

Introduction

In this lesson we are going to talk about creating your own project management system.

Creating your own project management system

Everything we've covered thus far in lesson one is standardized, which means it's a specific set of rules. It's really great to know the basics of those things if you work with a team that uses that methodology. But as a freelancer, none of those methodologies are really going to work for you wholesale. They're designed for managing internal projects within a company, and not managing the company as a whole, and as a freelancer, that's what you're actually doing. You need a different way of managing your business and projects individually. That's what we're going to talk about here.

Productivity basics

We're going to cover a few basics.

The two things that actually go together are the **batching** and **switching costs**. Every time you switch between tasks, you lose a certain amount of time. The most recent study says that every time you switch between tasks, or every time a task is interrupted, it takes about 23 minutes for your focus to go back to the levels it was before the interruption, especially if you're in the **flow state**. Flow state basically means that you're immersed in a task, it's challenging, and you do not notice the flow of time. So when you're interrupted during that, it totally tanks your productivity.

Normally, flow state is a really productive time, but if you're being interrupted, it's not. So the idea behind batching is that you prevent the switching cost of changing between tasks rapidly by doing a bunch of things all at once. For example, you might do a bunch of client e-mail or do a bunch of administrative work all in one thing. So you do not answer one email, then code one page of a website and then go back and answer another email and so on. Instead, you go through all of your emails and then you do all of your coding. That helps you minimize the switching cost, that helps you be more productive and save more time. So you really don't want to be popping into your inbox every single time you get an email and answering it immediately.

Things to consider when implementing project management system

So, as a freelancer, there's a couple of things that you need to keep in mind when you're constructing your own rules for your project management system.

You are managing multiple projects and multiple clients, which makes it hard to do sprints, like we talked about in Scrum. It's very hard for you as a freelancer to completely devote yourself to one project for a long time. Typically, the best way to do it is maybe a week at a time.

Getting feedback is great, and it's a huge part of an iterative or a cyclical work process. But you need to manage that feedback too. Getting feedback can wind up taking almost as much time as doing the work, and sometimes more, so one of the things we're going to talk about in another lesson is how to manage the feedback.

Understanding what works for you

So when you're starting to construct rules that you want to work within, you need to notice what works for you. Do you want to do days dedicated to projects or clients? We discussed earlier why sprints won't work. But you could easily devote Tuesdays to Client X's project only, for example. Or you can work in blocks of time, so you might work on projects for an hour and a half block or a three hour block. If you do a three hour block, I would recommend you taking a break somewhere in there, because otherwise you're going to get tired quickly. But, you can also block out your days and your weeks with time blocks for specific projects. If you're going to do that, you want to think about how many blocks to a day and how many blocks to a week. Some people like switching projects relative, more than once in a day, and some people don't. This is all personal preference here.

Creating rules and sticking with it

When it comes to sticking with your preferences, you want to write down your new rules. For example, Tuesdays through Thursdays are client days: on those days, I typically do two to three articles a day, depending how, on how long they are, but their primary focus is client days. Mondays and Fridays are administrative and business development days. So if I were going through this process right now, I would write down that list of rules. Then I would follow it

for a week, and come back to them by the end of the week and take notes on what worked and what didn't.

After you've gone through like two to three weeks of trying different things, stick with what you've wound up with for a month or two, and see if there are problems with your new system that show up in the longer term. See how that plays out for you. Then once you've stumbled across something that seems to work, you want to do quarterly check-ins to see if it's still working for you and what should be modified.