

# Catapult Your **PRODUCTIVITY**

THE **TOP 10** HABITS YOU  
MUST DEVELOP TO GET  
MORE THINGS DONE



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# **Catapult Your Productivity!**

## **The Top 10 Habits You Must Develop To Get More Things Done**

If you want to reach higher levels of productivity, you need to develop habits that support and complement your workflow. It does no good to be able to say, "I'm going to be more productive!" if you don't have routines and rules in place to set the stage for success.

Being productive on a continual basis - as opposed to enjoying random, but unreliable spurts of productivity - requires focus, energy and diligence. It entails giving your brain and body the resources they need to work efficiently, day in and day out.

Dedication alone won't suffice.

For example, consider an individual who decides to run a marathon. Even if he or she is dedicated, that person will fail if he or she neglects to train for it. The training, which begins months before the marathon, teaches the body to endure ever-increasing levels of pain. It increases the body's - and in many ways, the mind's - tolerance levels.

Becoming a more productive individual likewise requires training. You don't have to run several miles a day, but you do need to develop the right set of habits. Those habits are crucial to your success. They teach your brain and body to ignore distractions and tolerate other challenges.

Without those habits firmly in place, you'll fight an uphill battle every day as you try to get more work done.

Integrating those habits into your life will take time, just like training for a marathon. The brain is naturally resistant to any type of change. Ignoring distractions is a major change. So too are time management strategies like the Pomodoro Technique and timeboxing. In short, your brain will resist your attempts to change the way it responds to stimuli.

For example, suppose you've developed the bad habit of checking your email every 5 minutes. It's practically an addiction for you. Let's also say that you're dedicated to breaking that bad habit (good for you!). Rather than checking it every 5 minutes, you set a rule to check it at 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. each day.

Your brain will resist. Remember, it abhors change. But with diligence and repetition, it will eventually concede. If you avoid checking your email except at 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. every day for a few weeks, you'll win the battle.

The brain's natural resistance to change is one of the core reasons to develop habits that accommodate your pursuit of higher productivity. That resistance manifests in myriad ways, from the foods you eat to the activities you engage in.

## **Why The Brain Resists Change**

Before we get to the top 10 habits you need to develop in order to achieve an unprecedented level of productivity, it's important to understand what's going on in your brain.

Why does your brain hate change?

One reason is because it grows accustomed to certain incoming stimuli. Suppose you always sit in front of your television from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. That being the case, your brain will expect you to do so in the future. If you decide to forgo television this evening, your brain will be faced with new incoming stimuli (whatever ends up taking the place of your favorite television shows).

Any time the brain detects new incoming stimuli, it questions whether a mistake was made and whether that presumed mistake has exposed it to a threat. Its flight-or-fight response mechanism kicks in. You know the change - in this case, skipping your favorite show - is intended to effect a positive result (greater productivity). But your brain doesn't know that.

So, it resists.

And that's why it takes time to develop good habits. You have to break down your brain's resistance to them by consistently exposing it to a new set of stimuli. The new stimuli will eventually replace the old, and your brain's expectations will change accordingly.

The length of time that process takes will depend on 2 factors:

1. the habit you're trying to build
2. the extent to which the habit you're trying to break has become ingrained in your life.

Now that you know what you're up against, it's time to discuss the 10 habits that will help catapult your productivity. Here are the 10 we're going to cover in the rest of this Special Report:

1. Wake Up Early
2. Start Working Immediately Upon Waking
3. Track How Effectively You Use Your Time
4. Focus On Tasks That Contribute To High-Value Projects
5. Create *Effective* Task Management Lists
6. Stick To A Healthy Diet
7. Be Unreachable
8. Maintain An Unflappable 80/20 Attitude
9. Be An Anti-Perfectionist
10. Concentrate On One Item At A Time

You may think you know everything there is to know about the above. But I strongly recommend reading through each item below, and asking yourself how each can produce a positive change in your workflow and productivity. I'm willing to bet there are several small, simple changes you can make that will produce a huge difference in both departments.

Let's start by discussing the time you wake up each morning.

## Habit #1: Wake Up Early

It's not a coincidence that so many movers and shakers wake up early each morning. Coffee magnate Howard Schultz reportedly wakes up at 4:30 a.m. So does Bill Gross, founder of PIMCO. Compared to them, billionaire bad boy Richard Branson is a veritable late riser, pulling himself out of bed at 5:45 a.m. The CEOs for General Motors, Apple, Disney, PepsiCo, Square and Chrysler are also among the ranks of early risers.

The habit isn't a new one among the productive. Many of the world's most renowned men and women throughout history routinely tossed their sheets aside before the crack of dawn. Ben Franklin was reputed to have woken each day at 5:00 a.m. And some reports claim Napoleon rose as early as 2:00 a.m. during major campaigns (he may have been one of history's first polyphasic sleepers!).

Why do so many productive people wake up early?

Their reasons vary, but they boil down to a few common motivations:

- there are fewer people awake during the early morning hours. Hence,, there are fewer interruptions to confront.
- they have more control over their time.
- their minds are more engaged (once the initial grogginess fades).
- they can get more work done without the distractions and interruptions that pepper their day during normal work hours.

If you're a business owner, those quiet hours during which everyone else is still snoring away can be your most productive time of the day.

If you have a full-time job, getting into the office a couple hours early can give you the time you need to finish major projects on time.

If you're a parent, rising before your kids and spouse will give you valuable personal time that would otherwise be unavailable.

If you're a student, getting up before everyone else will give a considerable head start on assignments and tests.

If you're a writer, the earlier you wake, the more words you can write. To that end, Ernest Hemingway offers this bit of advice on being an early riser...

*"When I am working on a book or story I write every morning as soon after first light as possible. There is no one to disturb you and it is cool or cold and you come to your work and warm as you write."*

Rising early isn't easy. If you normally get up at 7:00 a.m., rising at 5:00 a.m. is going to hurt. It's going to be unpleasant. But there are major advantages to coping with the discomfort. Doing so will open up your day and give you more distraction-free time to get things done.

With that in mind, here are a few tips to help you build the habit:

1. Put your alarm far enough away from your bed that you're forced to get out of bed to turn it off.
2. Go to bed earlier to compensate for the hours of sleep you'll lose in the morning. If you normally go to bed at 11:00 p.m. and wake up at 7:00 a.m., go to bed at 9:00 p.m. if you intend to get up at 5:00 a.m.
3. Resist the temptation to hit the snooze button on your alarm. It only delays the inevitable. Worse, it trains your brain to expect to be able to snooze each morning after your first alarm sounds.
4. Establish an early morning routine. For example, the moment you rise, drink a glass of water, do 20 pushups and take the dog out for his morning constitutional. Having a routine in place creates an expectation for your mind. It will be less likely to hem and haw at the idea of rising early if it has a plan of action waiting for it.

Get into the habit of rising early. You'll be able to relate to other early risers who claim they get more done by 9:00 a.m. than most people get done during an entire day.



## Habit #2: Start Working Immediately Upon Waking

Now that you're waking up earlier (see Habit #1), it's important to avoid wasting the extra time you've given yourself. It does no good to wake up at 5:00 a.m. only to sit on the couch and watch reruns of *The Walking Dead*.

To make the most of the morning hours, get to work as quickly as possible after waking. Working doesn't have to mean sitting in front of your laptop and putting time into a looming project. It just means starting your morning routine immediately after your feet hit the floor.

That might include eating a healthy breakfast or going for a short jog. Whatever your routine involves, don't give yourself a chance to settle into unproductive activities. Your brain has a natural tendency to procrastinate. If you let it do so, it will.

Instead, get something accomplished as soon as you wake up. Having a few things crossed off your to-do list will give you a sense of achievement and set the tone for the rest of the day.

One word of caution: don't dig into email or listen to voicemails. It's too easy to get pulled into them and end up wasting valuable time that could be spent elsewhere. There aren't many emails or voicemails that are so urgent they must be answered at 5:00 a.m. Let them sit for a few hours. Focus your early-morning time on getting things done.

This habit isn't difficult to establish and maintain. It's just a matter of creating a routine and sticking to it. The good news is that you can retrain your brain. You'll be surprised by how quickly it will start to follow your lead.

## **Habit #3: Track How Effectively You Use Your Time**

Any productivity manual worth its salt will recommend that you track your time. Of all the resources you have at your disposal, time is the only one you can never regain.

Once it's gone, it's gone for good.

The problem is, most people actually think they're using their time wisely. They go through their workday, working on projects that have been assigned to them and meeting their deadlines.

That must mean they're working productively, right?

As you already know, that perception is almost always a mirage. Under closer scrutiny, it quickly becomes obvious that the individual's workday is as leaky as a sinking ship. Time slips through his or her fingers - a few minutes here and a few minutes there - ultimately adding up to hours of wasted time.

Research suggests that full-time office workers put in less than 3 hours of productive work each day. Some researchers claim the actual amount is closer to 90 minutes. But ask most corporate employees whether they're busy and you're sure to hear tales of 60-hour weeks and looming deadlines.

The problem is that most people waste a ton of time. Worse, they don't realize it.

The only way to *truly* know how you spend your time is to track it. Only then will you have the data you need to figure out if you're spending your time wisely. For example, you may discover that those "quick" visits to Facebook and Twitter are having a major impact on your productivity.

## **The Simplest Way To Track Your Time**

There are several online time-tracking tools you can use for free. My favorite is Toggl because it's simple and free. Once you register an account, you can create an unlimited number of projects and tasks, and assign each of them a specific color for easy visualization.

Toggl's interface is intuitive. When you're ready to start a task, click the large red button to start the clock. After you complete the task, click the button again to stop the clock.

That's as simple as it gets.

Toggl will keep track of the amount of time you spend on various types of activities according to how you organize your account. For example, suppose you're a blogger. You can set up a project for blogging and create individual tasks for that project related to researching, writing and editing your blog posts. That allows you to drill down to the finer details of your work. For instance, you'll be able to see how much time you spend editing your posts.

Toggle allows you to view how you've allocated your time over select periods (e.g. last week, last month or a specific date range). Then, it displays that data in an easy-to-interpret pie chart. If social media is taking up half your workday, the time you're spending on it will be impossible to ignore.

You can also create detailed reports that show your time allocation in different formats. Here again, you can display the data for the date range of your choice.

It almost sounds like I'm the owner of Toggl. I'm not. Nor am I an affiliate (I'm not even sure if they have an affiliate program). I just really like the tool.

By the way, you can use Toggl on your smartphone (iOS or Android). It's just as simple and intuitive as it is through your browser on your desktop. You can also download the Toggl software to your computer, though I've never found a reason to do so.

If, for some reason, you hate Toggle, use one of its many competitors. Here's a short list of popular alternatives:

- RescueTime
- Chrometa
- Timely
- Now Then
- Freckle
- Timesheet
- Hours

Frankly, I think you'll love Toggl as much as I do. Having said that, it never hurts to have options. Of course, you can also use a pen and paper to record your time. Doing so is high-maintenance, but I have friends who swear by that method.

The most important thing to remember from this section is that you need to get into the habit of tracking your time. Don't assume you're using it efficiently. Track it. Then, look through your reports to figure out where you can make improvements.

## Habit #4: Focus On Tasks That Contribute To High-Value Projects

Being busy doesn't mean you're being productive. It just means you're busy. A big part of maintaining a high level of productivity is to concentrate on items that pose considerable value with respect to your long-term goals.

For example, let's suppose you're a travel blogger who aims to generate \$5,000 a month in revenue. Here are some of the activities that might directly contribute to meeting that goal each month:

- Write 3 information-dense blogs per week.
- Survey readers regarding the topics they want to read about.
- Identify affiliate programs that have significant revenue potential.
- Pitch 4 ideas for guest posts on other travel blogs each month.
- Reach out to other travel bloggers and form relationships.

Here are some of the activities that may contribute to meeting your goal, but do so indirectly or minimally:

- Reading travel blogs just to "stay up to date."
- Spending time each day on social media.
- Playing around with the design of your blog.
- Learning "black hat" SEO tricks to gain better rankings in Google.
- Subscribing and reading every marketing newsletter you can find.

To be productive, you must distinguish between the tasks that will contribute *directly* to your long-term goals and those that only play a minimal role to that effect. Your time is limited. Spend it on the tasks that will give you the greatest leverage on your high-value, high-priority projects.

I carry a small notebook with me and jot down to-do items whenever they come to mind. In my experience, a majority of the items that I *think* I need to address are unnecessary. At the very least, they can be given a low priority and be placed on the backburner for the foreseeable future.

I'll often review them after a few weeks and deem them to be irrelevant to my goals. At that point, I'll simply cross them off my list.

## **What Vilfredo Pareto Teaches Us About Leverage**

The Pareto Principle, often referred to as the 80/20 rule, comes to bear on habit #4 in a big way.

You've no doubt heard that 80% of your desired results will stem from 20% of your activities. That means 80% of the activities on which you're spending your time are having a minimal effect on your goals.

That's another way of saying you're working inefficiently.

Sit down for an hour and review every item on your master to-do list. Consider each in the context of how it moves you toward your goals. How great an impact will completing that task have on them? You'll find that 80% of your to-do items will fall in the "minimal contribution" column.

Ignore them for now and focus on higher-value activities.

## Habit #5: Create *Effective* Task Management Lists

The age-old to-do list. It's one of the most useful productivity tools you have at your disposal and simultaneously one of the most misunderstood and misused.

Believe it or not, there's an art to creating a to-do list that complements your pursuit of greater productivity. Most people take the wrong approach with their lists and then wonder why they can't seem to get their mountain of to-do items under control.

If you're dealing with that issue, you're in good company.

The problem is, it's difficult to be productive over long periods if you don't know how to create effective task management lists. I'll show you how to do that in this section so you can inject a real sense of order into your daily life. But first, it's worth spending a few minutes to understand why most to-do lists fail.

There are 3 main reasons:

First, most lists contain too many items.

Advocates of Getting Things Done will argue that putting every task, no matter how small, on a list is valuable because doing so removes those tasks from your mindspace. That, in turn, allows you to focus on the work at hand.

There is something to that assertion. Allowing hundreds of tasks to linger on your mind will erode your concentration. It will also increase the likelihood that some tasks will fall through the cracks.

But the answer is not to put every task on a list. As busy as our lives are, that only guarantees you'll be left with a gargantuan (and discouraging) list of hundreds of uncompleted items by the end of the week.

The answer is to focus your efforts on the tasks *that matter*. We discussed above how the Pareto Principle can be applied to your daily workflow; most of the items on your to-do list can be ignored or postponed. Here, I'm suggesting that you proactively decide which tasks deserve a spot on your list in the first place.

The second problem with most task management lists is that they lack deadlines.

Look at your to-do list. Have you assigned a deadline for each item? I'll go out on a limb and assume the answer is probably no. That's a problem. Deadlines drive action. Without them, we're more inclined to postpone the completion of tasks. It's human nature.

But let's say you're a member of that small class of folks who actually assigns a deadline for every task on their task management lists. Here, the question is whether the deadlines you've assigned are too far into the future. Parkinson's law teaches us that "work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion." The longer you give yourself to complete a given task, the longer it will take to complete it.

Set an aggressive deadline for it.

The third problem with most to-do lists is that there's no system for prioritizing tasks.

We know intuitively that some tasks are more important than others. We also know that we need a way to distinguish the important tasks from the unimportant ones. But how many people actually implement a prioritization system and regularly use it?

Very few.

Most of us simply write items down as they pop into our heads and neglect to assign a priority to them. Assigning priorities requires putting each item into the context of our current workflow and short and long-term goals. That takes time and effort, neither of which we're willing to invest at any given moment.



The problem is that, without assigning priorities that guide our workflow, it's difficult to know which tasks pose the most value to us. That leaves us to pick tasks haphazardly, according to our mood, interests or other variables that don't support our pursuit of higher productivity.

Now that you're familiar with the 3 main reasons most task management lists fail, let's talk about how to create one that works for you. I'll present a series of 10 actionable tips below:

1. Maintain 2 lists: one for the current day and one master list.
2. Keep your lists short. Especially your daily list. If an item doesn't *need* to be done that day, don't put it on your list.
3. Choose 3 items on your daily list that are the most important tasks of the day. These are your "A priority" items. They must get completed.
4. Give each remaining task a priority. Use B and C. "B priority" items are important, but the world won't end if you fail to complete them. "C priority" items can be put on the backburner without consequences.
5. Assign date-based deadlines - for example, May 21 - for each item on your *master* list. Assign time limits - for example, 45 minutes - for each item on your *daily* list.
6. Make each task actionable. Rather than writing down "contractor invoices," write down "pay contractors' invoices."
7. Add details you'll need in order to complete a task. For example, if you need to call a restaurant to make a reservation, add the restaurant's phone number to your list. That will save you the time and hassle of looking it up later.
8. Do a weekly purge of your master list. On Sunday (or whatever day you choose), glance through your list and cross off items that are no longer relevant to your goals.

9. Break large tasks into smaller ones. This might clutter your to-do list since you'll essentially be adding a lot more items to it, but you'll be better able to complete tasks when they're individually defined.
10. Make sure each item on your master list is short-term in nature. You might want to learn how to play piano, but unless you plan to take action on that goal in the next few weeks, leave it off your list.

If you want to be productive, you must create effective task management lists. Otherwise, you'll waste a lot of time on things that keep you busy, but prevent you from actually accomplishing your goals.

## **Habit #6: Stick To A Healthy Diet**

The saying “garbage in, garbage out” has been a long-revered colloquialism in the computer science industry. It essentially means your input determines your output. The right inputs should result in a better product. The wrong ones will result in an inferior product.

In the context of working productively, “garbage in, garbage out” can be thought of in terms of your diet. If you want to increase your productivity, getting more done and having more free time on your hands, you need to give your body access to the right resources.

Think of someone you know who maintains a terrible diet. He (or she) might gorge on junk food instead of nutritious foods, drink soft drinks rather than water or tea, and consume candy as if it’s going out of style.

Ask yourself: how productive is that individual on a long-term basis? Ignore the short spurts of energy he demonstrates thanks to his sugar and caffeine intake. Instead, focus on his daily and weekly workflow. Is it efficient? Does he consistently produce quality output, and do so at a respectable pace?

The answer is probably no. A big part of the reason is probably due to his dietary choices.

Now, think of someone you know who eats healthy. She sticks to meals that give her body the vitamins and nutrients it needs in order to consistently perform well.

That individual is probably productive during the course of any given day. Rather than working at a frenetic pace over a short period, fueled by sugar or caffeine, she works at a steady rate over a longer period. And rather than turning in shoddy work, she probably turns in high-caliber work.

Good inputs, good outputs.

If you're like most people, you're probably in the middle of those two extremes. You eat healthy some of the time and decidedly less healthy other times.

That being the case, there's room for improvement. If you want to enjoy more focus, higher energy levels and increased motivation during your workday, it's time to tweak your diet.

## **Simple Diet Hacks That Will Boost Your Daily Productivity**

Here are a few simple ways to improve your diet and ensure your body gets the vitamins, nutrients and minerals it needs. Implement them and you're almost guaranteed to have more energy. Don't be surprised if you shed a few extra pounds along the way.

**First, look through your kitchen and pantry for junk food.** Throw out cookies, pastries, chips and candy. Even those chocolate-covered macadamia nuts you love. Toss all of it into the garbage. Remove the temptation to snack on junk.

**Second, identify foods that provide the nutrients your body needs.**

Your choices will vary based on your preferences, body chemistry and food tolerances. Make sure you have a mix of foods that supply your body with the following:

- Vitamin A
- Vitamin B
- Vitamin B1, B2, B3, B6 and B12
- Vitamin C
- Vitamin D
- Vitamin E
- Vitamin K

- Iodine
- Calcium
- Manganese
- Magnesium
- Potassium
- Selenium

A lot of folks take supplements and multivitamins to make sure they get the nutrients they need. Supplements and multivitamins can be useful, but it's always better to obtain nutrients through food. Research shows that the body is better able to metabolize and absorb them from food than from pills and powders.

Once you've identified a list of healthy, nutrient-dense foods, create a meal plan that incorporates them.

**Third, keep things simple (for now).** Avoid complicated recipes. The easier it is for you to put a nutritious meal on your plate, the more inclined you'll be to prepare it. As you grow more accustomed to your new diet, experiment with more complex recipes.

**Fourth, fix smaller portions.** This hack flies in the face of advice given by intermittent fasters (IFers) who consume up to 2,000 calories in a single meal. That huge meal is then followed by a long period - typically, between 12 and 24 hours - during which the IFer goes without food.

Intermittent fasting does offer several noteworthy advantages. It helps to control cholesterol, increase human growth hormone levels and can simplify your diet., eating smaller portions more frequently throughout the day does two important things for you:

1. It prevents you from consuming more calories than your body needs.

2. It gives your brain a chance to receive the signal that you're full. Research shows that it takes up to 20 minutes for your brain to receive satiety signals from hormones in the gastrointestinal tract. Think about how much extra, unnecessary food you can consume in those 20 minutes!

**Fifth, start reading food labels.** Every time you visit the grocery store, check out the ingredients contained in each item you pick up. You might be surprised by the number of unhealthy items found in seemingly-harmless products. The biggest offenders are high fructose corn syrup and various stabilizing gums, both of which are found in nearly everything these days.

**Sixth, eat a breakfast that includes plenty of healthy fat.** You'll feel sated longer, which will prevent you from snacking on junk food.

For generations, we've been told that saturated fat is unhealthy and likely to cause us to gain weight. Scientists now know that to be untrue, or at least severely lacking in detail. Certain fats, such as those found in eggs, beef, fish, full-fat yogurt and butter are not only good for you, but also delicious and satiating!

I eat more fat than practically anyone I know, and I've been slender for years (no, I don't have a high metabolism).

**Seventh, limit your consumption of fruits.** This suggestion may seem counterintuitive since most of us were taught that fruit is good for us ("*An apple a day keeps the doctor away!*"). But a majority of today's fruits are loaded with a truckload of fructose. They're specifically engineered that way.

Many studies have shown that excess fructose can have a severely adverse impact on the body. A few scientists have even claimed that high amounts over prolonged periods can be toxic to the liver. Having said that, the jury is still out regarding how the body actually reacts to fructose. For now, go easy on the fruit to avoid the sugar bombs.

Remember, garbage in, garbage out. Your diet plays a major role in your ability to concentrate on your work and maintain a high level of productivity throughout the day. Use the 7 hacks above to create a diet that keeps you focused, energized and motivated.

## **Habit #7: Be Unreachable**

Email, social media, texts, phone calls, chat sessions, and random knocks on your front door... all are interruptions that can derail your workflow. They not only distract you from getting work done, but they also disrupt your momentum.

The biggest difference between these and other types of distractions - for example, watching cat videos on YouTube - is that other people are making demands your time.

That complicates things.

You can turn off YouTube. You can refrain from playing video games. But once you establish contact with someone through email, text, chat or any other channel, it can be very difficult to disengage. How many times have you returned a phone call, intending to spend only a few minutes on it, and being wrangled into a conversation that lasts half an hour?

That's a major downside to being reachable. But it gets worse...

## **How Interruptions Demolish Your Productivity**

Repeated interruptions can have a catastrophic effect on your productivity. Research shows that it can take up to 25 minutes to regain your momentum after an interruption. You might think you can dive right back into your work, but your brain needs time to find its place. Until it's able to do so, your workflow will be caught in a holding pattern.

Imagine being interrupted once an hour. You'd lose a good chunk of every hour to your brain's attempt to find its place. You might consequently have a difficult time getting any real work completed.

Now consider those poor souls who are addicted to checking their email, social media accounts, texts and voicemails incessantly throughout the day. It's a wonder they get any work done at all!



## The Art Of Being Unreachable

If you want to be productive, you must be unreachable. That means ignoring others' demands for your time until you reach a point in your workflow that it makes sense to respond to them.

For example, suppose you're using the Pomodoro Technique to achieve better focus on your work. The typical Pomodoro schedule is as follows:

- Work for 25 minutes.
  - Take a 5-minute break.
- Work for 25 minutes.
  - Take a 5-minute break.
- Work for 25 minutes.
  - Take a 5-minute break.
- Work for 25 minutes.
  - Take a 15-minute break.

Responding to emails during your 5-minute breaks is a bad idea. It's too easy to become caught up in back-and-forth email conversations. Each reply begs an immediate response, potentially causing you to spend more time than you had originally planned.

It's the same with connecting with others through social media, texts, phone calls and chat sessions.

One option is to wait until your 15-minute break to reach out folks. You'll have a little more time at your disposal.

Another option - and it's a much better one in my opinion - is to allocate certain times of the day to returning emails, texts and phone calls. My personal times are at 11:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m and 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

That's it. Twice a day. I assign reasonable blocks of time that allow me to connect with others on my terms.

The upside is that I can devote myself to my work and still respond to everyone that needs a response within 24 hours.

You might be thinking to yourself, *"But what about the people who need an immediate response from me about something important?"*

Here's a little secret: there are very few things that require an immediate response, even if the person making the demand on your time tries to convince you otherwise. Perceived emergencies are seldom real emergencies.

Most items can wait 7 or 8 hours without negative consequences.

Here's what I recommend if you want to become unreachable during the workday:

- Turn your phone off, avoid social media and refrain from checking your email while you work.
- Pick 2 times during the day to check your email, texts, voicemails and social media accounts. If your job or business requires you to "check in" more frequently, adjust according to your responsibilities.
- Develop the habit of ignoring all immediate demands on your time. If someone knocks on your front door, ignore it and continue working. (You may need noise-cancelling headphones if the individual is persistent.) Adjust for legitimate exceptions.

The above advice may be counterintuitive to what you're accustomed to. You might be used to responding to emails, phone calls and texts as soon as people reach out to you. You may even feel that others will become angry with you for your failure to respond immediately. Whether that perception is true or not depends on the expectations you've created. If people expect an immediate response from you, it's time to set new expectations.

Some people will understand. Others will be confused, and need to be “retrained.” Still others may be deeply offended that you’re not responding quickly to their demands.

You can’t control how others will feel, so don’t spend time worrying about it. Let those who become offended be offended. Most of them will come around eventually.

To summarize this section, the most important thing to remember is that repeated interruptions will destroy your productivity. Keep in mind that you’re the only one who will protect your time and workflow. You’re the only one who has an incentive to do so. Remember that when others make demands on your time.

Be unreachable if you want to get more done and have more time to devote to the people and things you love.

## **Habit #8: Maintain An Unflappable 80/20 Attitude**

You've no doubt heard of the Pareto Principle. It states that 80% of your results come from 20% of your efforts.

The original principle was developed by an economist named Vilfredo Pareto in the early 1900s, and has since been applied to every niche imaginable. Experts in fields ranging from aerospace to zoology use the Pareto Principle to help them decide to allocate their limited resources.

Back in the early 1900s, Pareto observed that 80% of the peas produced by his garden came from 20% of his pea pods (according to Wikipedia). That observation, which later became known as the 80/20 rule, was further developed by specialists in a variety of fields.

For example, in retail, it was observed that 80% of sales came from 20% of customers. In the music industry, 80% of the available radio coverage is given to 20% of the bands and musical artists. (Actually, it's more like 99% / 1%, but you get the idea.) In software engineering, 80% of productivity comes via 20% of the engineering team's processes.

The point is, not every task on your to-do list has the same importance. Some tasks will contribute to your goals much more than others. Some will be a complete waste of time.

You need to determine which tasks are worth focusing on and which can be put on the backburner or dismissed entirely.

## **Why You Must Apply The 80/20 Rule To Your Life**

Applying the Pareto Principle is one of the most important habits you can develop if you want to increase your productivity. If you never distinguish between the tasks that contribute to your goals and those that do not, you'll forever waste time.

Time wasted on non-essential tasks is time that could be spent with your family and friends; or building a side business that generates a second income; or advancing your career and becoming an authority in your niche; or simply relaxing and allowing your brain to recover after a demanding day.

By applying the 80/20 rule to your life, you'll be more inclined to weed out the peripheral activities that offer little value. In doing so, you'll free up more time that can be used toward more productive and rewarding ends.

There are a myriad of ways you can apply the 80/20 rule to your day. It just takes a little creativity and a willingness to chuck most of the extraneous tasks currently filling up your to-do list.

## **How To Apply The 80/20 Rule And Save More Time**

First, let's talk about your email. Do you truly need to read every message that comes into your inbox? Probably not. Most of them can be ignored or read when you have free time on your hands.

Think of the email newsletters you receive. You can probably unsubscribe from most of them and suffer zero consequences.

Second, consider the voicemails you receive. Is it imperative that you return each one? Again, probably not. Sure, every person who leaves a voicemail for you might want a response. But their desire for one doesn't obligate you.

In those cases when a response is warranted, consider emailing the requested information. That way, you can avoid getting trapped in a phone conversation that cuts into your productive work time.

Third, if you run a business, think about the amount of time you spend addressing customers' complaints. Are you using that time efficiently?

Consider: some of your customers contribute a high percentage of sales, and thus deserve a lot of attention. Other customers may contribute very little to your bottom line. Hence, it makes little sense to spend a significant amount of time addressing their complaints, especially if their complaints lack merit. It's better to offer a full refund and move on.

One way to save time as a business owner is to come up with a way to minimize complaints in the first place. If you're a service provider, make sure your service is top-notch. If you sell products, make sure they're of high quality. Also, post a Frequently Asked Questions page on your website that can head off potential problems that multiple customers have reported in the past.

Fourth, scrutinize each task on your to-do list that repeats or is similar to tasks you've completed in the past. Those items are taking a lot of your time over the long run. Ask yourself how they've contributed to your goals. Did they move you forward? If so, by how much?

Here, you want to determine whether the tasks are worth your time and attention. Are you performing them because they're important or because you've always performed them? If they're not contributing to your goals, cross them off your list.

Fifth, think about your internet surfing. Think about the sites you visit each week. Write them down and set the list aside. Then, review the list after a week has passed. How many of the sites proved useful to your goals? How many contributed to your bottom line? Chances are, very few will qualify as keepers.

It's fine to surf for pleasure. The internet can be a good way to relax. But if you're spending hours each day on Facebook, CNN and YouTube, you're wasting a considerable amount of time.

We've only covered a few areas in your life that could benefit from the 80/20 rule. You can apply it in many other ways. The important thing to remember is that your time is like money. Every minute you save by getting rid of non-essential tasks is a minute you can spend elsewhere.

For some people, that's a life-changing epiphany.

Bottom line: to become ultra-productive, get into the habit of consistently applying the 80/20 rule in every area of your life.

## **Habit #9: Be An Anti-Perfectionist**

Most of us are perfectionists. We want to do things right and are willing to put in the necessary time and effort to make it happen.

For example, if you're a software engineer, you toil for hours to ensure your code is clean as a whistle with detailed comments for each line. If you're a novelist, you edit your books multiple times to make certain they're free of spelling or grammar errors. If you're an accountant, you spend an inordinate amount of time to guarantee that every client's paperwork is completely error-free.

You might be thinking, "Hold on a minute. Perfection is the height of professionalism. It's what people expect from me as a professional in my field!"

But you'd be mistaken.

Very few people expect others to be perfect. Your boss, clients and spouse realize that everyone makes mistakes. They'll forgive you as long as your work isn't riddled with them. Consider electronic products, such as the iPhone and Kindle. Apple and Amazon (respectively) realize their products aren't perfect. Neither company tries to create perfect products. They build and ship products, and fix problems in later versions as they're reported by customers.

You definitely want to limit the number of mistakes you make during the course of your day. Mistakes take time to correct. They also influence how others perceive you. But limit the amount of time you spend going over your work to ensure it's error-free.

Perfection doesn't pay.



## How Perfectionism Hurts Your Productivity

The problem with perfectionism is that it's inconsistent with maintaining a high level of productivity.

The two are like oil and vinegar. They don't mix.

Consider what happens when you relentlessly pursue a state of perfection:

- You take longer to complete tasks.
- You spend a considerable amount of time on details that others are unlikely to notice.
- You miss deadlines.
- You begin to look at others' imperfect work with disdain (even though they're meeting their deadlines and receiving kudos from their bosses and peers).
- You develop a strong resistance to producing anything that is less than perfect in your eyes.
- You start to fear the prospect of failure.
- You begin to neglect your health in pursuit of producing error-free work.
- You end up wasting a significant amount of time that can be dedicated to more rewarding activities.
- You end up friendless because no one can live up to your lofty expectations.

Ironically, the above problems are likely to precede a noticeable and rapid decline in the quality of your work. Why? Your pursuit of perfection eventually leads to burnout, which causes you to make mistakes. That, in turn, kills your motivation to work. You start to procrastinate for fear of producing something that others will ridicule.

It's a brutal cycle. Your own misguided efforts to achieve perfection sabotage your pursuit of perfection. And your productivity takes a terrible beating in the process.

## **How To Rein In Your Inner Perfectionist (And Get More Done!)**

It's easy to know when you're being a perfectionist. There are numerous telltale signs. The first step to becoming an *anti-perfectionist* is to identify them. See if you recognize any of the following red flags in your daily workflow:

- You're risk-averse.
- You don't enjoy stepping outside your comfort zone and learning new things.
- You berate yourself for mistakes even when others praise your work.
- You react negatively to constructive criticism.
- You miss deadlines or routinely ask for extensions.
- You can't stand the idea of someone turning in better work than you.
- You're a micromanager who hates to delegate tasks to others.
- You have impractical goals and expectations - for yourself and others.
- Your self-esteem is tied closely to what others think of your work.

If you recognize any of the above traits in yourself, it's time to reevaluate how you approach your work. Specifically, it's time to banish your inner perfectionist. Here are a few suggestions:

1. *Note the above warning signs.* You may not be guilty of all of them. But even a few can indicate a problem.

2. *Be honest with yourself.* If you recognize any of the red flags, don't try to convince yourself that the manner in which you approach your work is fine. Self-awareness is the key to improving your workflow.
3. *Figure out why you're trying to be perfect.* Do you think it will advance your career? Are you convinced that your business will implode if you make a mistake? What beliefs are driving your pursuit of perfection?
4. *Question your beliefs.* The assumptions you identify in step #3 will likely be delusions. For example, making a mistake will not cause your business to implode. Challenge each of your beliefs to make certain they're rational.
5. *Slowly change individual habits.* If you loathe delegating tasks, outsource a few low-priority ones. If you react negatively to constructive criticism, seek honest feedback from others so you can develop a tougher skin. Don't try to make large, across-the-board changes. Focus on one habit at a time.
6. *Track your results.* Did the new habit you implemented have a negative outcome? What were the effects of the change? In order to confidently ban your inner perfectionist, you need to see that doing so won't result in negative consequences. The only way to do that is by tracking your results.
7. *Limit the amount of time you spend on each project or task.* Activities tend to take as much time as you give them. Give yourself too much time and you'll invite your inner perfectionist to return. To prevent that from happening, set a limited time period to devote to each activity on your to-do list. Then, commit to setting the activity aside once that time period has elapsed.

Perfectionism will destroy your productivity. It can ruin your business. It can hamper your career. It can even discourage others from interacting with you.

Be willing to tell your inner perfectionist to take a hike. Don't be surprised if you see an immediate improvement in the amount of quality work you produce.

## **Habit #10: Concentrate On One Item At A Time**

Multitasking is the bane of productivity. That shouldn't surprise you. Countless articles - and more than a few books - have been written to drill that point home. Yet, despite the flood of anti-multitasking material available, people still try to handle more than one task at a time.

Part of the reason is the sense of accomplishment that comes with multitasking. You *feel* as if you're getting a lot of work done because your mind is never given an opportunity to rest. That feeling delivers emotional gratification.

The problem is that the feeling is a mirage. It stems from delusion. It's no different than feeling good about your marriage while your spouse is cavorting around town with other men or women.

The key to banning your inner multitasker is to come to terms with the delusion. Understand how dividing your attention among multiple tasks is adversely affecting your productivity.

## **Consequences Of Multitasking: 6 Reasons To Become A Single-Tasker**

The biggest delusion among multitaskers is the belief that they're effective. They assume they're being productive, getting more done than would be possible if they tackled items individually. They're also convinced that their output is high in quality.

The reality is usually much different. Here are six ways multitasking impacts your productivity and the quality of your work:

1. *Each task you work on takes more time to complete.* That's because you're splitting your attention between them, not magically coming up with more mindspace to handle the extra load. Plus, your brain needs time to adjust each time it switches from item to item. (That's referred to as a "switching cost.")

2. *You make more mistakes.* You've probably noticed that your error rate increases whenever you rush. The same thing happens when you try to address multiple items at the same time. The less attention you give each item - remember, you only have so much mindspace to split between them - the more errors you're likely to make.
3. *You forget important details.* Researchers have found that multitaskers are more susceptible to lapses in memory. The negative effect on memory seems to become more pronounced with age. Those were among the startling findings published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in 2011.
4. *You deal with more stress.* It shouldn't come as a surprise that multitasking leads to higher stress levels. The more we try to do at one time, the more stress we experience. Add in the numerous distracting gadgets that have become a part of our lives - smartphones, tablets, etc. - and you have a recipe for anxiety.
5. *You're less creative.* In 2012, the journal *Current Directions in Psychological Science* published findings by researchers at the University of Illinois who found that multitasking negatively affects working memory and creative problem-solving. That can impact numerous areas of your life. Without a stream of good ideas, you might be unable to solve problems at your job, create useful products and write engaging content. A lack of creativity can even hamper your relationship with your spouse and kids.
6. *Your brain will suffer over the long run.* Scientists have discovered that multitasking impairs cognitive function. People of all ages perform less effectively on cognitive tests when they attempt to handle multiple items at once. Researchers at the Center for Cognitive Brain Imaging at Carnegie Mellon University found that most people's brains functioned less efficiently when they tried to juggle multiple tasks compared to handling one task at a time.

As you can see from above, the costs associated with multitasking, particularly with respect to your productivity, are substantial. They can affect your career, your business, your family and even your quality of life. So, if you're a chronic multitasker, now's the time to make a change in how you approach your work.

## **How To Become A Productive Single-Tasker**

First, you must come to grips with the fact that multitasking is the enemy of productivity. If you remain unconvinced, you'll always be looking for excuses to do it. Fortunately, you don't have to perform a Jedi mind trick on yourself to believe in the merits of single-tasking. You can rely on a large body of scientific research (references above) to that end.

Second, get into the habit of rebuffing demands other folks make on your time. If you don't have an obligation to comply, learn to say no. A lot of people multitask because they're insanely busy. The problem isn't that they're busy. The problem is that they're unable to rebuff others' demands. They consequently end up being responsible for items that have nothing to do with their goals.

Third, use the Pomodoro Technique and/or timeboxing when you work on tasks and projects. Both approaches emphasize focusing on one thing at a time and avoiding distractions. Both are great solutions for learning how to concentrate on single tasks.

Fourth, get plenty of sleep. When your brain is tired, you become more susceptible to distractions. Those distractions include the items on your to-do list. Your exhausted brain, unable to concentrate, is drawn to juggling multiple tasks if only to escape the task in front of it.

Fifth, take breaks. Your brain can't work productively for long periods without rest. You've no doubt noticed that it becomes more difficult to concentrate as you work longer hours. Your brain needs frequent breaks.

Sixth, plan out your workflow the previous night. When you sit down to work, you should have a clear plan for your day. You should know which tasks need to be completed and the order in which they need to be addressed. Having a plan will keep your mind focused.

Seventh, listen to music while working. The right type of music can help you concentrate. It will help keep distractions (including your co-workers) at bay, and thus make you less inclined to juggle multiple items. Remember, a distracted mind looks for ways to avoid the task in front of it.

Listening to music doesn't work for everyone. You may work in an environment that precludes you from wearing headphones and "unplugging" from the activity around you. Or, the music itself may be a distraction to you. I know many writers who need absolute quiet in order to work.

I encourage you to experiment with different types of music. Try baroque music (Brahms is excellent), atmospheric rock and "trailer" music (search for Thomas Bergersen and Two Steps From Hell on Youtube). Stick to instrumental pieces. They lack vocals that might otherwise distract you.

Thus far, we've covered the "*Top 10 Habits You Must Develop To Catapult Your Productivity*." But I'm a big advocate of giving a little extra. So, let's talk about one more useful habit...

## **Bonus Habit: Be Selfish With Your Time**

No one is incentivized to protect your time as much as you. No one has as much to gain from doing so, and no one has as much to lose if your time slips through your fingers.

Your friends, family members and co-workers don't have to deal with the consequences of your low productivity. If you surrender to their demands for your time, they get what they want (your attention, help, etc.). Meanwhile, they can sidestep the negative effects of their demands (your missed deadlines, diminished focus, lost momentum, etc.).

That may seem cynical. But in my experience, it's true. Consider the co-worker who claims his question "will only take a second." Or the person who asks you, "do you have a second to help me?"

When was the last time a request for your help only required a second of your time? The request itself is disingenuous. It betrays the individual's belief that his time is worth more than your own (despite protestations to the contrary when confronted).

But what if I told you that you're probably contributing to the problem?

## **How You're Inviting People To Interrupt Your Workflow**

One of the reasons people feel justified in interrupting you is that they're convinced that doing so is acceptable behavior. Perhaps they're narcissists who believe others should stop what they're doing and cater to their needs. Or perhaps they don't value their own time, and thus lack the capacity to value yours. There are many things that could be at the heart of the problem.

But here's the factor that's probably having the biggest impact: *you've said yes to them in the past.*



We train those around us each and every day. We train them by setting expectations. Those expectations are created and reinforced by consistent application. Once they've been established, they drive others' actions.

For example, let's say you always set aside whatever you're working on when your co-workers visit your office. Every time someone interrupts you, you respond by rewarding them for their interruption by giving them your attention.

Can you see why that individual might be inclined to interrupt you in the future? You've set the expectation that he'll receive your help. Moreover, you've shown him that he'll suffer no repercussions for his interruption.

If it's any consolation, most people do this. They assume they should say yes to everyone around them. By doing so, they can avoid giving others the impression that they're unapproachable.

The problem is, they unwittingly invite others to interrupt them in the future. They set the expectation that doing so is acceptable and likely to result in a reward (your attention, help, etc.).

If you're in that predicament, it's time to break the cycle and set new expectations.

## **How To Say “No” To Others**

Saying no is a learned skill. It's difficult to do at first, but becomes easier as you do it over and over. In other words, with practice comes mastery.

It's important to remember that telling others no is nothing more than a way to protect your limited time. You only have so many hours in a day to address the priorities in your life. Ceding to others' demands on your time forces you to set those priorities aside.

The first step is to focus on being honest with people. Rather than just saying no when they come to you for help, explain why you're unable to help them.

The second step is to make yourself available to help them at a later time. For example, when someone comes into your office, you might say, "I'd love to help you, but I'm working on a priority report for my boss at the moment. Can you and I get together this afternoon at 3:15?"

You're giving the interrupter an alternative. That alone will make your "no" more palatable.

Another strategy is to funnel all requests through another person - for example, your boss. The individual to whom you report should be aware of the projects you're working on. That being the case, he or she can decide whether you have time to address another task for someone else. (If your boss is not aware of your workflow, inform him or her.)

Granted, this will only work in an environment where you report to another person. It won't work if you run your own business. After all, you're the boss. You don't report to anyone.

Learning to say no will become one of your most valuable tools in your struggle to work productively. It may be uncomfortable at first. But remember, you're the only one you can count on to safeguard your time. No one else has the same incentive to do so.

## **Final Thoughts On Developing Productivity-Friendly Habits**

Think of the 10 habits (and 1 bonus habit!) in this report as the foundation on which you create a productive lifestyle. The benefits of greater productivity extend beyond getting more work done. They set the stage for enjoying a more rewarding life.

You'll have more time to spend with your family and friends. You'll have more time to devote to your passions and hobbies. You'll benefit from lower stress levels, improved concentration, greater effectiveness and more income.

I strongly recommend focusing on one habit at a time. Master it before moving on to the next habit. Otherwise, you might become overwhelmed and discouraged by the process. And that will only make you more inclined to give up.

I also encourage you to read through the material I've posted on [ArtOfProductivity.com](http://www.artofproductivity.com). When I have something important to share that will help you further increase your productivity, I'll post it on the blog and send you a quick email to let you know.

Lastly, be sure to read the emails I send you as soon as you receive them. Here's why: each time I publish a new book on Amazon, I plan to offer it for a steep discount for a day or two. Once that initial launch phase passes, the normal price will go into effect.

By checking my emails when you receive them, you're guaranteed to never miss a great deal!

I sincerely hope you've enjoyed reading this special report. It contains a ton of helpful, use-it-now information that will help you skyrocket your productivity.

Enjoy the journey. And stay committed to pursuing a life made more rewarding by having the time to do the things that are most important to you.

Here's to your continued success!

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