the buzzing in your own head. Not only will it improve your productivity, it will also improve your relationships – you can't go wrong!

Zero inbox

☆ 34.8 📊 2 ✖ Email

“Zero” doesn’t refer to the number of emails in your inbox, but the amount of time your mind is in your inbox. Productivity expert Merlin Mann developed the Inbox Zero technique to prevent your inbox becoming a to-do list. Choose one of five actions for each email: delete, delegate, respond, defer and do. He also advocates not leaving your inbox open and only checking email at certain set times of the day. Here’s Merlin talking about it.<https://youtu.be/z9UjeTMb3Yk>.

Voicemail



32.6



1



Distractions

In a world of endless pings and text messages, answering a ringing phone can feel like a more “legitimate” reason to allow yourself to be interrupted. But technology also granted us another way: voicemail. Don’t feel obliged to answer phone calls if you are deep in an important task. Let voicemail be your friend.

Templates



32.6



2



Email

No need to reinvent the wheel with every new message. Speed up your outgoing email by using templates if you frequently send out emails that are similar in structure.

Hard stuff first

☆ 32.6 📊 3 ⏪ × Admin

Wherever you can (while allowing for deadlines), prioritise the hardest tasks. It might be the opposite of what you want to do – it's so satisfying powering through all the easy and enjoyable tasks to give us a false sense of accomplishment. But by chipping away at the hard and unpleasant ones first, you'll get a greater sense of satisfaction in the long term and boost your spirits and self-confidence. This also leaves the nice things to do at the end of the day when your energy levels are probably lagging, and the last thing you want to do is face a horrible task.

Close open loops in your head



32.6



4



Wellbeing

Open loops are tasks that need doing but have no deadline, plan or decision in place. They can be professional or personal (a unpleasant task from your manager, an awkward conversation you need to have with a friend). They are unresolved, open-ended issues that drain your energy, cause anxiety and ultimately detract from your productivity. Close these open loops by writing them all down, and putting a plan in place.

Waiting-on list

☆ 32.6 📊 1 ⏪ × Admin

The waiting-on list is for those tasks that are important to you but that someone else must do. Keep a log of such tasks as soon as you've delegated them, or if someone has volunteered to do it. This technique is further strengthened if you log the dates that the task was assigned and its agreed deadline. Avoid creating more admin for yourself by being picky about what is on your waiting-on list (not more than a dozen). A lighter version is to tag all actions for others with 'WO' so it is logged, and you can circle back and chase up periodically

Deprioritise the non-essential

☆ 30.4 📊 2 ⏪ × Email

Sounds pretty obvious, but non-essential emails need to drop down the list of priorities, if not fall off it entirely.

Reply by...

☆ 30.4 📊 3 ⏪ × Email

Email can derail even those with the best of intentions, because every time a new one pings in, our instinct is to want to open and respond. However, not all emails are made equal, and many do not require an immediate response. Try making a folder for emails and assign those emails a day by which you will reply to them. That way, you free yourself of the burden of feeling like you need to reply straight away, but you've also set yourself a deadline to respond

Control your inbox

☆ 30.4 📊 4 ✖ Email

Control your inbox, don't let your inbox control you. It is all too easy to let the constant incoming flood of our inbox dictate how we spend our time. Take back control by turning off email notifications, allocating set times in which you deal with email (and don't go near it outside of those times) and organising your email using folders, or tags – whatever works for you.

Wear a uniform



30.4



2



Distractions

Unless your job requires you to wear an actual uniform, deciding what to wear to work will take time out of your morning routine every day. Though the gravity of this decision depends on how fashion-conscious you are, every decision we make throughout the day drains a little bit more of our cognitive energy, and will eventually lead to decision fatigue. Avoid this by assigning yourself a work uniform. Steve Jobs was famous for his polo neck and jeans combo, and many other successful business people do the same. If you wear the same thing every day, that's one less decision you have to make, preserving energy for the many others you will need to make at work.

Set deadlines

☆ 30.4 📊 1 ⏪ × Admin

Set deadlines for everything, even small things. When delegating, if others don't know how urgent a task is they can't know how to prioritise it, and so they won't. This applies whether you're communicating with someone who works for you, your boss or your boss's boss. It's a matter of clarity. Just make sure that when setting deadlines for others you do so in a polite manner!

Assign a 'task deputy'



26.1



2



Environment

Much as we can try to control ourselves, there's nothing like being held accountable by someone else to keep us on task. Try assigning a task deputy, such as a colleague or a friend. As long as it is someone whom you can trust to hold you mercilessly to account when you procrastinate or do not fulfill commitments.

Password manager

☆ 26.1 📊 2 ⏏ Admin

We're drowning in passwords these days, and often pointlessly waste time retrieving forgotten or lost passwords. Try using a password manager like Dashlane, which will generate secure passwords for you and allow you to quickly, easily and safely access all your accounts, pain-free.

Schedule “stress” time.

☆ 17.4 📊 2 ⏪ × Time management

While some stress at work now and then is expected, excessive amounts will interfere with your performance, and impact negatively on physical and emotional health. While we cannot completely avoid stress, we can stay in control. To protect yourself and improve job satisfaction and overall well-being, schedule breaks into your calendar by time blocking. Take a few minutes of quiet time for yourself before you start work. Schedule an exact amount of time each week and treat it like an appointment that you can't cancel. When you write it down and plan for it, you're less likely to skip it.

Five goals



13



2



Goals

Warren Buffett would have you eliminate all your goals except for the top 5. That's it – just your 5 most important goals. This exercise forces you to get clear on what really matters, and direct all your energies toward those things. It sounds scary, but is also oddly freeing

Convert emails to to-dos



13



3



Email

To avoid getting derailed from your carefully pre-planned list of scheduled tasks, put emails that need actioning on tomorrow's to-do list. That way you can keep to your original plan of action, while still responding to emails in a timely manner.

Old-school alarm clocks



13



1



Time management

The last thing you want to do as soon as you wake up is to start idly scrolling through your smartphone. But you risk doing this if you rely on its alarm clock to wake you up first thing in the morning. Instead, try using an old-school alarm clock that does just one thing: wake you up.

Chewing gum



8.7



1



Wellbeing

Chewing gum is an alternative to coffee, which you shouldn't overdo if you want to avoid the jitters and disturbed sleep patterns. Chewing gum has been shown to help you concentrate and retain information, as well as keeping you awake!