12 TIPS THAT SPELL

PRODUCTIVITY

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INTRO

Productivity: it's something everybody wants, and everyone could have more of. But it's not as simple as doing a lot of stuff; it's actually producing. It's a measure of the efficiency of production expressed by output. Increasing productivity in the workplace can be a frustrating and timely task. This eBook is designed to simply and efficiently give you the tools you need to be more productive, with statistics, tips, and anecdotes so that you can begin to get the most productivity out of each working day.

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P is for PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination is the enemy of productivity, and it must be met head-on. You're literally sabotaging yourself by procrastinating, even if it seems like you're being productive by taking care of things you've already put off instead of doing what you need to get done. If you catch yourself procrastinating often, you're not alone.

This habit is so bad, it's estimated that 40 percent of people have experienced some financial loss due to procrastination. And, it's not necessarily an issue of time management—it's a matter of self-regulation.

Unfortunately, procrastinators lie to themselves—and occasionally others—saying things like, "I'll feel more like doing this tomorrow," or "I work best under intense pressure." This typically results in nothing more than squandering resources by not utilizing the time or availability of others that was previously given.

The good news is, procrastination is a habit, which means it can be eliminated. And, if procrastination is the enemy of productivity, then productivity will naturally combat procrastination. As you read on, you'll see the productivity tricks and techniques that will eliminate procrastination, break the habit, and make you more productive. Here are some **steps** to help you start:

- **Write down what you need to get done.** Having the task down in tangible writing helps it become more real, and makes it less easy to put off.
- **Understand your feelings.** Fear is a major component to procrastination. Identify the core reason why you're procrastinating, and deal with the root of the problem.
- **Break the task down into manageable segments.** Turn the big project into smaller steps that are more easily vanquished. You can stop procrastinating a project by taking baby steps toward the end goal.
- **Recognize procrastination at the beginning.** Pay attention to the little voice in your head trying to convince you to put something off. If you feel yourself thinking, "I don't feel like doing this now," or "I'll come back to this later," you need to resist the urge to procrastinate and spend at least a few minutes working on the task right away.
- **Remove personal distractions from your immediate vicinity.** It's impossible to eliminate interruptions, but you can resist distraction by taking away anything you know will tempt you away from your productivity. This can include television, radio, social media sites, the Internet, email notifications, etc. Set a certain amount of time during which all these distractions are turned off.
- **Reward yourself upon completion.** Whether it's the entire project or a segment of a larger task, delay gratification until it's completed. If you want a cup of coffee or a snack, tell yourself you can't have them until you've reached a big milestone in a project, or finished it entirely.

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R is for REST

But, rest isn't just about literally sleeping; rest can mean stepping away from work for a while to spend time recuperating, or with friends and family. If you take a vacation or day off, actually "be off." Organizations offer PTO for a reason, they want their employees to take a break and refresh.

PRODUCTIVITY PETE SAYS...
To get a better night's sleep, avoid blue light, including TV, computer, and smartphone screens!

It's important to remember that doing isn't the same thing as being productive. Productivity isn't just about getting things checked off your to-do list, it's about actually producing! You may feel like your productivity is on the right track because you're knocking out assignments and meeting deadlines, but that's not necessarily the case. Productivity should take into account the quality of output. While skipping sleep may allow you to be more productive (or at least produce more) in the short-term, it can kill your long-term productivity.

In order to improve productivity and the quality of output, your body needs to rest. Follow these tips to get a better night's sleep.

- **Take a quiet walk before bed.**
- **Have some private time to yourself away from other people and technology.**
- **Read something that puts you in a good mood.**
- **Handwrite a note, or a to-do list.**
- **Lower the temperature.**
- **Meditate and be mindful.**
- **Avoid blue light, which includes television, computer, and smartphone screens.**

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O is for OUTPUT

Productivity is literally the ratio of output to input in the production process. When **all outputs and inputs are included** in the productivity measure, **it's called total productivity.**

Before we delve too much further into the concept of productivity, it's important to understand what productivity really is. **Productivity** is literally the ratio of output to input in the production process. When all outputs and inputs are included in the productivity measure, it's called total productivity.

It may be difficult to measure productivity through output—depending on the industry—but it must be quantified somehow. Whether it's by number of customers served, houses built, or websites created, productivity must be measured by output.

Productivity can be looked at in two ways; **physical** and **economic** productivity.

Physical productivity is the quantity of output produced by one unit of production during a certain amount of time. An example of that would be a bird house maker building two birdhouses in one hour.

Economic productivity is the value of output with one unit of input. An example is the birdhouse maker selling the birdhouses for $10 each. His *economic productivity* would be $20 per hour.

Determinants of output can include things such pricing and demand, and the individual's prior skills and learning curve. If consumer demand is low for birdhouses, then the birdhouse builder will not work at his fullest physical productivity capacity. The same goes for economic productivity. If only one birdhouse is being built per day because that is what's required to meet demand, the builder will not build what he could, nor make the potential money.

In a different scenario, consider that the birdhouse builder takes on an apprentice. The apprentice will not produce the quantity or quality of birdhouses in an hour. He will be more occupied with not making mistakes than optimizing his time to work in the beginning. But after time, his output will level off, and his full productivity can be measured.

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D is for DELEGATION

Everyone—**from workers to upper management**—should delegate to be more productive. **Delegation multiplies your effectiveness and productivity** so that you can **utilize the talents that only you have**.

Delegation is not only for managers. While managers may have more items to delegate, everyone can lessen the burden of their tasks. In his book, **Next Generation Leader**, Andy Stanly said, "Only do what only you can do." It's good advice to live by to increase productivity. Everyone—from workers to upper management—should delegate to be more productive.

Delegation multiplies your effectiveness and productivity so that you can utilize the talents that only you have. Follow these **tips** to start making delegation a little easier and a lot more effective.

- **Decide what to delegate.** To start, find something small that's been giving you a hang-up—that thorn in your side that keeps nagging, distracting you from the bigger projects at hand.
- **Choose the right person for the job.** Everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses, and can complete tasks for which they are suited in a faster, more efficient manner. You should evaluate the strengths of your colleagues and see how you can best work together. For example, if a coworker is a better editor, and

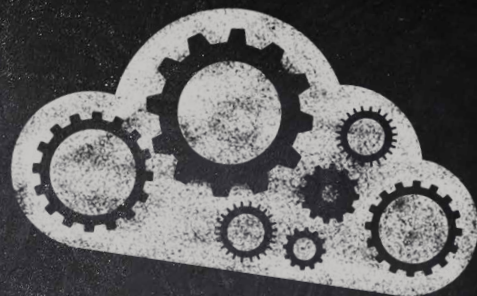you're better at creating presentations, try delegating these tasks to each other.
- **Communicate clearly.** Communication is the most important factor in helping people work effectively together. From the very beginning, be clear about what's expected and when it needs to be done. Hopefully, the other person will communicate just as honestly about their ability to complete the task on time. Spending a little extra time at the beginning of a project explaining expectations and answering questions will save a

lot more time in the long run.
- **Check in, but don't waste time doing so.** Once you've delegated a task, let it go. It's alright to check in a couple of days after you've handed the project over, but unless there is specific protocol or procedure associated with the task, allow your delegate be flexible in the way they get it done.

After years of researching what makes workers more productive, The Harvard Business Review discovered that "Eliminating or delegating unimportant tasks and replacing them with value-added ones" was most critical to productivity.

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U is for UTILIZING RESOURCES

Just like delegation reaps the benefits of off-loading tasks to other people, utilizing resources increases productivity by allowing you to use technology to lighten your load. There are several websites and apps that can help boost your productivity, and range in price from free, to reasonably inexpensive. These are a few of them:

WEBSITES:

- **Gmail** offers fluid interactivity between the email client itself and Google's other productivity contributions: Calendar, Tasks, and Google Drive, which features Google Docs, an online Microsoft Office-like productivity suite. Google also offers Google+ and YouTube, and all of these offerings are free.
- **Basecamp** does task and file sharing, instant messaging, note taking, time tracking, and more business-related services—such as invoicing accounting and reporting—through third-party add-ons. Basecamp's plans start at $20 a month after a 60-day free trial.
- **Smartsheet** is software that tracks anything, from orders, fulfillments, customers, pipelines, expenses, assets, and timesheets—almost anything a business could want to have tracked. Its plans start at $15.95 a month after a 30-day free trial period.

APPS:

- **IFTTT (IF This, Then That)** is an application that acts as a go-between for all of your other apps (like Facebook, Evernote, email, etc.). It can do anything from tell your Instagram account to save pictures to your Dropbox, or send you an email reminder to follow up with new clients as they are added to your contact list. It can even control the lights in your house, if you want. IFTTT works by creating "recipes," and there are new "recipes" being written every day. This app is free.
- **MakeMe** increases productivity by utilizing the best aspects of gamification. It's a social, multi-player human achievement game that encourages productivity by appealing to your competitiveness. Start a game with your friends via the app, and MakeMe solicits their help in the form of gameplay cards to make sure you follow through with your goals. It literally shames you into getting work done. This app is also free.
- **24me** acts as your very own digital personal assistant. It can pay your bills, wish your friends a happy birthday, and outsource tasks like grocery shopping and scheduling. While the app itself is free, there are fees for delegating your daily work to online vendors.

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C is for CONCENTRATION

Concentration means taking your mind off multiple things and focusing on one thing at a time. Research has found that spending half an hour of meditating and practicing mindfulness each day for eight weeks actually changes the density of gray matter in the parts of the brain associated with memory, sense of self, empathy, and stress—all things vital to productivity.

One region of the brain mindfulness affects is the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), which is responsible for self-regulation. This limits the potential for knee-jerk reactions when making important decisions, as well as purposely directing attention to behavior. It supports optimal decision-making as well, because it is associated with learning from past experiences and decisions. In order to maintain effective productivity, concentration and mindfulness must be practiced. The following are some tips for practicing mindfulness:

- **Take a few minutes of quiet time in the morning before work.** Close your eyes and concentrate on the things you need or want to accomplish that day. If a particular thought overwhelms you, focus your breathing and calm yourself into a positive mentality.

- **Be methodical.** Take your time, giving one task at a time your full, undivided attention.
- **Really listen to others.** Be present with your coworkers and others around you, and actually hear what they're saying.
- **Take a break.** Take a walk around your building, or close your eyes and take some deep breaths.
- **Meditate.** Take half an hour at the end of the day, and find a quiet place away from television, the Internet, phone calls, and other people. Close your eyes, focus on your breathing, and reign in your mind if you feel it begin to wander.

Follow these steps, and you'll begin to see your interactions with others, mental vigor, personal happiness, and overall productivity improve. It will even begin to affect the way you manage your time.

PRODUCTIVITY PETE SAYS...
To maintain productivity, practice concentration and mindfulness!
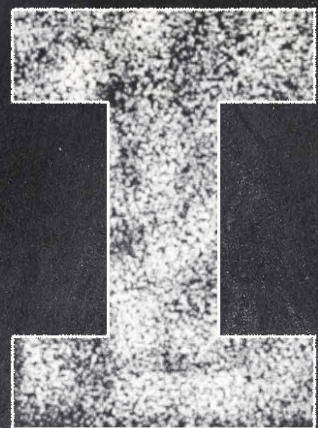
T is for TIME MANAGEMENT

Being **mindful** of your time will make you more productive. Knowing exactly **what length of time you have to spend** on a given project will **help allocate** the appropriate number of **hours and resources**.

Time management is critical to being productive—after all, how can something be done if there is no time in which to do it? Of course, everyone has 24 hours in each day; but the interesting thing is, concentration and mindfulness can also play a large role in how much time you really have.

Being mindful of your time will make you more productive. Knowing exactly what length of time you have to spend on a given project will help allocate the appropriate number of hours and resources. With that mindset in place, following these time management tips can help increase productivity:

- **Make a list of all the things that habitually waste your time.** Whenever you notice you're wasting time, add whatever you're doing to the list. This can help keep you mindful of time wasters so that you can avoid them.
- **Turn off social media apps.** Research shows that the average person spends almost four hours each day on social media sites. Without those distractions, it opens up nearly a quarter of your waking day to be more productive.
- **Set daily goals with reminders.** Every project inherently comes with a list of chronological things that must be done in order to accomplish it. You can set your phone or computer with apps like Google Calendar to remind you of the things you have to complete, and keep you on task in a timely manner.
- **Write shorter emails.** Business professionals receive on average 85 emails a day. Almost 600 per week. One-third of work time is spent reading, organizing, and replying to emails.
- **End the day at a set time.**
- **Ignore emails when there is a deadline.**
- **Establish and limit things that habitually drain your time.**
- **Immediately tackle projects sequentially if they are of equal importance.**

Time management is more than completing tasks quickly. Being truly productive is about making sure you're strategically allocating your limited resources to the right activities, to achieve set goals at the end of a day or week.

I is for IMMEDIACY

Sometimes, the "worst" thing is **the most important thing**. It's the one you don't want to do because **it's difficult**, **may result in more work**, **or is simply intimidating**. Finish the most important or difficult task **first**.

Mark Twain said, "If it's your job to eat a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first." It's clever advice for being more productive.

Sometimes, the "worst" thing is the most important thing. It's the one you don't want to do because it's difficult, may result in more work, or is simply intimidating. Finish the most important or difficult task first. Completing a series of small, less important tasks may feel productive, but by the time these inconsequential things are done, you'll have exerted energy that could have been used to do the bigger project. It could even lead to procrastination, because you'll put off the bigger project until tomorrow, etc. Once the most important task is done, use your remaining energy on the smaller projects.

Don't try to multitask. It's physically impossible, because multiple tasks cannot occupy the same space in the human brain. **In fact**, Harvard Business Review quotes research that showed multitasking leads to as much as a 40 percent drop in productivity, increased stress, and a 10 percent drop in IQ. Quickly jumping from one task to the other is simply the illusion of productivity, and wastes valuable time that could be spent focused entirely on one project.

Look at it **this way**, if you're given six similar tasks, each to be completed within three days, you could either juggle them or do them sequentially. If you juggle them, you could spend half a day on each in turn. Although you may make good progress on each one as the days go by, you won't complete any of the tasks until day 16 (when the first two are completed). The next two projects are finished on the 17th day, followed by the final two on day 18. However, if you approached the tasks sequentially, you could finish the first project in three days, the second in six, and so on. In fact you'd finish five of the six projects earlier than if you'd have been working on them in tandem (the sixth project would be finished on the 18th day, same as in the first scenario).

So, assuming all things are of equal priority, tackling assignments or projects as soon as they come in is the best course of action for boosting productivity and getting everything done. Of course, it's important to take a break every now and then.

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V is for VACATIONS

• If employees would take only one additional day off each year, the result would be $73 billion in output for American businesses.
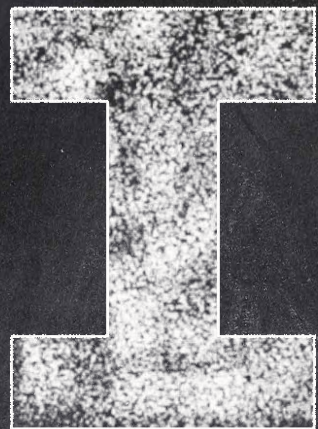
So, what's the secret tip for taking more vacation days? Take more vacation days! Simply working or staying busy isn't productivity. You need to give your brain a rest to improve the quality of output. If you need to take a break and mindlessly surf the Internet, it's okay, as long as it's a break and not a distraction. Another **study** found that "those who spent less than 20 percent of their time perusing the Internet's silly offerings were nine percent more productive than those who resist going online." It works like diminishing marginal returns: the more you work, the worse your end product—at some point you need to pause and refresh.

As you know, rest is important. But rest is a lot more than getting enough sleep. Henry Ford realized in the mid-1920s how important rest away from work could be for improving productivity. He reduced the workweek for his employees from six days to five, and cut hours from 48 to 40. He said, "We know from our experience in changing from six to five days and back again that we can get at least as great productivity in five days as we can in six, just as the eight hour day opened our way to prosperity, the five day week will open our way to a still greater prosperity."

Taking personal vacation time to rest and recuperate increases productivity. However, according to a **study** from Oxford Economics, over 40 percent of Americans who received paid time off did not take all of their allotted time, leaving an average of 3.2 vacation days on the proverbial table. The study also found that:

• If workers used all of their vacation days, the economy would benefit from more than $160 billion in sales and $21 billion in tax revenue, which could create 1.2 million new jobs.

PRODUCTIVITY PETE SAYS...

Taking personal vacation time to rest and recuperate increases your productivity!

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I is for INTERRUPTIONS

There's nothing you can do about interruptions at work— after all, an interruption is nothing more than an unanticipated event, and those happen constantly. On average, people experience an interruption every eight minutes. In an eight-hour workday, that comes out to about 50-60 interruptions, and each interruption typically causes distraction for about five minutes (it takes the average person roughly 20 minutes to fully regain his or her pre-interruption level of concentration). So, if the average person receives 50 interruptions, each lasting five minutes, the grand total time comes out to just over four hours, or half the workday.

Now, while there may not be anything you can do to entirely avoid interruptions in your daily life, there are ways to handle them effectively, and to keep them from affecting your productivity:

- **Don't worry about being distracted.** Fretting about the next incoming phone call or unexpected email will weaken your productivity even before the distraction occurs.
- **However, you should plan for the inevitable interruptions.** You can plan for the unanticipated, and surmount each distraction as it comes so that you don't waste more valuable time.
- **Delegate and postpone** your involvement in an interruption unless it is absolutely necessary that you take care of it at once. It's alright to turn your phone on "Do not disturb" or close your office door.
- **Don't let interruptions turn into procrastination opportunities.** The best way to fight the urge to let interruptions interfere with productivity is to set truncated deadlines for yourself, and not let anything distract you until they're reached.
- **Split your time into targets,** especially things you don't want to accomplish. Say, for example, that you set a target of sending an unpleasant email by nine in the morning, but you get a call at 8:45. Instead of letting that conversation drag out for an hour, you have to cut it short or reschedule because you have the email target.
- **Limit inputs.** The fewer channels people can use to distract you, the less frequently you'll be interrupted. It's difficult not to check email, Facebook, texts, etc., or to step away from the rush and close yourself away from others to get your work done. But you must, and your results will prove the effectiveness of this practice.
- **Batch your outputs.** Blocking out time to respond to emails and phone calls can be an extremely effective way to keep interruptions and distractions at bay. Make a list of everything you need to do to maintain good workplace communication, and then give each action its own time slot with a little extra time at the end of each.
- **Communicate your schedule** with your coworkers. If you need to finish a project by a certain deadline, let people know that you can't be interrupted until it's done. You have to let people know you're off limits for a certain period of time. (Of course, this can't be done unless you've already set a schedule and list of priorities for yourself).

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T is for TO-DO LISTS

In the early 1900's, Charles Schwab, steel tycoon and one of the first Americans to implement Taylorism, sent out a memo stating that he would reward handsomely the individual who could improve productivity amongst his employees. Ivy Lee, father of public relations, responded by suggesting that each employee should write down six tasks every day, and rank them from highest to lowest priority. The first task should be tackled immediately, followed by the second, and so on until the list was completed. After 90 days of list-making and monitoring, Schwab noticed productivity dramatically improve, and the to-do list was born.

To-do lists can be very beneficial to productivity, but also very harmful—in ways such as tricking your mind into thinking you've already completed tasks, or keeping your brain fixated on something you haven't completed yet (called the **Zeignarnik** effect). Try these tips for creating an effective to-do list to keep your productivity on track:

- **Write your to-do list the night before.** Writing out a list before bed not only helps you sleep better, it causes less anxiety in the morning, when you already have less capacity to think about what you need to get done.
- **Qualify your tasks.** Everything on your to-do list should fit into two categories: things you must accomplish, and things which are less important or could be delegated. Don't stuff your list with things that aren't important and will waste your time.
- **Assign time estimates.** Whether it's five minutes or the entire day, assigning the probable amount of time it will take to complete each task will help make realistic decisions about how much you can really accomplish. If you realize the impossibility of your to-do list, eliminate less important tasks or rearrange priorities.
- **Section your list.** Group your tasks into chronological and non-chronological items. Chronological items include time-specific things like meetings and conference calls, while non-chronological items include projects that aren't assigned to a particular time. Non-chronological tasks should be listed in order of priority.
- **Re-evaluate anything you haven't accomplished.** If, at the end of the day, you realize that something has been put off or repeatedly postponed, figure out why. Either it's not that important and shouldn't be on the list, or something else should be taken off the list in order to complete it. Regardless, it's a sign that something is wrong.

To-do lists can be a huge boon to productivity, as long as they don't get in the way. You need to figure out a system that works best for you.

Y is for YOU

Yoshiro Nakamatsu, arguably one of the world's greatest inventors, claims to **hold his breath** underwater to within half a second of drowning to increase his creativity and productivity. That process, however, is insane, and not right for you (or anybody, really). At the end of the day, getting the most productivity out of yourself boils down to finding what works best for you.

Everything you've read so far can help you increase productivity. Many of the tips—as you've seen—intertwine and interconnect. However, some things may work better than others. The problem with many productivity hacks, tips, and plans is that many of them require you to change your lifestyle in some way, rather than you knowing yourself well enough to decide how to schedule your time appropriately. There are some **things** you need to know about yourself before deciding what will work best for you.

- **Determine whether you're an early bird or a night owl.** Some people work best first thing in the morning, while others prefer using the momentum of the day to finish things later at night.

Knowing when you're naturally more productive can help you schedule blocks of time to get things done. For example, if you're more productive in the morning, come in extra early before a morning meeting eats up your time. Conversely, save some time in the evening when you're not as likely to be distracted.

- **Know what overwhelms you.** The things that overwhelm you point to areas in which you need to pay more attention or make changes. Take some time to figure out if there's a way on the cognitive level to reduce your feelings of being overwhelmed, and then address the root of your anxiety rather than the symptoms, or avoiding the issue entirely.

- **Consider whether you're introverted or extroverted.** Some people are more productive in solitude, while others feed off the energy of others. Instead of trying to cope with one or the other depending on the situation, find a space in which you can do work the way you'd like to do it. If you work in a noisy office and would prefer more privacy, try using headphones or do work away from the office if possible. If you need more community, try scheduling coworker time or find a busy place to be productive.

- **Be aware of your natural strengths and weaknesses, and leverage them.** If engaging with people is a natural strength of yours, try to be the first person to help a client. On the other hand, if meeting people is not your strong suit, try delegating that responsibility to someone who's better at it, allowing you to invest your strengths in something more productive. Also, know where your priorities lie. If you feel like something is unimportant or unnecessary, find a different way of being productive.

Productivity is about getting the most done with maximum accuracy and efficiency. The best way to do that is to know how you work best.

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