

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR WORK PRODUCTIVITY AND GET THINGS DONE!

# **WORK SMARTER NOT HARDER**

**2.0**



**28 ADDITIONAL TIPS THAT BOOST  
YOUR WORK DAY PERFORMANCE**

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## **How to Read This Book**

There is not a particular way to read this book. You can either start from the beginning or pick your chapters randomly.

The more important thing is to actually implement the advice in your everyday life. Only that way will you learn which ideas work for you and which one don't.

But in order to avoid the overwhelm, pick just one or two strategies first, to see how well they work for you. Once you have implemented (or abandoned) the techniques, pick some new ones to see how they work.

Keep this book available if you want to refresh your memory or pick up some new tips to improve your work day performance.

## **Who is This Book For?**

This book is mainly geared towards office workers (both at home or in a cubicle).

While the tips are mainly geared towards those who have a day job, all the advice can be applied to home offices, too.

Even if you don't work in those particular environments, you can still pick up some valuable tips to improve your everyday performance.

## Introduction

I wrote the first version of this book, *Work Smarter Not Harder*, back in 2015. It was originally based on the presentations that I gave on couple of company training events back in 2014.

I noticed that the first version of the book had a great demand in the marketplace (more specifically on Amazon Top-100 Free Downloads in time management category, where it was in the top3), and I decided that the book needed a sequel. And what you are reading right now is the version 2.0 of this book.

Like in the version 1.0 of *Work Smarter Not Harder*, in this book I wanted to collect some real-world tips that I personally use and which I have tested myself.

You don't have to implement all these tips at once. Heck, you don't have to implement any of these tips at all, if you think they don't make sense to you! However, I believe that picking one or two of them and then shaping it or them to what looks like your own solution will work wonders.

I hope that this book gives you some fresh ideas for how to make your daily work more productive, organized and fun, all while working in an office environment.

## 1. Write Things Down

I have to admit that I'm not always that great at remembering things. Especially if there is a big concept to grasp, relying just on my memory to remember everything will not work.

It takes a lot experience and practice to master something. But especially in the earlier stages of learning, when you are exposed to new terminologies or concepts, there is one simple technique to make learning and remembering much easier.

This technique, combined with a low-tech solution, works perfectly, even in the fast-paced digital world: writing things down with a pen and paper. Although I use digital devices for note taking as well, I think that the pen/paper approach beats these newer ways because of its simplicity.

Then again, if you prefer using a digital device for note taking, that's fine, too. All you have to do is to keep at least some kind of note-taking device with you where ever you go, because you'll never know when you need it.

The note taking habit is a timeless one, and you can use it whether there is a new concept to master—like it's your new colleague's name you are trying to remember—or virtually any piece of information you'll have to return to later on.

If you decided to use the pen and paper approach, quite soon you may be thinking: "Great, I have all these notes; how can I make them easily available, without having a fear of losing them?"

The question is fair. I also have dealt with this issue on a frequent basis. The answer, on the other hand, is pretty straightforward: turn those notes into electronic ones, especially if you want to save them for later use.

I personally either rewrite the notes in Google Docs and save them to my Google Drive account, so that I can access them later with my phone or with my computer. Or, I might just take a picture of the note (for instance, if it's a mind map) and upload it as is to my Google Drive account.

Take a pen and paper (or another note taking device), and use it as much as necessary. For instance, even if no one else takes notes in a meeting, you can be the exception to this rule.

This ensures that you are more likely to remember things or more easily grasp a new concept, because you took the effort to write down some notes.

**Action Steps:**

- Write down notes any time you need to remember something later on.
- Take a pen and paper (or any other note-taking device) with you in every meeting you go to.
- Turn the important notes into electronic ones, by rewriting them or shooting a picture of them.
- Store the notes in the cloud, for instance on Google Drive or in EverNote.
- Whatever you do during your work day, keep a note taking device easily available.



## 2. Track Your (Deep Work) Hours

In his great book *Deep Work*, Cal Newport talked about two types of work: the shallow work and the Deep Work.

The shallow work is busywork like processing emails, and other related tasks, that make us *look* productive, but which isn't necessarily the case.

On the other hand, there is the most important work that moves your career (and even your life) forward. It's the type of work, when practiced on a regular basis, that gives you the competitive advantage of mastering something and rising above the average performers. In essence, that's what Deep Work is all about.

To understand how you spend your days and how much Deep Work there is in it, you have to ask these two important questions:

- How did you spend your day?
- How many hours of which task did you focus on during the work day?
- How many hours of your work were focused on the Deep Work?

If you don't know the answers to those three questions, your workday becomes like a big black hole, where every task just disappears.

To fix this, you should have some sort of tracking in place to see how you spent your work days. This can be done in a form of a Deep Work log. This log is nothing but a simple spreadsheet, where you write down some basic information of the things you did:

- Today's date
- How many hours total you had available for Deep Work
- How much Deep Work you did
- The actual tasks you worked on
- Weekly Insights (once per week)
- Total number of Deep Work hours in a week

	Date	Available Time	Deep Work	Other notes			
				<b>Weekly insights: Doing pretty well with the book writing process; currently</b>			
Sunday	08.01.2017	2	-	No working today.			
Saturday	07.01.2017	-	-	No working today.			
Friday	06.01.2017	2	0.5	Editing and proofreading Work Smarter 2.0			
Thursday	05.01.2017	2	2	Editing and proofreading Work Smarter 2.0			
Wednesday	04.01.2017	2	2	Editing and proofreading Work Smarter 2.0			
Tuesday	03.01.2017	2	2	Editing and proofreading Work Smarter 2.0			
Monday	02.01.2017	2	2	Wrote Work Smarter 2.0: Approximately 1161 words. Started editing the book as i			
				<b>Totals: 8.5 hours of Deep Work</b>			

When you look at your Deep Work log, the results can be pretty eye-opening.

For starters, if you are really honest about your time usage (and you really should, because otherwise there is no point of logging these things), you'll start to see how your days were spent.

Once you know how much time you spent on important work during the day, you can start improving your conditions, especially if this figure is low. There are two ways to do this.

First, take a look at your daily log entry and try to understand which conditions lead to this particular number of hours of Deep Work.

For instance, perhaps there were plenty of interruptions, so you weren't able to handle your work as usual. In this case, find out if there are any ways you could prevent these interruptions happening in the future.

Also take note of those days when you got plenty of Deep Work done. Perhaps you could replicate the settings for this kind of a day again tomorrow?

Second, take a look at all the entries at the end of the week and gain some insights on what you should continue doing and what you should stop doing the next week. Then write these findings to your Weekly Insights column.

For instance, I noticed that I become super-productive when I work while commuting (I go to work by bus), so this is definitely something I'll continue doing in the future, too.

The enemy of the Deep Work is the shallow work. Unfortunately we just can't erase it completely, so we should try to minimize it as much as possible. This could happen by scheduling your email checking times and keep to that boundary, or by working remotely from home, if possible.

The more time you spend on doing the Deep Work, more likely you'll start seeing satisfactory results, either in your career, in your personal life, or both. And to spend more time on Deep Work, you should know first know how you spend your days. That's why the daily tracking is so important.

### **Action Steps:**

- Create a simple spreadsheet to track your Deep Work hours.
- Update the spreadsheet every day to see how much Deep Work you did during the day.
- In the spreadsheet, include things like the date, how many hours you worked, how many total hours you had available for Deep Work and what tasks you did.

- Analyze the log entries every day and at the end of the week to see how you can improve your work next week.

### **3. Write an Operating Document**

Create a paper-based document where you write down all the important things related to your new job. This tip is especially for those who have just started (or are about to start) a new job. It also works great when you start doing something new inside the company you currently work for.

What happens in the first few days in a new job is that you are most likely confused with a lot of information coming your way. There are a lot of new names to remember, what the company's general policies are or how the healthcare is arranged.

In order to deal with the information overload, create an operating document, which can act as a help and a reference when you need to remember something important. It's almost like your own personal work manual.

An operating document is a place where you write down every important piece of information that you might need later on. You can also type it out and move it to a cloud-based storage, to keep it easily accessible and to always have a back-up.

At the time of writing this, it's my third week in a new job and the operating document was the document I started writing on the first day. It has helped me to learn about the new environment faster and it acts as a handy reference if I happen to forget something.

#### **Action Steps:**

- Create a paper-based document where you write down all the important things related to your new job, if you have a new position inside the current company or start working in a new project.
- If necessary, type out and then move this document to cloud to keep it easily accessible and as a back-up. You could also take a picture of the document with your phone's camera, and then move that image into cloud.
- Refer back to the document to remember co-workers' names, company policies or other important things you should remember.

## 4. Show Your Skills

Quite often we are too modest when it comes to our skills and experiences. But when you speak up or show your expertise in the right place, you might find yourself in front of very exciting opportunities within the company you work for.

For instance, if you have developed or designed websites in your personal life and you bring this up in a casual conversation with your colleagues or your boss, you might be assigned a task of designing the next company website.

Or perhaps you like speaking in front of the crowd (yes, there are actually people who love to do that). You are then asked to make a presentation in the next meeting, related to a topic you are familiar with.

In my previous job, the HR department found out that I had a blog. I was then asked to write a blog post for a Finnish economic newspaper. I happily accepted this opportunity, since I love blogging and writing.

Another example comes from a job interview I had couple of years ago. As we talked about what topics I was experienced with, my passion towards time management came up.

As a result, the interviewees started to plan some internal training for their employees related to this very area. Also, a blogging opportunity came up because of my blogging experience.

Even if I wouldn't have gotten the job, listing my various experiences on the CV and speaking about them in the interview brought up some pretty exciting opportunities that I hadn't realized.

The key takeaway is that opening your mouth in the right place and talking about your experiences, hobbies or other skills could bring up some nice change to your regular work assignments. This, in turn, could increase your motivation towards what you do.

### Action Steps:

- Talk about your hobbies or other experiences with your boss or your colleagues; you may never know what new exciting opportunities might come up.
- If you are applying for a job, list out all of your special experiences. This can give you the advantage over other applicants.

## 5. Take Advantage of Commuting Times

For the first time in my close to 20 years in the IT industry, I recently started to commute to work, since my job is approximately 45 kilometers (approximately 28 miles) away from my home.

This is a big change for me, since my earlier jobs were located so close to my homes, I didn't have to use a motor-based vehicle to get to work.

When I got the current job, my initial plan was to get there by car. This seemed like a convenient solution, at least for couple of days. But quite soon I fed up with driving and I wanted to see if there were any alternative ways to get to work.

I was happy to find out that it was actually possible to commute to work by bus, and that opened a completely new opportunity for me: I could do writing work (books and blog posts) while commuting.

Thanks to this opportunity, you are now reading the version 2.0 of *Work Smarter Not Harder*; this chapter was initially written in a bus and I'm also editing this very same sentence on a bus, too.

Before I decided to switch over to a bus, I listed all the potential benefits this option would give me:

- I can focus on writing approximately two hours every day.
- I save a lot of money on a monthly basis when it comes to car-related costs.
- It's easier for the rest of the family; our car is available for my wife, since she takes our son to day care.
- Riding a bus is more climate-friendly than using my own car.
- I don't have the stress of dealing with traffic as a driver.

To be honest, there were downsides to commuting, too:

- Less time to spend with family (it takes more time to get back home, and I have to leave earlier to work). For instance, no more mutual breakfasts from Monday till Friday.
- Earlier wake-ups which means that I should get to bed earlier, too. This gives less time for me and my wife to stay up in the evening.

Fortunately some adjustments in my daily schedule and a talk with my wife solved these issues.

The reason I love commuting by bus so much is because I can do something productive while doing it. Besides writing, you could also do the following:

- Reading
- Sleeping
- Educating yourself (video courses, audio books, etc)

One final thing that should be mentioned about commuting is how to properly prepare yourself for it.

For instance, I try to make sure I know exactly what I'm going to do during the commute, like what chapters I'm writing next. This way I don't waste time pondering what to do, and I can get to work as soon as I sit down on the bench of a bus.

If the suitable commuting option is available to you and the benefits of it outweigh the cons, consider switching to this new option, rather than using your car.

### **Action Steps:**

- Find out if you can switch from commuting in your car to an alternative method of transportation.
- Know exactly how you are going to spend your commuting time.
- Maximize the time you spend during the commute by preparing for it in advance, such as the night before.

## 6. Maximize Your Evening and Morning Rituals

Waking up either on the right foot or on the wrong foot can definitely affect how your day will turn out. If you are unfortunate enough to get up some day on the latter one, the unhappier and less productive you are going to be.

I'm willing to say that a well-planned morning and evening rituals can help you considerably to finish your days strong, and also have an effective start to your mornings. I'm not saying they eliminate the "wrong foot effect" completely, but they sure reduce the probability for it.

When we talk about rituals, here is the breakdown for both of them:

- **Evening Ritual**

Can you believe that you actually start your next day the *evening before*!

Here is the deal: the last things you do before going to bed will affect hugely how your next morning starts and how effective it is. The role of the evening ritual is preparative. In other words, with the steps you take during the last awoken hours of the day help you get up easier the next morning. That's why I like to put the emphasis on this ritual first, because it makes its morning counterpart much more effortless.

In my case, during my evening ritual, I prepare for every single thing I will do in the morning, to make my next morning as easy as possible. More specifically:

- I pack my back bag with a laptop, some healthy snacks and other items I might need during the day.
- I put all the utensils ready on the kitchen table: the spoon, the plate or my favorite bag of granola. This way I don't waste time finding them in the morning.
- I put the coffee filter to the coffee maker, so that I have one thing less to do the next morning.
- I put all my clothes ready on the kitchen chair: shoes, jacket, pants... I dress up in the kitchen, since it causes the least amount of disturbance for the rest of the family.
- I have all the vitamin jars available on the kitchen table, so that I don't forget to take them. Also, my watch and my wedding ring are also on the side of the kitchen table, so that they are easy to find.
- I ensure my phone, my wallet, key to office and other necessary keys are in the pockets of my jacket.
- I have things like shaving machine or my deodorant available on the counter in the bathroom (this way they are easily available after waking up).



When you read the previous list, you may be wondering if all this is necessary. My answer is: yes.

Since I have approximately 45 minutes to dress, shave, brush my teeth, get the morning paper (and read it), eat breakfast, drink a cup of coffee, and actually do all this without feeling like I am in a hurry, doing all the steps the night before is necessary.

It takes only 5-10 minutes to do all the preparation steps of the evening ritual. By investing this small amount of time in the evening, it makes my mornings much more relaxed.

- **Morning Ritual**

I already talked a great deal about my evening ritual and the steps I take during the mornings. Here is how the actual morning ritual looks:

1. Wake-up at 6 am
2. Dress up, brush my teeth, shave (6:01 am).
3. Go to the mailbox to grab the newspaper (6:10 am).
4. Make some breakfast, read the newspaper, drink a cup of coffee (6:15 am – 6:40 am).
5. Put the outdoor gear on, grab my backpack and head out the door (6:45 am).
6. Go to the garage, grab my bike, ride to the bus stop (6:50 am).
7. Walk to the bus stop, hop on to it (7:05 am).
8. Commute to work (7:05 am – 7:55 am) while focusing on writing.
9. Walk from the bus stop to office (7:55 am – 08:00 am).

My morning ritual wasn't always like this; it has changed over the years. Since my previous job was in my hometown, I had more time to exercise before I hit the office. Back then, the "commuting" took only 5 minutes and I did it by bicycle.

## **Creating Your Own Rituals**

In order to plan an effective morning ritual, you'll have to start with the time you should be at work. Then, start by counting backwards from this very time, so that you can include all the necessary steps that take you to the office as smoothly as possible.

For instance, let's say that you want to incorporate some exercise into your morning ritual before you get to work. You also know that you should be at office at 08:30 am the latest.

In order to have a workout at the gym and be at the office at 8:30 am (without feeling hurried), be realistic about your exercise time.

For instance, the exercise time could be 1 hour and 15 minutes, if you included *all* the steps, starting from getting to gym, changing into your exercise gear, showering, dressing up again and getting from the gym to your office.

You also happen to know that it takes approximately one hour to get up, eat breakfast and head out the door. This means that you should get up at 6:15 am at the latest, if you want to do all and be at work at 8:30 am.

Based on the morning wake-up time (6:15 am), you know that you should get at least 7.5 hours of sleep to feel refreshed when waking up. To ensure that you get at least that much of sleep, you go to bed at 10 pm. (In this example I'm assuming it takes 15-minutes to fall into sleep.)

### **Put Your Rituals to the Test**

There is one final thing regarding rituals that either makes them or breaks them—that's putting them through a test. No matter how well a ritual may look like on paper, only testing it in practice shows whether it's doable or not.

Be merciful towards yourself the first time you execute a new ritual. Like doing anything for the first time, this is always the most time-consuming one.

Most likely, after the first test round, you'll see if the ritual works for you or not. At the very least, expect to make some adjustments to it to make it a better fit for you.

### **Action Steps:**

- Plan an evening and a morning ritual. These rituals help you to finish your day strong and start your mornings effectively.
- Figure out ways to shave off minutes of your rituals, especially from the morning one. To do this, do all the necessary preparation steps the night before.
- Don't make your rituals too tight, especially the one you execute in the morning. Have fewer steps in it, so that your mornings become more relaxed.
- Keep on fine tuning the rituals to make them even more effective.

## **7. Set the Expectations Right**

Expectations play a huge role on how enjoyable your daily work can be. For this reason, you should pay close attention to them.

Here are a couple of examples of expectations and how they may affect to your performance:

- **Job Interview**

The very first set of expectations you set are in your job interview. The impression you give to your future boss and possibly to your co-workers plays a big part in how you are going to feel at work (if you happen to get the job).

For instance, you are very likely being asked about your past work experiences and what type of person you are. Answering to these questions honestly lays a good foundation to your future success at work.

However, if you said something during the interview that wasn't actually true and the interviewees believed you, you'd find yourself in a tricky situation later on.

For instance, if you claimed that you had a certain skill and good expertise on something, but you actually didn't, you would have some explaining to do. In addition, you would feel helpless in your job, because you wouldn't have the necessary skills to do it properly.

- **Delivering Your Work on Time**

If you work for yourself, you are pretty much free to set the schedules you like. However, if you work for someone else, you don't necessarily have the freedom to do this.

Still, if you have to estimate about how long something would take to be accomplished, be realistic about what you promise. So rather than telling someone that a task takes an hour to do, when in reality it actually takes five, share this information upfront, so that everyone is aware of this.

This way, even if the task takes less than five hours, it would be easier to focus on the work.

- **You are Not on Vacation When Working from Home**

If you work remotely from home and you have a family, make sure that everyone is on the same page as you about why you are working from home and what you can

and can't do. This helps to clear the confusion about whether you should be available for doing household work or running errands.

Let everyone know that you are working at home like you would in an office, that you shouldn't be asked to do things that are not related to your work, or that you shouldn't be disturbed, if not absolutely necessary. Perhaps set definite hours so family members know to talk to you after a certain time.

- **Be Honest with Yourself**

The last point about expectations is also very important. The same way you set expectations towards others, you should also set expectations towards yourself, and actually meet them.

For instance, when you work on your tasks, set the expectation that you actually work on those tasks, rather than surf online. Or if you are in a meeting, set the expectation of focusing on the meeting, rather than playing with your smartphone.

Setting the expectations is sometimes difficult, because it means that you have to be honest towards others, or towards yourself. Yet, keeping them is a sure sign of a professional.

**Action Steps:**

- Make sure to be honest about what you can do and what not; this keeps everyone on the same page and makes your work more enjoyable.
- When working from home, let family members know that you can't do non-work-related things during the workday.
- Hold yourself accountable by setting the right expectations towards yourself, too.

## **8. Preparation is the Key to Success**

Whether it's a job interview, a meeting, starting a new project or any other assignment you could be faced in your work, there is one thing you can do to make things more successful for you: preparation.

For instance, if it's participating to a client meeting, you can attend to it either prepared or unprepared. Guess which option shows the professionalism to your client?

Or if it's speaking in a seminar that your company is arranging, you can try to improvise your speech in front of the audience, or plan and rehearse your talk couple of times before the event. Guess which option gives the more confident and professional outlook of you?

Naturally, the type of preparation depends on the task you are about to do. But at the very least you should know the following:

- What the assignment is all about?
- What are the expectations towards you?
- Should something be ready in advance (before the actual event)?
- In the case of meeting, when does it start and do you have to travel to the meeting place?
- If you have to do business traveling, how can you make sure the traveling experience is as smooth as possible?

This is just a very rough outline of the preparation steps you could take. But like mentioned, the total amount of work or steps depends on the matter that you'll have to deal with.

### **Action Steps:**

- Learn more about the coming assignment and what it's all about.
- Related to your event, go through the potential scenarios in advance to mentally prepare for them.

## 9. Turn off Electronics Early Enough

This tip is related to sleep, and even if it may seem quite simplistic, it's definitely worth pointing out.

Once you fall into sleep too late, you'll most likely get up the next morning tired. The lack of sleep can then have a direct impact on your productivity at work.

For instance, my wife and I used to watch TV late in the evening. Sometimes, even if the program wasn't that good, we would stay awake and keep watching it. This delayed our bed-going time, which caused me to get too little sleep, especially if I had to wake up early the next morning.

The content that you consume through electronic devices is not the only reason you are staying up late. There is, however, another reason why your sleep time is delayed. Blue light radiates from those devices (TV, computers, smartphones, tablets.). Research has shown that the blue light messes up your melatonin production, your body's own mechanism for making you feel sleepy in the evening.

In the case of blue light, there are special kinds of glasses that you can wear when watching the screens. Or when it comes to computers and smartphones, there is also an app called F.Lux, which is said to eliminate the harmful blue light.

However, the most effective strategy of dealing with blue light is by turning off the TV or going offline early enough before the bedtime (a few hours before going to bed). This way you ensure that the blue light won't disturb your ability to fall to sleep and get plenty of sleep.

In our case, as soon as we stopped watching TV in the evening, it reflected in our bed-going times immediately. So rather than watching TV, we have now more time for reading. This beats the bad TV experience anytime.

In addition, we actually get to bed at least one hour earlier than before. This has had a big impact on our well-being the next day.

### Action Steps:

- Turn off the electronics one to two hours before going to bed.
- If you have to use computer, tablet or smartphone late in the evening, install F.lux to block the blue light.

## 10. Switch Your Workspace Based on the Task

Most likely we do majority of the work by sitting in a same location the whole day. There are times, however, when you should consider changing your work location based on the task you are doing.

There are two main benefits of doing so.

First, you don't interrupt others and you make their days are more productive because of their improved focus. Second, you get to do your work more productively, because the nature of the task requires you to do it elsewhere, rather than in your own workspace.

Here are couple of examples of work done on different locations and the reasons for doing so:

- **Meetings/Meeting Rooms**

For quite a few people, the workspace switching already happens in the form of meetings; you go to a dedicated room to hold your meeting in order to have some privacy and without interrupting the co-workers sitting next to you. This helps everyone focus on just the items in the meeting agenda and not other work-related issues.

- **Coffee Shop/Public Library/Commuting**

Certain tasks require laser-sharp focus and sometimes this type of state can be found on surprising places.

For instance, I have worked in various locations outside the office and gotten plenty of work done. As I already mentioned, my absolute favorite place for working is when riding a bus to work.

However, it's worth noticing that if you decide to do work outside the office, you should pay attention to the data security and confidentiality factors. For instance, having a confidential phone call in a public place where everyone can hear you is naturally out of the question.

So instead of having phone calls when commuting using the public transportation, I have noticed that writing-related tasks are the greatest fit to this very location (in this case, you should use your own judgment, too, whether it's ok that other people can actually see what you are writing about, or not).

- **Working Remotely from Home**

This is my favorite type of working, since I have the luxury of fully focusing on the task at hand, without being exposed to noise that exists in cubicle environments.

Even better, if you can work in a separate room at home, you can even close the door while working. This way, if other family members are at home, they are more likely to understand that you shouldn't be interrupted.

Thanks to good and secure data connections, you can pretty much do all the tasks from home that you could in an office. But especially if you need some extra layer of focus, working from home is a great option to have.

These were just some examples of locations where you can do your work. But before you switch locations, do it because it potentially increases your productivity. Also, if you decide to switch work locations outside office, it's a good practice to talk with your boss about it first and have a mutual agreement on it.

### **Action Steps:**

- Make an inventory of the types of task you have.
- List various locations where you could potentially do those tasks to perform them to the best of your ability.
- Talk with your boss and with your co-workers if you decide you want to do work outside the office.



## **11. Walk Away from the Task – and Then Come Back**

This scenario is very familiar to us: you started working on a task and at some point you got stuck. No matter how hard you tried, you weren't able to make any progress on it.

There is, however, potentially a very simple solution to solve this matter: walk away and then come back.

The thing is, quite often we do work without any breaks because we think that doing so will make us more effective. But this isn't necessarily the case.

Sometimes by just stopping what you are doing and doing something completely different can actually help you to get unstuck. Even if you stop, your brain keeps working on the solution on the background. Then, all of a sudden, you get an idea that didn't cross your mind before, and you can move on with your work.

If you are able to do so, spend a little time walking or some other form of exercise. It helps you focus on something else, which can allow your mind to solve the problem.

### **Action Steps:**

- After getting stuck on a task, make sure to take some distance from it.
- Start doing something else, even if the main problem stays unsolved. Your brains keep still processing the information on the background.
- Exercise is also a great way to speed up the problem solving process in your brain.

## **12. Keep Others Updated of the Status of Long-Running Tasks**

You just assigned a task to your colleague, Jim. But after one week has passed, you haven't heard anything back from him. You may think that perhaps he has forgotten the task or he hasn't even started it in the first place.

Once you then check out the status from Jim, you notice that he is actually working on the assignment, but he hasn't finished it yet. You feel satisfied that the task is being worked on.

This type of scenario is very common, but it's far from ideal. What most likely happens in this scenario is that wrong expectations are set, since others are not on the same page with the assignment's status.

As the person fulfilling the task, you can easily prevent these wrong expectations from occurring by keeping other people consistently up-to-date with the latest developments of the assignment. This way they know that the work is in progress and you haven't forgotten it. If you are the person who assigned the task, make sure to check on the status of the assignment at regular intervals.

### **Action Steps:**

- If the task seems to be a long-running one, keep others updated about its progress.
- Be proactive about checking on the status of the assignment; if you haven't heard anything back from the person, don't hesitate to about ask the status of the task.

### 13. Have a Status Meeting Every Day

Every now and then, you might run into issues that prevent you from making progress on your project. On the other hand, your co-worker, who is working on the same project but who is located in a different city, has already solved the issue you are struggling with.

One of the reasons a project might stall is because of a lack of communication. One way to fix this problem is to have a short 15-minute status meeting on a daily basis.

This type of meeting is also known as a Scrum meeting. It's common in the software development industry, but it can be implemented elsewhere, too.

The idea of a Scrum meeting is simple. Within the 15-minute timeframe, the Scrum Master (who is the chairman of the meeting) asks everyone participating in the meeting the following questions:

- What did you do yesterday?
- What are you planning to do today?
- Have you run into any issues in your work?

There are three benefits to asking these questions.

First, everyone, whether it's the project manager or other team members, knows exactly what others are currently doing. This keeps everyone on the map where the project is headed.

The second and a very important purpose of these questions is to bring any potential issues into the attention of others so they can be addressed more efficiently.

For instance, in a case of software development, it could be that a certain functionality of code that is not working properly. When the other team members know about this issue, they can give their input to solve the problem.

Third, this type of meeting is great for accountability, too. Since everyone has to tell what he/she did yesterday or what are the plans for today, it forces you to actually take action and move forward with the tasks you (or your boss/colleagues/project manager) have set for yourself.

The purpose of the Scrum meeting is not necessarily to solve the problems during the meeting, but to give valuable ideas and feedback on how to proceed. This way the project is not necessarily stuck anymore and it will more likely meet its deadline.

Since the length of this type of meeting is short, it should be easily arranged for every day, for instance at the beginning of the work day.

**Action Steps:**

- Have a status meeting of 15 minutes every day.
- Whoever acts as the chairman of the meeting asks these following questions:  
What you did yesterday, what are you going to do today and are there any issues you are currently struggling with?
- Arrange this meeting on a daily basis, for instance at the beginning of the work day.

## 14. Keep Perfection at Bay

I know that this piece of advice can be difficult to some, especially to those who consider themselves perfectionists. Yet, I wanted to include it in this book, since it's definitely one of the ways to work smarter.

Also, let me be honest: this piece of advice doesn't work in every profession and you should analyze your own situation first before applying this tip in practice.

If you have a demanding job which requires precision and carefulness (a surgeon, an airline pilot), this information may not apply to you. But in general, there is a lot of work where you can ditch the perfection, at least on some parts of the work.

For instance, if you are a software developer, at first you might have a rough working version of the software, just to make it work. Then, when you finally ship the software, you clean up the code and make sure it meets the quality standards of your client.

Very often you can also release something to the world, even if it's not perfect.

For instance, if it's a written piece of content, just make sure the first version gets done as quickly as possible, so that you can get it out of your hands. And then, once the first version of the creation is ready, you then keep fixing and improving it later on.

I'm not suggesting that you should be sloppy in your work. Instead, what I mean is that quite often, we want something to be done perfectly until it leaves our hands. (Think of an author, who spends years of putting finishing touches to his book before publishing it.)

Too often, perfection is a showstopper for a project and a source for procrastination. In fact, I believe that there is a paradox when it comes to the word "perfection" itself.

The fact is, even if you think that a piece of work is perfect today, you'll most likely find something to fix in it the next day.

I also think that whatever results you are getting are always going to be perfect. This is because the results you get are always the best they can be, with a given skills, knowledge and the attitude you have at the moment.

### Action Steps:

- Sometimes you can move forward with your projects without trying to do everything perfectly. This applies especially to projects or work that is not critical in nature.

- To beat the perfection, create a checklist for the minimum requirements of a task. When all the requirements on the list are met, move on to other tasks.

## 15. Create Healthy Habits Almost by an Accident

It may sound a bit odd to hear this, but your daily office work can actually help you with creating healthy habits. In order to form these new habits, three requirements have to be met.

First, the habit should be linked to something else—something that you already do during your work day. Second, the “habit” should remind itself on a frequent basis. Third, it should be easily executable.

For instance, you may already know that every now and then you should take breaks during your work day and actually get up from your chair.

So when you stand up, link this particular activity to a new healthy habit. In my case, at a certain time of the day, I get up, grab the apple on my desk, go to the office kitchen and wash the fruit before eating it. I then eat it as my afternoon snack.

Or, every day when I start my work day, I grab the water bottle that is on my desk, I go to the office kitchen and fill it up with water. Since the bottle is visible on the desk, I’ll actually sip water from it during the day.

As you can see from these examples, three key factors are present: they are linked to an activity I already do (getting up from the chair), the habit “reminds” itself (apple sits on the desk where I can see it → go wash it and eat it) and it’s easy to execute (I can grab the water bottle just by reaching my arm).

But how do you make sure you have the apple or other healthy snacks with you when you come to work? By integrating that one little step to your evening ritual. For instance, when I pack my back bag in the evening, I also put an apple into it with the rest of the stuff I need the next day.

It’s easy to integrate these small, healthy habits into your day. Just make sure all three requirements mentioned earlier are met, and you are good to go.

### Action Steps:

- Put a water bottle on your desk and sip from it during the day.
- Take healthy fruits with you to work and eat them as snacks.
- Get up from your chair from time to time.
- If you have a standing desk, work in a standing position.

## 16. Waiting Time Can Be Productive, Too

There are situations when waiting time is inevitable. No matter how well you plan your day, there still can be unexpected moments when you have to wait for something until you can continue with your work.

For instance, when you are working on your computer, your system might tell you to install immediately certain security fixes. However, it turns out that this installation process is going to take at least 20 minutes, so you have to find something else to do.

You can wait until the computer finishes the installation routine, but naturally this is just wasting your and your employer's time. Rather than doing this, you could decide to take your lunch break, since that's a reasonable thing to do at that very moment.

Because the waiting time can occur unexpectedly, I try to have some backup tasks available until I can return back to my daily plan.

For instance, in addition to taking a lunch break, you could also do these things while waiting for something to complete:

- Educate yourself with material that improves your skills as a professional.
- Document the steps you took when you did a certain task for the first time.
- Process your emails.
- Take a (coffee) break.
- Eat a healthy snack.
- Declutter and organize your workspace.

These are just a few examples of the things you could do while waiting for something to complete. They help you to take advantage of those moments when you are unable to follow your original plan.

### **Action Steps:**

- Create a list of backup tasks you could do while you can't work on your main task.



## **17. Don't Let the Clutter Escalate**

You have this one piece of paper sitting on your desk and you promise yourself to process it the next day.

The next day comes and some additional papers get dropped onto your desk; perhaps it was the report your co-worker brought to you or some other papers you just printed out. Once again, you make a promise to process all these documents the next day, when you have more time to do that.

But here lies the problem—if you keep postponing the paper processing, your desk is eventually going to be cluttered with documents. Also, the likelihood of missing a particular document increases, since your desk soon looks like a mess.

This very same cluttering effect happens not only with physical documents, but with files on your computer, too. Paying attention to both of these clutter types, either physical or digital, is crucial if you want to keep yourself organized and on top of things.

### **Two Principles of Accumulating Clutter**

When it comes to a cluttered desk, there are two principles that attract more clutter to your desk.

First, there is procrastination, which makes you to delay processing the documents at the end of the day. Second, since you don't have a system to deal with incoming material, it's easier to leave it as is, rather than process it.

### **Benefits of Decluttering**

Before you actually start decluttering your workspace, ask yourself this: Why you are doing it and what are you getting out of it? Because once you truly understand the benefits that decluttering can bring to you, it's much easier to get started with it in the first place.

For instance, I want to have a decluttered environment, because it helps me to find the things I need easier. Also, I feel a sense of relief after I have decluttered my belongings, almost like a rock has been lifted off my shoulders.

### **Two Approaches to Handling Clutter**

You have two ways to deal with clutter: either in increments, or all at once. Both of these solutions have their benefits.

If you decide to deal it with increments, you don't necessarily have to overload yourself with too much to do at once. On the other hand, it takes more time to finish the decluttering project, since you are making less progress at a time.

The at-once approach helps you to deal with all the clutter in one big project, but you'll also have to dedicate a bigger block of time for this type of approach. However, you could find it quite overwhelming to deal with all the clutter in one go, especially if it has accumulated to your desk and drawers over the years.

For a lot of people, the incremental approach works better. You could, for instance, schedule a time block of 15 minutes on a daily basis to go through all the material that's stored in your workspace. If you keep at this activity for few days, you will start seeing visible results in the form of a tidier desk or a better-organized drawer.

## **Dealing with Physical Clutter**

Here are the rough guidelines for dealing with clutter:

1. Decide whether you want to do it all at once or in increments.
2. Pick a time for your decluttering efforts. If you choose an incremental approach, this could be at the end of the work day.
3. Go through all your documents and other items and decide whether:
  - a) You should trash\* the item
  - b) You should recycle the item
  - c) Give it to your colleague for further use
4. The items that are left after decluttering, especially the ones you use most frequently, should be put in a location where they are easy to reach.
5. Pick a home for every document, CD, DVD or any other item you use.
6. Implement a habit of putting the used items back where they belong, after the work day is over.
7. Once your workspace is decluttered, spend a maximum of 5 minutes every day, just before leaving home from work, to clean up your desk. This way the clutter won't accumulate on your desk anymore.
8. Every month, go through your drawers and office cabinets to see which items can be trashed or given away to someone else in your office. Then, re-organize the items that are left by putting them they belong.

*\* One thing to pay attention to, especially when decluttering digital things like DVD or other media, is the data security. It's not so uncommon to hear that confidential company documents or other items ended up in a trash bin outside the office building, where the outsiders were able to pick them up. Make sure to dispose properly.*

*Pay close attention especially to computers, smartphones, tablets or other items with hard discs. Make sure to have a conversation with your boss or with the IT*

*department first, about how to properly erase them from all the data, before getting rid of them.*

## **Dealing with Digital Clutter**

Physical clutter isn't just the only type of clutter that exists. In an office space, you also have to deal with digital clutter, too.

Even though digital clutter is in many ways hidden from your eyes, it still needs to be processed in order to make your work day smoother.

Here are a couple of instances where digital clutter can emerge and how to deal with it effectively.

### **Tab 0**

Some years ago, a new type of web browsing became possible, thanks to the development of web browsers. The type of browsing became also known as tabbed browsing. So instead of opening a new browser window for each new web address (URL), you could keep just one browser window open and load multiple open tabs in it, each tab presenting a different URL.

Although the browsing experience was improved this way, it also introduced a big problem: a cluttered browser. Not only was the browser more difficult to use, it could also slow down your browsing experience considerably, sometimes even crashing your browser.

I used to love tabbed browsing a lot. But once my browser started to have close to 20 open tabs, I realized that this type of user experience wasn't something I wanted.

That's when I decided to follow the same kind of approach that I do with my email on a daily basis. When it comes to my email inbox, I try to keep it clean most of the time. And this was exactly what I wanted to experience with my browser, too. That's when I came up with the term Tab 0.

This principle is very simple. At the end of the day, I try to close every open tab, with a very simple process:

## 1. Close Unused Tabs

If the tab isn't used anymore, I just close it, so that it doesn't consume the memory of your computer.

## 2. Find Purpose of Remaining Tabs

For the rest of the tabs I ask myself these questions:

- Am I doing further research related to the topic on the open tab?
- Did I find the content interesting, but don't have time to consume it further yet?
- Am I following an online course?

Once I identified and justified the reason for the open tab, I would process them further with two tools: a list and a schedule. When you use these two tools, either separately or together, managing open tabs becomes easier, and you can close them at the end of the day.

For instance, I might have a tab open for a book that I'm interested in buying from Amazon. But rather than keeping it open infinitely, I add the book to my Amazon Wish List, and then close the tab.

The Amazon case is an example of a list only approach. The only purpose for doing this is to store the information of the tab on somewhere else. Since in this case the content on the open tab wasn't that critical, adding it to an external list was sufficient enough.

However, if I want to make sure I take action on the contents of a tab, I use a list and a scheduling approach together. In this case, not only is the content of a tab stored somewhere else, but I also make sure that a task gets scheduled for taking action later on.

For instance, if I'm following an online training, I add a note of it to a task list (Todoist), with a date when I want to continue studying it again.

I also add a URL of the training course to the description field of the task (this field may or may not exist in the task list tool you are using) and also at which point of a lecture I stopped studying it.

This way the contents of a tab become actionable and I can close the tab, rather than keep it open.

## Dealing with Files

Another very common location for digital clutter is in your storage space.

Although the file storage has moved more and more towards the cloud, the clutter issue stays the same: it's as easy to fill up the cloud storage space as it is to clutter the local hard drive of your computer. Yet, the organizing principles stay the same in both environments.

In this portion of the chapter, I will talk about how I make my cloud storage space more organized, namely how I deal with my projects folder (my most important one) and its contents.





### 1. Get rid of all the items you don't need.

As with its physical counterpart, the first step in clearing the clutter is to recognize the things you don't need anymore and then get rid of them.





Go through each and every file (the ones you have created) in your system and ask yourself: Do I need this file anymore? If the answer is no, delete the file, otherwise keep it.

### 2. Create a central place for your projects.

I have stored all my projects in a single location on the cloud. The name of this location is Projects and it contains all the projects that I'm currently working on, I have finished or which are in a pending state.

 * Kindle Books ★	me	Dec 29, 2014 me
 * ProductiveSuperdad.com ★	me	Jan 2, 2015 me
 Old Projects	me	Dec 18, 2016 me
 Pending Projects	me	Dec 29, 2014 me

The naming of each sub-folder under Projects varies. However, the only exception is the Resources folder, which always stays with the same name, regardless of the project. This is where I keep all the resource files that are related to the project and which I might need at some point.

Name ↑	Owner	Last modified
 Currently Working On	me	Dec 19, 2016 me
 Kindle Book Ideas and Schedule	me	Dec 17, 2016 me
 Resources	me	Apr 21, 2016 me
 Written	me	Dec 17, 2016 me

### 3. Use a standard naming convention.

I try to have simple, yet descriptive names for my files, so that I don't have to second guess what in them when I look at them.

For instance, a file called tk289.pdf doesn't necessarily tell you anything, even if it's placed in an appropriate folder. However, if you rename this file to be *Sales\_Report\_Aug\_2016.pdf*, it becomes much clearer what the file is all about.

Once you have found a naming standard for your files, stick to it. So rather than having files of same content named differently, try to have them named in a consistent manner, like *Sales\_Report\_Sep\_2016.pdf* or *Sales\_Report\_Oct\_2016.pdf*

### 4. Make a backup of the files you are unsure of.

When I start organizing my files and I enter a location or a file which I don't necessarily know anything about, I take an extra step before I decide how to proceed. This extra step is creating a new folder to temporarily store these files that need further investigation.

Let's say I had some files in my Projects folder which didn't make sense to me. Also, I wasn't sure whether I should keep the files or delete them.

Until I have figured out what these files are all about, I create a folder called Old, where I would copy all the necessary files. Once I have gone through all the files in this folder, I either move them to appropriate locations or delete them.

### 5. Clean your hard drive.

You can do this process in two ways.

First, take a closer look at your computer and all the installed applications. I bet that you can find software which consumes too much hard drive space on your computer. If the program serves no purpose to you, uninstall it from your system.

However, make sure to backup the files you have created with the software first before executing an uninstalling operation. This ensures you don't lose your working files. Always remove the software from your computer through an uninstaller. This way nothing extra gets deleted and your computer can continue operating as usual.

Second, run your computer through a program which will clean it from unnecessary files or registry entries\*. The unfortunate fact is that even though you uninstall applications through the application's own uninstaller, some files are still left hanging on your system.

To find out more about cleaning programs, check out the great list of tools for PC. For Mac, you can use a tool like Hazel.

*\* The tip for cleaning your computer applies especially to Windows machines. If you want to learn how to improve the performance of your Mac, check out this article by The Safe Mac or the one by LifeHacker.*

## **6. Desktop 0 and quick-launch programs.**

We have already covered decluttering and organizing your files, cleaning your browser and your computer. However, the clutter madness doesn't stop there.

There is another, quite visible place where the clutter can emerge and which can potentially slow down your computer. This place is your computer's desktop. Especially if it's full of icons, it can slow down your computer (on Mac). And even if slowing down is not an issue, your desktop still looks cluttered.

A simple way to clean your computer's desktop is to create a something called sorting bins, which are special folders related to your work.

In some cases, you can also create special areas on your desktop that make accessing your programs easier by grouping related icons together. One way to create these areas is by using software called Fences for PC. An alternative for Mac is Desktop Groups. Please note that I haven't tried either one of the applications myself.

If you want to create these areas, but without spending any money on an application, you can always create folders on your desktop and then put all the related icons in that very folder.

Also, you can start the programs or find the files on your computer the easier way by using a special application for this.

For instance, with Mac, you have the option to use Alfred, which is a tool for quick-launching apps or accessing folders, either on your computer or on the cloud. There

are plenty of alternatives to Alfred on PC, but I haven't tested any of the PC versions myself.

## **7. Follow the same principles as with physical clutter.**

Digital clutter should be treated the same way as physical clutter. Also, the principles are the same as when dealing with the physical clutter:

- 1) Pick a time for your digital decluttering efforts.
- 2) Decide whether you want to declutter and organize all at once, or in increments (for instance 15 minutes every day).
- 3) Go through all your documents and other items and decide whether you should:
  - delete the item
  - keep the item
- 4) Pick a home for every file that is left after decluttering.
- 5) Once you have decluttered and organized your computer and files, spend a couple of minutes every day to move the files to right locations or deleting them, if necessary. This way, the clutter won't accumulate and it's easier to keep your computer organized.

### **Action Steps:**

- Clean the clutter, either by at once or bit by bit.
- After decluttering your items, put the items that are left to a dedicated location.
- Put frequently used items in a location where they can be easily accessible.
- After the work day is over, put all documents or other items back where they belong. This shouldn't take more than 10 minutes maximum.
- Once you have cleaned the clutter, whether it is physical or digital, schedule frequent maintenance sessions (like once per month), where you go through your work files and documents. Then, re-declutter or re-organize them if necessary.



## **18. Have a Personal Knowledge Base**

Whatever type of work you do, certain issues might come up over and over again. Having proper documentation on those issues, especially how to solve them, makes all the difference the next time the same matter comes up.

For instance, one of the applications I was using was giving me an error message and prevented me to continue working. This wasn't the first time this particular error message showed-up, yet I couldn't figure out the solution to this issue.

Then, hours after an investigation, the solution came up. This issue, with it's solution, was added to my personal Knowledge Base (KB) file. Later, this same error message came up again. But this time, I had the solution available, thanks to my personal KB.

You should have this kind of knowledge base, too. It's nothing more than a document, which lists all the issues you have had and their solutions. With this file, you can more quickly and easily solve the same issue, if it comes up in the future.

### **Action Steps:**

- Create a personal Knowledge Base file, where you store all the issues you had in the past, and their solutions.

## 19. Create a Starting and Finishing Routine for Your Day

I have already talked about rituals in Chapter 6. However, this topic is worth discussing again, especially how to integrate rituals into your work day.

Every morning I get to the office, I start my day with same steps:

- 1) I go to my work space, take my outdoor gear off and start my computer.
- 2) I go to the office kitchen and fill up the water bottle with fresh water.
- 3) I take a sip of the water from the bottle.
- 4) I grab a cup of coffee in the kitchen.
- 5) I put the apple and other healthy snacks on my desk, next to the water bottle.
- 6) I sit down and open my task list.

When the workday ends, I make sure I:

- 1) Clean my inbox and extract all the tasks inside the email messages (or from notes) to my task list (Todoist).
- 2) If necessary, I take a “snapshot” of what I was doing, so that it’s easier for me to continue working the next day. This snapshot is nothing more than a brief description of what I was doing when the day ended.
- 3) I clean my desk from all the unnecessary papers.
- 4) I clean my coffee mug.
- 5) I close my computer.
- 6) I put my outdoor gear on and head out of the office door.

It takes approximately 5 minutes each to run these routines and they ensure that I can start and finish my workday as effectively as possible.

These routines also keep me more organized, healthy and productive. They are very simple and quick to do, every day. And since the level of entry of doing them is very small, I don’t feel tempted to procrastinate or skip them.

### Action Steps:

- Create a start up routine for the day to start your work day effectively.
- Create a finishing routine to keep your workspace organized and also to make sure the next day starts as effectively as possible.

## **20. Try to Find an Eliminator Task in a Group of Similar Tasks**

Let's say you open your task list and you notice that your project manager has assigned ten new tasks to it. At first you feel overwhelmed, since you haven't been able to finish even the previous tasks he assigned to you.

You look at these tasks and at first they all seem to be unrelated to each other. However, when you inspect and analyze the tasks a bit closer, you see that there is a common denominator amongst them.

Once you realize that fixing one of the cases will also solve the rest of them, you feel a sense of relief. You are able to clear the tasks on your list more quickly than you anticipated.

### **Action Steps:**

- Try to find if your unsolved tasks share the same characteristics with each other.
- Find out if solving this one particular task can help solving the other tasks, too, or at least make them easier to solve.

## 21. Ask: What Can I Do to Improve the Productivity for Others?

Especially in a team environment, productivity isn't just about your performance. It's also about how the team performs and how well a project moves forward.

When you are productive and get the right things done, you are a valuable player to the company and to the project you are working for. But you should also ensure that other people in your project or team can also become more productive, since this greatly benefits the whole project.

Here are few ways to help make the team or project perform better:

- Let the others to focus on their tasks with as little interruption as possible. One way to do this is to have your calls in a separate room. For instance, if I have to deal with something which is not work-related, I make sure to find an empty meeting room for the call.
- Don't keep information just to yourself. If you have information that could benefit others, make sure to share it. For instance, you could write a document about something important and then let others know about it. This way the information is not just in your head and others can keep working, if you are absent.
- Internet-based meetings are nowadays a very common way to share ideas and talk about the ongoing projects. But even if they are effective because you don't have to travel physically to a meeting location, they can also interrupt the focus of your co-workers, especially if they are held at your own workspace. Because of this, make sure to book a meeting room for these meetings as well, so that you create as little interruption as possible.
- If your co-worker needs some help, offer him/her your helping hand. I'm very grateful for the support I have received in the past from my colleagues, and I'm sure to give my help back to those who need it.  
There is also another potential benefit to offering help to others: When you are in a situation where you might need a helping hand, you are more likely to get it from the person who you helped you earlier.
- Share your skills and other knowledge with others. For instance, you may have a faster and better way of doing something than your co-worker. For the improved efficiency, share this knowledge with him/her, to help the person to perform better in his/her work.

### Action Steps:

- Be considerate towards others when at the office; For instance, take your calls in a meeting room.
- Share your knowledge with your co-workers to help them to become better and faster at what they do.

- Offer your help to others when they need it, even if they don't explicitly ask for it.

## 22. Use a Standing Desk

Sitting is one of the most dangerous things you could do for your health. Many studies have shown that this activity can harm to your body in the long term. For instance, sitting has been linked to things like obesity, diabetes or even cancer.

What's really an eye opener is the fact that even consistent exercising won't necessary help you to prevent the potential negative side-effects that are caused by sitting. Although exercising greatly benefits us, it's not enough and you need to do some additional things to prevent the disadvantages of sitting.

Enter standing desks. As the name implies, it's a desk where you do work while standing. When compared to regular desks, the standing ones seem to have plenty of benefits, all from lowering the risk of heart disease, to helping with back pain.

Although standing desks seem to have plenty of benefits, one should start his/her "standing desk journey" with small steps. So rather than trying to work in a standing position all day, you should start out with shorter sessions in the beginning. This way you body gets used to the new way of working.

For instance, one strategy would be to start with just 20 minutes of standing per day, to get used to the new working position.

Also, consider purchasing a standing mat to ease the stress that is pointed towards your hips and knees.

Finally, invest in a desk which makes switching between sitting and standing desk position as easy as possible. This feature is available in electronic standing desks, where adjusting the height of the table can be done by just pressing a button.

As with the regular desks, the ergonomics of a standing desk is important, too. This means that the monitor should be 15-30 inches from your eyes, and your forearms should be parallel to the ground while working.

Working in a standing position might take a bit of time to get used to. Then again, you'll avoid the many disadvantages that extensive sitting can bring on the long term.

### Action Steps:

- Consider purchasing a standing desk in order to reduce the amount of sitting you do.
- If you have enough in the budget for the desk, invest into an electronic one, since it's height is much easier adjustable.
- Consider buying a standing mat, too.

- Start working in a standing position gradually to get your body used to the new working position.

## **23. Know When You Are Working and When You Are Not**

After you sign out from the office at 5 pm (or at 4 pm like I do), you start your free time, which lasts until you get back to the office again.

Your personal time should be used to recharge your batteries and spend time with your loved ones, helping you to start your next work day as energized as possible.

Quite a few people continue working outside the official office hours, whether at the office or at home. This is understandable as there are times when you'll just have to finish a project or a certain task before a deadline. However, these times should be just rare exceptions.

In order to have enough personal recharging time, here is something that I want you to do: decide on your working hours and stick to them. Know exactly when you are working and when not.

For instance, you could decide that when the clock hits 4 pm, you just close your computer and forget work for the rest of the day. Especially if you have started your work day at 8 am, this eight-hour working block is more than enough for one day. (Remember, no matter how many extra hours you put in, there is still work left for the next day.)

Limiting your hours is especially important when you work remotely from home. In this scenario, it's very easy to continue working longer as usual, since there isn't any physical separation between work and home.

So when the clock hits a specified time of the day, make an agreement with yourself to start focusing exclusively on your hobbies, your family or anything else except your work.

### **Action Steps:**

- Define a time of the day when you will stop working.
- Then, turn off your computer and focus on your personal activities instead.



## 24. Buy Some Free Time with Your Salary

How you spend your free time after work makes all the difference to your recovery and how energized you are the next day you go to work again.

For this very reason, try to be strategic with how you spend your salary. Especially try to invest to things that make your personal life easier, more fun and more productive, while reducing the amount of time spent on mundane things.

Here are certain examples that you can use your salary for:

- **Hire a Cleaner**

I don't know about you, but I don't like cleaning my home. Although I'll try to do it with my family, it's not something I'm passionate about.

To keep your home clean on a consistent basis, hire a professional cleaner to take clean your home. This way it becomes more enjoyable and you can spend the time spent on cleaning somewhere.

- **Better Work Equipment**

Maybe you have a home office where you work remotely. Or maybe you run a side-business in your free time. If either one of the points apply to you, ask yourself these questions:

- Are all of the necessary office equipment easy-to-use and up-to-date?
- Is your office chair old and broken?
- Are you doing your work with a tiny monitor?

If any of these statements are true, you'll most likely need to invest to newer equipment to make your life easier. It doesn't mean that you should buy all the latest gadgets the money can buy, just the ones that improve your productivity and make your work environment more comfortable.

- **Outsource Car Maintenance**

One of the most dreaded things I had to do in the past was changing the tires of my car. In my country, it's mandatory to do this twice per year because of the different seasons (and because the law says so).

Because it's icy and snowy during the winter months (from November till the end of March), it's mandatory to drive with a car which has studs on the tires

(or alternatively, use friction tires). From April till the end of October, we drive with regular tires.

After getting fed up with changing tires, I decided to outsource this activity to professionals. This takes approximately 15 minutes and I can watch them working on my car while I sip a cup of coffee. Besides, the tires are now stored at the tire shop, so they don't take storage space off my garage anymore, either.

- **Outsource Lawn Mowing or Other Yard Care**

Do you live in a house? Do you have a big yard? If you do, then taking care of the lawn is one of the things that you'll have to take care of.

If you don't like doing this kind of work for yourself, why not just outsource it to professionals? When you do that, you can then free up the time for something else which you value more.

- **Outsource Shopping**

If you happen to live in an area where shopping groceries online is possible, why not switching over to this activity instead? This is yet another time-consuming activity, which just has to be done on your free time, no matter what.

Although the grocery prices are most likely higher when you shop online (especially if the groceries are delivered to your front door), it still saves you the hassle of wandering from aisle to another in huge supermarket and then waiting on your turn in line to get to the cashier.

These were just some examples of how you can improve your free time productivity with the salary you get. When you invest your money to these kinds of activities, you have more time to do things that you truly love.

For instance, if you love painting or writing and the time outside the office hours is limited, do whatever necessary to maximize the available time for your hobby. I don't know about you, but I'd rather spend time with my family or with my hobbies than trying to do everything by myself.

Besides, spending money on things that improve your life's quality will also improve the local economy too, since you are giving work to others, and this keeps up the demand for various services.

**Action Steps:**

- If possible, invest at least part of your salary outsourcing mundane free time tasks. Alternatively, you could also invest into newer equipment or technology to make certain tasks easier for you.
- Put the freed-up time into good use by focusing on things that you truly like doing.

## 25. Let Others Know When They Can Interrupt You

When working in a cubicle, it's very common that someone comes to you and interrupts you while you are in the middle of something.

Sometimes, especially if you are stuck in a difficult task or the task is otherwise boring, you might find this interruption as a welcome break to your work.

However, when you are doing something important which requires your full focus, interruptions are far from OK. In fact, it may take some time until you get back to the focus zone again.

Here are some ways to limit other people's access to you when you work:

### 1. Electronic Channels

Doing focused work starts with you turning all the electronics or applications off. This includes your phone, instant messaging, social media, Slack notifications, your email client or any other apps that might interrupt you.

When you take this first step, you can protect yourself from interruptions coming in from the outside.

### 2. Co-workers

What can you do, if you don't have a dedicated work room, nor you can escape to your home to work remotely from there? The answer is to use some visual cues to let others know that you shouldn't be interrupted.

The more explicit the cue is, the more effective it is. Here are a couple of ways to keep your co-workers away when you don't want to be disturbed:

- **Traffic Light on Your Desk**

Years ago, it was very common to see "traffic lights" in offices or government buildings across the country.

The idea was simple: in order for someone to enter the room, you watched for a traffic light next to the office door. When the light eventually turned from red to green, you were allowed to enter the room.

Unfortunately, this type of system doesn't exist anymore because of open plan offices, but it is possible to simulate the traffic light system in a modern office environment.

For instance, Luxafor is manufacturing a light which you can hook onto your laptop and which indicates whether you are available for a chat or not.

- **Put a Note on Your Desk**

This solution is much more lightweight and you can do it at an instant. All you have to do is create a note and place it on your desk, telling others that you shouldn't be disturbed at this very moment. Perhaps put a time when you will be ready to talk.

- **Close the Door**

Perhaps you have the luxury of having your own room. With a subtle act of closing the door, you can send a message to others that you are trying to focus on something and shouldn't be disturbed. Place a sign on the door or doorknob if need be.

- **Put On Headphones**

Another simple way to send a message to others that you are working on something important is to put your headphones on, sometimes even without listening to anything.

I did this at my former job. Even if I wasn't listening to music, people left me alone, because they thought I was coding or I was in an online meeting.

If you still find it difficult to do work in a focused manner, try speaking to your boss about the issue. Perhaps there is a solution you can mutually agree on.

### **Action Steps:**

- Be clear about when you shouldn't be interrupted.
- Take care both of the electronic and co-worker-related interruptions to guarantee your maximum focus.
- If none of the tips above seem to help you, talk to your boss about the situation.

## 26. Know Which Types of Tasks to Work on and When

Not all tasks are created equal. As I already mentioned in chapter 2, Cal Newport, the author of *Deep Work*, talked about the differences between Deep Work and shallow work.

In this case, the former type of work is the most important one, something you should try to focus on as much as possible. The latter means doing things which aren't necessary to improving your core skills or moving you forward in your career.

Even if doing Deep Work is important, this is not enough. To make the Deep Work time even more productive, you should also pay attention to the most optimum time you should be doing it.

In order to find your peak hours, do the following: track your energy for couple of days to see if any patterns emerge. In other words, are you energized in the morning, but hit a slump after the lunch (like majority of people)? Or do you really get the ball running in the afternoon?

Because when you know your personal peak performance hours, you should naturally allocate as much Deep Work to these hours as possible. Then, for the rest of the hours of the work day, spend time on secondary tasks like checking your email or attending meetings.

### Action Steps:

- Track your energy levels to see when you are most energized during the day and when not.
- Spend the majority of your peak performance hours focusing on Deep Work tasks. Then, try to do the shallow work tasks outside of the these high performance hours.

## 27. Semi-Delay Your Email Checking

Very common advice to manage your email messages is to avoid opening your email client when you first start your work day. This way you don't get caught up with the requirements of others, and you can get started with the most important work right away. Then, later in the day, you can open your inbox for the first time and start processing your messages.

This type of approach has both benefits and downsides to it.

When you postpone your email checking, indeed, you get to focus on your work better, since you are keeping at least a portion of the distractions away. For instance, if you are about to finish a report this morning, opening your email client won't necessary help you to accomplish your task.

On the other hand, delaying email checking can also waste your time. This was something that happened to me earlier.

Some years ago I was on a vacation for a week. When I got back to work, I didn't open my email first thing in the morning. Instead, I continued working on a task which I started before the vacation.

Unfortunately this was something I shouldn't have done, since the task was cancelled by my project manager during my vacation. Had I checked my email as first thing in the morning, I would have known this and I wouldn't have wasted hours of my time on this assignment.

Also, it's important to understand that majority of your clients and co-workers open their email first thing in the morning. Because of this behavior, other people might wonder why you aren't get back to them soon enough.

So what's the proper way of dealing with email, then? Delayed checking can definitely improve your productivity, but on the other hand, you may miss some important information regarding your tasks.

In my case, I have decided to open the email sometime during the morning (aka semi-delayed checking). At least, I make sure that I get up to speed with my work first, until I check my inboxes.

However, there are three exceptions to this rule.

First, and as already discussed, if I'm getting back to work from vacation, I open my email as soon as I get to office, to catch up with the latest information regarding my work.

Second, if I happen to have a meeting, I always check to see if there are any last minute changes to the original schedule. For instance, there have been occasions when an online meeting was delayed or cancelled. And thanks to checking my email before the event, I was informed about this early enough.

Third, perhaps you are expecting an email message from your customer or from your co-worker and this piece of information gives you more instructions regarding the task you are working on.

If you continue with this particular task the next morning but you also need to have the updated information before you can continue, opening your inbox, to see whether this important email has arrived, is justified.

But other than those exceptions, the “semi-delayed” strategy might work well for you. In my case, I normally open my email client sometime around 10 a.m. By that time, I can get a lot completed, but still check my email early enough to respond to others.

The final piece of advice is related to training your co-workers or other people who are using the email as usual. In order to set the expectations right, let them know how you deal with email and how often you check your inbox. You can also set up an automatic reply to your email, stating explicitly when you go through your emails and what’s the earliest moment they can expect to have a reply from you.

### **Action Steps:**

- Semi-delay email checking a bit, until you make some progress with your tasks first.
- Let others know about your email processing times.
- Define the exceptions when you actually check your emails as first thing in the morning.



## 28. Feel Grateful for What You are Doing

This final tip can make all the difference to your work productivity. It's more of a mindset, but if you master it, then it will improve your satisfaction towards what you do for living.

As we all know, there are both good jobs and bad jobs. But how you perceive a job and whether it's either one of those types depends solely on your attitude towards the work.

Especially if you don't like your job that much, you might have motivational issues towards what you do and this will reflect as poor performance in your work. But this attitude can be changed when you involve some gratitude in your work day.

For instance, I worked as a web developer in my previous job and there were times when I didn't like it.

Then my wife said something that helped me to reframe the whole situation. She told me that that thanks to the job, I had a chance to educate myself with all the online courses and books that I was buying online. I never looked at things that way, but it definitely helped me to see things from a different perspective.

When it comes to being grateful, it's all about being aware, and feeling grateful, of even the tiniest things that occur in your daily work. It's also being aware and grateful of the greatest things, too.

For instance, your journey of gratefulness can start by understanding how fortunate you are that you can pay your bills on time with the salary you are getting from your job. It's about being grateful about your helpful co-workers. It's also about being grateful of the coffee that someone else has made at the office and which you can grab to your mug in the morning.

If you want to take things further, list the things you are grateful for in your job. You can then read the list and say thank you silently in your mind.

A grateful worker is a happy worker. And when a worker is a happy one, he or she is also more productive. So keep your eyes open and see all the things you are grateful in your daily work life.

For me, gratefulness has helped me to transform my life for the better, both at work and at home. I bet it has the same kind of effect in your life, too.

**Action Steps:**

- Take a look around and notice all the things, even the tiniest ones, you can feel grateful for in your work.
- Write a list of all the things you are grateful for in your work. Then go through the items in the list and thank silently for them.

## Conclusion

The version 2.0 of the book *Work Smarter Not Harder* included plenty of new tips related to how to increase your work performance. I hope that you found them valuable and that they can make a difference in your day.

I have now done my part. It's your responsibility to test these ideas and see how well they work for you.

But before I let you go, promise me two things: First, actually implement some of these strategies in practice. Then, based on your results, report back to me how well they worked or how if they didn't work.

That's how you learn more about personal productivity. And if you get back to me, I can perhaps give you some additional hints on how you make these tips better suited for you.

## Questions and Comments

I'm happy to help you with any productivity questions you may have. Please feel free to send me an e-mail at:

- [timo@productivesuperdad.com](mailto:timo@productivesuperdad.com)

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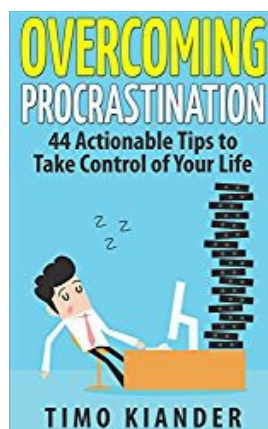
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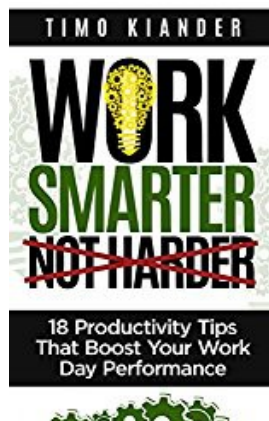
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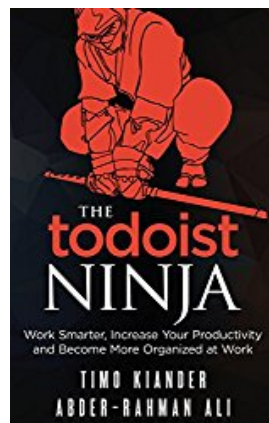
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## About the Author

Timo Kiander runs a productivity blog called [Productive Superdad](#).

His blog helps individuals interested in personal productivity on two levels: By improving their personal productivity, at work or in life and becoming more organized.

Timo is also into endurance sports. He has run 18 marathons so far, and has already lost count of how many triathlons he has participated in.

In his free time, he likes to spend as much time as possible with his wife and son.

Timo is very approachable and easy to get along with, so don't hesitate to contact him if you have any questions regarding this book (or any other matter) by sending him an e-mail at: [timo@productivesuperdad.com](mailto:timo@productivesuperdad.com).

