

# Eight Ways To Increase Your Personal Productivity

Increasing your personal productivity does not mean working harder or longer. It means working smarter. Here are 8 ways to accomplish more of what's most important to you with less time and effort.

**1. Manage your time the way you manage your business.** A successful company budgets, controls, and regularly evaluates its use of its assets. To increase your productivity, you must manage your most important asset — your time — in a similar way.

The first step is deciding what your most important goals are. Ask yourself: What do I most want to accomplish for my company — and myself — in the next several months? Since your time is a scarce and limited asset, you shouldn't squander it by trying to accomplish everything. Instead, concentrate on the most important goals.

Next, you should outline, in writing, the steps you must take to accomplish these goals. Again, focus on the most critical steps. Also try to set out a timetable for completing each of these steps.

By proceeding in this way, you gradually build a personal plan for managing your time over several months. Of course, you won't be able to spend all your time working on the goals and steps in your plan. But when you have discretionary time, i.e., time you don't have to spend in some predetermined way, you can spend it working on your planned goals.

Since your goals are dynamic and not static, you should reevaluate them frequently. Get in the habit of asking yourself: Is this still the best use of my time?

**2. Focus each day's activity on your important goals.** Each day, you face a collection of things you have to do, would like to do, want to avoid, can't forget, and so forth. How do you sort these out?

An effective way is to list these activities and rank them according to how much they help you accomplish your important goals. You can either rank an activity 1, 2, 3, 4, and so on, or you can categorize it: A, if it is urgent or a significant step toward achieving your goals; B, if it is of lesser value; and C, if it can be postponed.

Use your list to manage your discretionary time. Try not to work on any B's or C's until you have finished all your A's. At the end of the day, you can use the list to evaluate how effectively you spent your time during the day.

**3. Audit your personal activities for several days.** Like many busy executives, you may often be unsure of where the time goes each day. This may mean that some of your time is wasted. You can find out by "auditing" your use of time for a few days.

The first step in the audit is to make a simple chart and record how you spend your time throughout the day. Make the chart as detailed as is practical for you. Try to account for all your time — "missing time" is often wasted time.

At the end of each day, review your chart and see how much time you spent on your important goals and tasks. Ask yourself questions like these:

- What kept me from spending more time on my A and B activities?
- What was my most frequent distraction or interruption? How can I avoid it in the future?
- What steps can I take tomorrow to spend more time on my A and B activities?
- What activities could I have delegated, postponed, or dropped completely?

You should use the audit to critically evaluate your normal use of time. You want to be sure that habits and practices you developed when your job or assignment was different haven't carried over and lost their effectiveness. For example, a sales representative who has been promoted to sales manager might continue to spend time contacting customers, even though he barely has time to learn and do his new job.

**4. Learn from mistakes.** You can turn mistakes to your advantage by trying to learn from them. Take whatever you think was your biggest mistake in the last week or month and ask yourself:

- What should I have done differently?
- What can I do now to prevent the mistake from recurring?

A less painful way to learn from mistakes is to learn from the mistakes of others. When you do this, ask:

- Could the same thing happen to me?
- What can I do now to avoid having the same problem?

**5. Be a perfectionist — selectively!** If something is worth doing at all, it is not necessarily worth doing perfectly. Often, 80% of the value of doing something comes from just 20% of the doing. Before you start a project, ask yourself what "percentage of completion" will be sufficient for your purpose. Then stop when you've done that much. Successful openheart surgery requires a high level of perfection, but most work doesn't.

**6. Be careful about taking work home.** Sometimes you have no choice but to take work home with you. But don't forget that the possibility of working at home can be a crutch that keeps you limping through the day. It's easier to fritter an afternoon away if you think, "I'll do my important work tonight." Try to work for a week on a no-homework rule. If you can't do that, set a limit on the work you do at home.

**7. Don't overcommit yourself.** There is a limit to what you can accomplish in a day or a week. Don't commit yourself to doing more than you can successfully handle. When you have a chance to take on a new assignment, ask yourself whether the new task is important enough to your goals and your company's goals that you would be willing to drop some other task to find time for the new one. If you try to do both and overcommit yourself, you may do both badly.

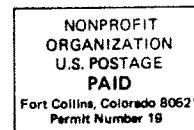
**8. Overcome mental blocks.** Many people are occasionally hampered by mental blocks that keep them from starting some important work. You can often overcome these blocks by analyzing them. Here are some examples:

- Do you lack facts? Then start with some research.
- Is the task overwhelming? Then divide it into smaller tasks and begin with just one of these tasks.
- Are you tired? Take a break.
- Are you afraid of something? Figure out what you fear. You'll often find that it doesn't merit your concern.
- Do you lack conviction? Think about what you're trying to accomplish and be sure it's really worthwhile.

Make a habit of productivity. These 8 ways of increasing your productivity will work if you use some of them every day. Making them part of your work habits will improve your production.

"The Michigan Florist," Feb. 1978.

Published by  
Colorado Flower Growers Association, Inc.  
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