WORKING SMARTER NOT HARDER BY TIMO KINDER | BOOK SUMMARY

Working Smarter Not Harder by Timo Kinder is a quick read that identifies 18 different ways to improve your working day. Tips range from learning new valuable computer skills to understanding your own working patterns and rhythms. A easy-to-read guide that will help anyone increase their productivity one step at a time!

"To have a solid foundation for personal productivity, the following blocks must be in place: proper mindset, physical activity, optimum nutrition & enough sleep."

1. HAVE A POWERFUL START TO YOUR DAY

By learning to get up earlier, you can add more flexibility to your morning and enjoy a better start to your day. It starts with a decision, followed by a target time and commitment to your plan.

Change your sleep cycle in 15-minute increments at a time, for 3–4 nights. Once you are comfortable with this small change, make another adjustment to your wake-up time and pay attention to the time you go to bed.

Once you have successfully adopted this new schedule take full advantage of your new-found "me time" by investing in yourself. For instance, you could meditate, read a self-help book or start a new exercise regime.

2. UNDERSTAND YOUR OPTIMAL WORKING RHYTHM

To improve your focus and effectiveness, try to find an optimum working style; one that suits you the best. Here are a few options;

Pomodoro technique
Break the work sessions into 25-minute chunks, while taking a 5-minute break between sessions. Once you have completed four cycles, take a longer 15–30 minute break.

90-minute intervals

Our bodies work in 90-minute cycles21 – these 90-minute intervals are the peak time of our focus and productivity. Follow with a 20 minute break.

52–17
Working for 52 minutes, followed by a 17 minute break.

3. KEEP DISTRACTIONS AT BAY

There are 3 types of distractions you are exposed to during the working day; communication tools, other people and internal distractions.

Try manage social media and emails as best you can, set boundaries e.g. check twice a day for 15–20 minutes only.

Whether it be family members at home or colleagues in your office make changes to avoid distractions e.g. make do not disturb requests, change your location or invest in noise-cancelling headphones or show up to the office earlier than everyone else.

Ensure you get enough sleep, takes breaks and are adequately fuelled so that you don't face 'internal distractions' such as wandering thoughts.

4. NEVER START YOUR DAY UNPLANNED

Implement a habit of planning your day in advance. This way you know exactly what you should be focusing on when your work day starts. Also, you don't have to operate from memory, since all the necessary tasks are laid out in front of you.

5. DRINK WATER

Drinking water has many health benefits, but there are some productivity benefits too. A study made by The University of East London found that drinking water improves your brain performance by 14%.

Make a decision to drink more water, starting today. Your body and brain will thank you for that!

6. IDENTIFY THE MOST IMPORTANT TASKS AND DO THEM FIRST

To define an important task, consider these options:

1. The long-term effect of a task
2. The short-term effect of a task

In the first case, a task – when completed – can have a profound effect on your future. Most likely, these kinds of tasks are the ones which you should focus on now, even if the results materialize later.

The short-term effect can also play a big role, when prioritization is concerned. Even if a task might not be significant to you, other people may still rely on your input before they can move ahead.

7. ASK THESE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOUR NEXT MEETING

1. Do I have to attend?
2. Is it possible to attend virtually?
3. Do we need this meeting in the first place?
4. Is there an agenda?
5. Can we limit the duration of the meeting?
6. Is it possible to test the meeting technology prior to the meeting?

8. BATCH SIMILAR TASKS TOGETHER

Instead of peeking into your inbox every now and then, start batch-processing all the e-mails at once, during pre-determined time windows.

Pick 3 times per day (once in the morning, once in the mid-afternoon, and once in the evening), to process all e-mails at once, in 15–30 minute bursts.

This same batching strategy could be used elsewhere too, not just with your e-mail messages: phone calls, social media, etc.

9. PROCESS YOUR EMAIL EFFECTIVELY

Take a more organized approach in dealing with your e-mail messages:

1. Define your e-mail checking times; e.g. 2–3 times per day, 30 minutes each. Avoid checking e-mail first thing in the morning, since it's very likely you'll get off-track quickly.
2. Open your e-mail client only when you check your e-mail.
3. Turn-off the automatic notifications in your e-mail client.
4. Create an auto-reply message saying that you check e-mails only three times per day at pre-determined times.

10. DELEGATE, THE RIGHT WAY

Not only does delegation help to level the workload, it also gives us more time to focus on our important assignments, ensuring that unnecessary mistakes are weeded out during the work phase.

First, make sure to document your work steps with enough detail so that the other person can actually complete a task with success.

Then, take a test drive of those instructions, first by following them yourself, and then by the person you are delegating your task to.

Make sure to define the deadline for the delegated task.

The last step is to have a regular follow-up on your task (by phone or by e-mail), so that things move along smoothly.

11. TAKE BREAKS

Breaks are important for your productivity. Try to have a break that energizes you, helping you to perform better on your assignments after the break. A few examples are making a cup of tea, eating a healthy snack, getting some fresh air or a short burst of exercise.

12. TAKE CARE OF THE FROGS RIGHT AWAY

'Frogs' are the tasks you tend to postpone more than anything else. You need to combat this habit and deal with them right away.

First, prepare mentally for the task. E.g. to call an angry client, go through the call in your head first. Secondly, imagine how you would feel after dealing with the situation. Most likely relieved.

Quite often we exaggerate the scariness of a task (like a phone call) inside our heads. Get it done before you can exaggerate the fear.

13. CREATE CHECKLISTS

There are two types of checklists and you'll have to decide first which one to use, before creating your list:

In the case of READ-DO, the checklist acts like a recipe. First, you read the item on the list, then you act according to the item and then you move on to the next item.

The DO-CONFIRM checklist is a bit different. In this case, you do a task from your own memory (or from experience) and then at some point you consult your checklist to make sure that you did everything required.

Remember that creating a checklist is not enough. You should also keep the list up-to-date based on any process changes or requirement changes. You can schedule this activity to your calendar, so that you remember to do it or use an application like Siri to remind you about the maintenance task.

14. TAKE A SNAPSHOT OF YOUR WORK BEFORE VACATION

To avoid post-vacation chaos take a "snapshot" of the current work you are doing. In other words, create a not on your computer's desktop, describing:

The latest e-mail correspondence you have had.

The calls you had made.

The tasks you were currently working on and their statuses.

Other important information to be aware of, when returning back to work.

When you return, your work day will be much smoother as you will instantly be able to get onto of the work situation and know what to do next.

15. FOCUS ON ONE THING AT A TIME

- Split the task into smaller, manageable pieces. This gives you much better focus as you don't have to handle too big an entity at once.
- Create a plan to execute the task.
- Control the distractions around you as much as possible. Close your e-mail application, avoid spending time online and mute your cell phone.
- Take advantage of time blocking when you do the task.

16. CONTROL THE BUSYWORK

- Learn to say no. Or at the very least, make sure you set the right expectations towards the person who asks you to do something.
- If you are bombarded by multiple ASAP (as soon as possible) tasks by multiple people, figure out together whose work has the highest importance, then proceed with the agreed-upon priorities.
- If someone asks you to do a task, could you ask them to help you with your other task in return?
- Make sure to understand the true costs if a project or task gets delayed.
- Be pessimistic with your time.

17. KNOW YOUR TOOLS (AND YOUR KEYBOARD TOO)

- Learn keyboard shortcuts
- Learn more about the program you are using
- Get familiar with touch typing
- Start your applications faster
- Utilise bookmarks to access websites faster

18. KNOW HOW YOU SPEND YOUR TIME ON YOUR COMPUTER

It's useful to start tracking your time to see how you are spending your work day. Once you know how you spend your days, start doing systematic changes so that the productivity ratio (the percentage of productive time) of your day increases. Realise where you are getting distracted, identify why and minimise these distractions.