THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO MAXIMIZING YOUR PRODUCTIVITY

In the office and at home

moneyminiblog

Contents

The Complete Guide to Maximizing Your Productivity

This guide will show you how to increase and maximize your productivity in the office and at home.

Preface

10 Important Actions You Can Take Right Now

When you're reading productivity articles, you don't want vague ideas, you want actionable steps that you can take to literally increase your productivity today. You want practical, applicable tips.

I've tried my best to make this blog full of actionable tips you can apply to every day of your life.

This article may be the most actionable of them all.

Here are 10 of the most important actions you can take right now, today, to increase your productivity by leaps and bounds…

In the Preface, I'm going to briefly go over much of what's in this guide. Each point has the relevant chapter linked below it.

1. Create Your Plan

If you want to actually accomplish something, you need goals. If you want to achieve those goals, you need a plan. A plan to improve. A plan to grow. But how do you create that plan? It's simple, here are 5 basic steps to create your own personal development plan:

1. Make a list of your priorities
2. Formulate goals based on those priorities
3. Develop a strategy to accomplish your goals
4. Write down your priorities, goals and strategy, in one place
5. Develop daily rituals to continuously act on your plan and your strategy

Once you have a plan in place, all you have to do is keep acting on it and reevaluate it monthly. Plans change as your goals change, so you'll want to make sure you're staying on track.

2. Clear Your To-Do List

To-do lists are great, but how often do we let them get so full that we can't even see the bottom?

It's OK. It happens.

That's why you need to clear your list.

Note: First, let me make something clear: I have a "brain dump" list for random notes and ideas that pop into my head. I think it's a great idea to keep a list like that, but know that it should not be the same list as your to-do list. On another note, you shouldn't be using your email inbox as a to-do list either. If it's an actionable item, put it on your list and archive the email. That makes getting to inbox zero much easier, doesn't it?

For clearing your list, it really comes down to a few things. You must:

- **Eliminate** unnecessary tasks
- **Automate** anything that can be automated
- **Delegate** things that you don't have to do yourself
- **Postpone** things that are less of a priority
- **Break Down** your list into action steps
- **Schedule** everything that's left

3. Conquer Your Mornings

I find my mornings to be the most productive time of the day. I can accomplish more between 4am-8am than I can the entire rest of the day.

There is something magical about the morning time. If you don't believe me, I suggest trying to rise early for 30 days. If it's not for you, you don't have to keep doing it, but I'm betting you'll be on board.

Becoming a morning person is actually pretty easy.

Start by making sure you're getting enough sleep, then begin to make a gradual shift to an earlier wake-up time. Start by waking up 15 minutes earlier than normal for one week. Then begin to keep reducing your wake-up time by 15 minutes every few days until you're where you want to be.

Try some or all of these positive and productive ways to start your day to make the transition as easy as possible. Sure caffeine can help, but don't strictly rely on drinking a pot of coffee to become a morning person. It doesn't work like that…or at least, not for long.

4. Maximize Your Energy

The most important (and most forgotten) part of your productivity is your energy level. You could read a million productivity tips, but if you don't have the energy to take action, they won't help much. So how do you maximize your energy?

First off, while sleep is very important, your energy is NOT all about sleep. In fact, if you're feeling fatigued, a few minutes of exercise could do more for you than a quick nap.

As long as you're getting enough sleep and most importantly, sleeping in 1.5 hour increments (sleep cycles: ex: 6 hours, 7.5 hrs, etc.), then you will need to increase your energy from other places.

Diet and exercise are the two most helpful areas to increase your energy. Learn how to gradually adopt healthy eating habits and slowly add more exercise into your daily routine. You will feel better…and the results are pretty quick.

5. Take Back Your Time

Where does your time go?

We all feel like there's not enough time in the day, but why? Do you know where your time is spent or do you spend your evening wondering where the day went? It's time to take control and here's how to do it:

- Make a list of where your hours are spent (work, home, school, etc.)
- Time your non-fixed activities (gym, grocery shopping, TV, etc.)
- Make a schedule to include things you need and want to do
- Plan for lazy blocks of time and even entire lazy days

It's perfectly fine to relax and even to be lazy, but you need to plan it out. Like anything, you'll want to reevaluate your schedule to make sure it's working and improve its efficiency.

6. Minimize Your Commitments

You're probably overcommitted. We all are. You may be someone who needs to say "no" more often.

Most importantly, you need to prioritize your commitments and eliminate the junk.

All your commitments should be getting you closer to your goals. If they aren't, they need to go. If you truly want margin and freedom in your life, you must limit yourself to the important things.

7. Reduce Your Choices

You make choices everyday, but you may be making more than necessary.

Living a choice-minimal lifestyle will free up your time for the things that are really important. Here are a few areas in which you can reduce your choices:

- Spend less time deciding what to wear. Limit your wardrobe to all matching items.
- Spend less time deciding what to eat. Separate your meals into pleasure (take your time to decide) and fuel (eating the same things over and over). I prefer dinners as my pleasure meals and I eat the same things for breakfast and lunch.
- Spend less time complaining and regretting. Both of these are just useless. Complaints help no one and they hurt you by shifting your mindset into the negative. Regrets serve no purpose. Live life, make mistakes, learn from them, move on.

8. Create Positive Habits

Positive habits are the foundation of a successful life. Whether that includes better financial habits, reading, working out or whatever fits into your life, positive habits will get you where you want to go.

So how do you create a positive habit? You start small.

Want to run a marathon, without prior running experience? Start by running half a mile or less. Then slowly move up to running more. Start so small that it almost seems too easy. So small you can't say "no" to doing it.

Positive habits are something you need to focus intently on and you must consistently practice them.

You have room for positive habits, even if you're "too busy". Of course, to create more room for positive habits, you may need to break some bad habits, but don't just break them, replace them!

9. Create More Discipline

I've said that energy is the most important part of productivity and that's true, but even if you have energy, a lack of self-discipline can still prevent you from improving and growing. But that's perfectly fine, because discipline is something you can improve.

Discipline is contagious, to others and in your own life. Discipline begets discipline.

Try starting a new morning running routine. You'll find that it's easier to stick with your other habits. When you're disciplined in one area, it's easier to become discipline in another. Completing tasks and accomplishing goals releases endorphins that can literally get you addicted to succeeding.

Just remember, much of discipline is about not being hard on yourself when you're undisciplined. You can try the old-school military-style discipline if you want, but more and more studies are showing that it's better to forgive yourself when you stumble or when you stop for a period of time.

10. Include Your Family

It's easy for us to get so caught up in improving ourselves and increasing our productivity that we forget to bring the family along.

This is not only key for being productive, but it's key for a healthy family.

Your spouse wants to be productive too, so help him/her to implement the new techniques you learn. Apply productivity hacks in your work and then bring them home so the whole family can benefit from them.

You can even start teaching your kids about productivity. And the best part is that once they learn to be more productive, that will increase your productivity even more!

Chapter 1

The Most Effective and Most Forgotten Part of Productivity

I have written plenty of articles on productivity and I have read thousands.

I've read articles, books, guides…pretty much anything you can think of, but I've noticed there's something that gets skipped over a lot.

This is probably the most important part of productivity, yet it's usually mentioned in a sentence or two and then forgotten.

What is this mysterious piece of the puzzle? I'm glad you asked, let me tell you…

Your Energy

That's it. The most important element of your productivity is your energy level. Without energy, nothing gets done.

Most of the time this gets dismissed by a simple "of course, you need to eat right and exercise" or something along those lines. **That's not enough.** This is a vital aspect. Seriously.

How can you utilize the latest productivity hack or advice if you don't even have the energy to get off the couch? Now I didn't write this to only tell you what the problem is; I'm going to give you the solution too…

Chris Bailey conducted [a year of productivity experiments](#).

In his findings he realized that all of the productivity advice he consumed and wrote about over the course of that year could be categorized into three areas:

- Time
- Attention
- Energy
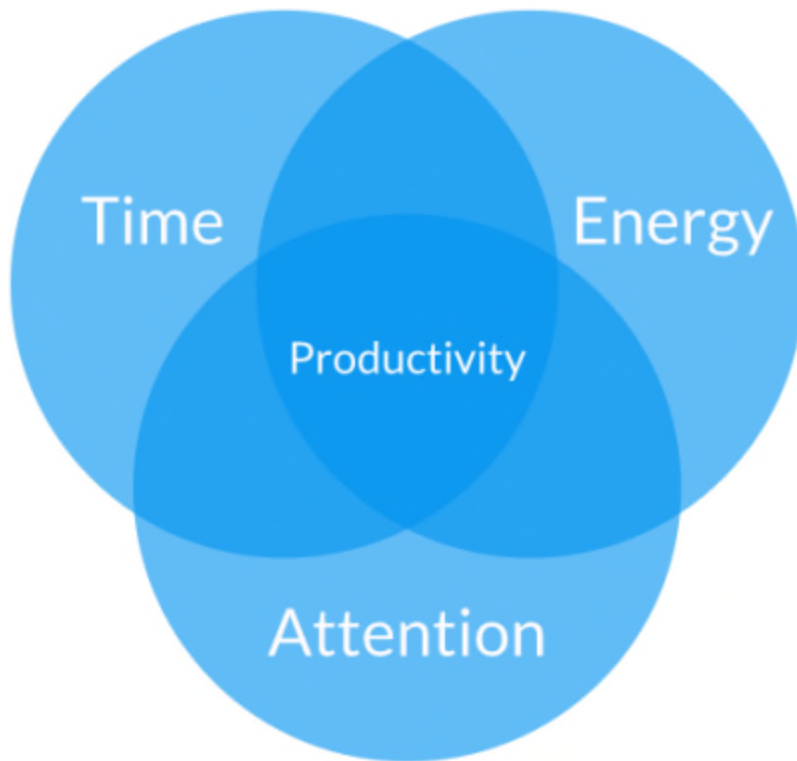
Of course we have to have the time to do what needs to be done. And your level of attention is directly related to your level of energy.

Now that I have your time and attention (see what I did there)…I'd like to dive straight in and tell you what you need to know about increasing your energy levels, because without energy, productivity advice is useless.

Energy is Not All About Sleep

Energy has less to do with sleep than you may think. Sure, you need to get enough sleep and try to plan your sleep around your sleep cycles (about 90 minutes each), which means sleeping in multiples of 90 minutes (ex: 6 hours, 7.5 hours, 9 hours). You'll also want to limit your caffeine, alcohol and heavy meals before bed and make sure you have a good mattress.

Other than that, your energy is about how you live your day.

New research suggests that exercise can fight fatigue better than taking naps and sleeping more. Exercise boosts your energy levels. If you wake up feeling tired, try going for a walk or doing some jumping jacks, then see how you feel. Trust me, it works.

In studies where groups have tried exercising vs. not exercising when tired, the first group was shown to have more energy. I think this sums up the typical thought process against exercising when tired:

"Too often we believe that a quick workout will leave us worn out — especially when we are already feeling fatigued," said researcher Tim Puetz, in a news release. Dr. Puetz recently completed his doctorate at the university and is the lead author of the study. "However, we have shown that regular exercise can actually go a long way in increasing feelings of energy — particularly in sedentary individuals."

There you have it. Exercise is key to more energy. But that's not all. Your diet is equally, if not more important. Enough with the studies, research and quotes from the docs…here are several ways to increase your energy:

1. Strategize your caffeine consumption, instead of overdoing it
2. Exercise first thing in the morning, even if only for a few minutes
3. Drink lots of water, especially right after you wake up
4. Keep early morning meals light; think smoothies, fruit and vegetables
5. Consume less heavy carbs (ex: white bread/flour, simple sugars, etc.)
6. [Don't hit the snooze button](#), it will only make you feel more groggy
7. When all else fails, take a nap or tie this in with #1 and take a [coffee nap](#)

If you really want to take your productivity seriously and get stuff done, you need to work on increasing your energy levels. Sleep right, eat right and exercise. That's really what it's all about. Even if you work a desk job, you can still get up and take a walk every couple hours. That will bring some energy back to your day.

As far as eating right goes, I personally know that I feel better than ever when I am eating a Paleo based diet. Fruits, vegetables, nuts and meat. No heavy grains, heavy starches or simple sugars. That works for me; find what works for you. Likewise, a green smoothie can give you the same boost as a cup of coffee. And remember to plan your meals around your productivity.

If you want to be productive, focus on your energy.

The Productivity Tip That Sounds Stupid, But Works

This productivity tip may sound ridiculous, but when you think about it, it makes sense.

Want to Be More Productive? Here's the Secret…

I'm going to give this away right now, in the beginning, but you must know three things:

1. It's going to sound really stupid.
2. It works, so ignore how stupid it sounds.
3. You must keep reading to take full advantage.

I need you to bare with me and hear me out, so put your thinking cap on (I love clichés).

Here it is: the best way to be more productive is to be productive.

We're both adults here, so let's be honest. You don't feel like doing stuff…way too often, as far as you're concerned. You want to be more productive, but you don't "feel" like being productive. Well there is the energy factor mentioned above, and you need to be self-aware of your own moods and methods, but as an adult, you've just got to start **doing**.

I know you don't *feel* like it, but since when has that been a thing for adults? You do it anyways, and here's why:

When you start getting stuff done, checking off that to-do list, and seeing results, the motivation comes. Motivation is not something you need in order to start getting things done; **motivation is something that comes with action**. And you know it. Action is powerful; it creates motivation, and it cures fear.

When you start seeing progress, it's easy to keep going. But you have to get started. That's why this isn't talked about in every productivity article — because it's hard. But all you have to do is get started, see what I'm talking about, and then it will click. From there, you'll be able to do this all the time.

Riding Motivation Waves

You know what a motivation wave is, because you've experienced it before.

That time when, out of nowhere, you decided to organize your entire DVD library. Or the time your house was messy for weeks until one day you decided to clean and you cleaned the entire house before dinner. Those are motivation waves. They're very real, and you must take advantage of them.

Sometimes they show up unannounced, and we don't know why, but you have to use them wisely. But the more important thing to know is that you can create motivation waves by taking action and getting stuff done. **Motivation always follows action.**

Listen to Dr. B.J. Fogg, originator of the [Tiny Habits](#) movement, briefly explain motivation waves: [click here to play video]

You've experienced this, right? I think we all have.

Putting it All Together

Remember, motivation waves don't always come unannounced. You can create them with action.

So once you start acting, and you create a motivation wave, ride it out. Here's what it looks like:

1. Take action.
2. Let the motivation hit.
3. Ride the motivation wave.

If you want to know more about motivation waves, here's a more detailed video from Dr. Fogg:

Once you start to implement this on a regular basis, you will start to see huge results.

You're essentially batching tasks together, and using action to create the motivation required to complete those takes.

And it will work wonders. Try it.

The next time you have a couple hours free, make a list of things you need to do, and start acting on them. Watch how it gets easier and easier as you go through the list. The motivation will get stronger as you check off more things and get everything done.

It's not hard to get things done, it's only hard to get started.

You could always boost the time by taking caffeine (see the toggle below) before you get started, but only if you're working in the first part of the day. The caffeine and the motivation wave will keep you awake if you start too late.

This isn't all just a "good idea," it's an actual method that works. I have used this method over and over, and the motivation does come. And then riding a motivation wave feels so productive. There's no better way to get a large task, or a long list of small tasks done. And there's no better way to spend a few free hours.

Chapter 2

6 Steps to Create Your Self-Development Blueprint

What is a self-development blueprint?

It's simply a game plan or a blueprint for improving your life and yourself.

We're constantly growing and learning. It helps to make a plan. Learning is much more effective when it's strategic.

Are you reading books, listening to audio and watching videos? Most of us are.

Are they getting you closer to your goals? Let's start working on your game plan…

Step 1: Start With Your Priorities

Start by asking yourself these 3 questions:

- Why do I want to improve myself?
- Why do I want to be more productive?
- What's the most important thing in my life?

Everything else is dependent upon your answers to those three questions.

They may seem like obvious questions, but you need to make sure you can actually answer them. Have you ever thought about it?

You must answer these questions before you can set your goals, because your goals should be based on the answers.

Step 2: Turn Your Priorities Into Goals

Your priorities define your goals.
Every time you set a new goal, ask yourself if it's inline with your priorities. Every goal will take you closer to your priorities or farther away.

Set S.M.A.R.T. goals. I'm sure you've heard it before, but that's because it works…

Specific. **M**easurable. **A**ttainable. **R**ealistic. **T**ime-Bound.

Step 3: Develop Your Strategy

This is where the self-development really starts. You need a strategy.
You can read self-help books all day long, but if they aren't related to your goals and priorities, are you really doing much good?

You should be developing a reading/listening/watching list of books/audio/video that you want to take in.

Find the best format for you. Some people like turning the crisp pages of a new book, others listen to books while they're out for a run. Or you may need to watch a video to help you focus and learn visually.

If you're like me, you do all three! The point is to find your favorite format and take advantage of it.

You should always have a list of relevant teaching ready. Plan it in advance. Don't wait until you finish a book to start searching for a new book. Plan ahead.

And be realistic with the information you take in. If it's productive for you to read several books at once, do it, but if you're only able to focus on one at a time, read one at a time.

You may want to plan different areas at different times of the day. Finance in the morning, productivity in the evening, health at supper time? You know if you're capable of doing it. Be honest with yourself.

Step 4: Create Your Plan

You've got your priorities and your goals. Now you know your strategy. Let's put it into action. Your plan should be written (like your goals) and it should be broken down.

Use these 4 steps to create your plan (we'll use books as an example):

1. **Write it down.** Write down everything, from the books you want to read to the goals you plan to accomplish.
2. **Break it down.** Figure out how many books you need to read each year and which goals you will complete.
3. **Break it down, again.** Break it down by month, then to the week. Then you should know how much you need to do.
4. **Create your days.** We will get into daily rituals in a moment. For now, just figure out how much you need to accomplish each day.

If you're married, it's good to create a plan together…and then tweak your individual plans.

Step 5: Develop Rituals

You should have a full plan now. The best way to accomplish your plan is to chip away at it with small, daily habits. And you'll want to create rituals.
The word "ritual" might make you think of religious activities or ceremonies, but that's not what we're talking about here. We need to get away from routines and work towards having rituals. Routines are boring, they never change and they aren't effective.

Here is how I define a ritual (I'm keeping it simple! You're welcome.):

An activity or group of activities, practiced daily, that leads you toward your goals.

When you're planning, use a schedule. And schedule your rituals.

If you're married, share a schedule with your spouse. My wife and I use Google Calendar. We both have iPhones, so we are able to sync our calendars. If one of us adds an event, the other automatically gets it. Perfecto!

I have a morning ritual and an evening ritual. I would recommend both. They have worked extremely well for me.

Step 6: Check, Re-Check and Check Again

Like any ongoing plan, your self-development blueprint should be ever-changing. It will grow as you grow.

Measuring your progress is the key to improving your plan.

Don't think of this as just a self-development blueprint, think of it as a life blueprint.

Your plan for improving yourself is your path to achieving your goals.

I'll end with one of the most common proverbs on planning, but think about it in context to your life plan:

"If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail." -Benjamin Franklin

Chapter 3

Choosing to Spend Your Time Productively

Let me guess. You have a to-do list and you add to it everyday.

You promptly go through each item and check it off, one after one.

By the end of the day, your list is completely empty and awaiting whatever tasks tomorrow holds.

Not so much?

Since you're here, reading this article, I assume that it doesn't go so smoothly. It doesn't go so smoothly for me either.

You are constantly adding to your list and occasionally checking something off.

Enough is enough. When your to-do list is so full that you forget about things at the bottom, it's time to change something.

Here's how to completely clear your to-list today and start getting stuff done, without overwhelming yourself…

Before You Clear the List

In David Allen's famous book "[Getting Things Done](#)", he talks about the importance of clearing your head and getting all of those thoughts out to make room for new thoughts. This is probably my favorite part of his entire book.

I think keeping a clear head is a *must*, to be as productive as possible, so I do this all the time.

I personally use an app that syncs to my Google task list, called [GoTasks](#).
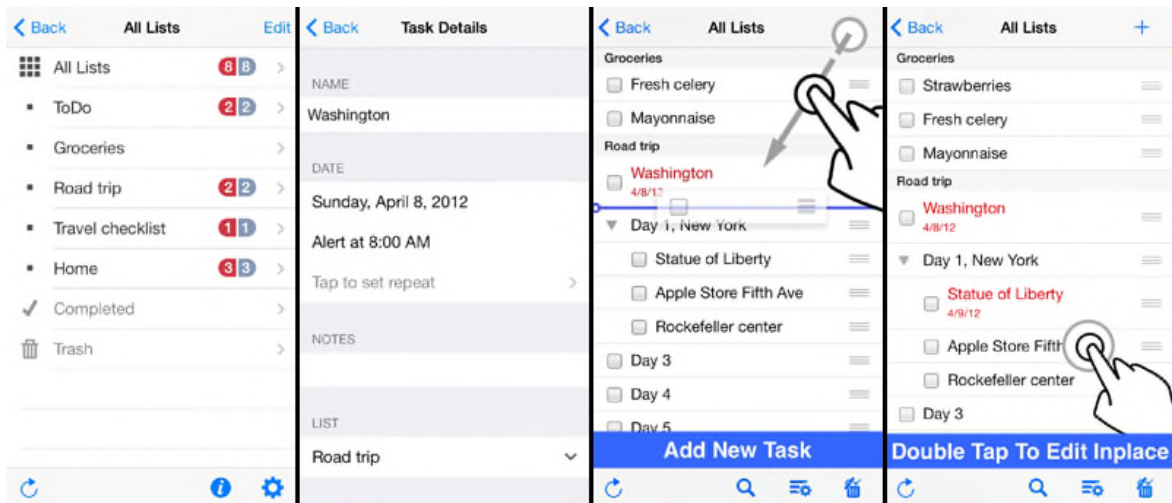
There's not much to it. It's simple. And I like it like that.

I have several different lists, including one I call "The Master List". **This is the list I use to brain dump.**

If I hear of a book or website I want to check out, I instantly put it on this list. If an idea pops into my head…this list. Literally everything goes here. Then later, I'll come through and sort it into my "Reading List" or my "Idea List", etc…

Now you know how my list is created. Your list may be similar, but either way, let's talk about clearing it.

6 Steps to Clear Your To-Do List

Here are the steps I take to clear my list. You can do this today and I recommend doing it at least once per week from this point on. It may take several hours the first day, but after you do it once, you can do it weekly and it will actually be a fairly quick process.

1. **Eliminate** – Go through every single item on your to-do list and eliminate the unnecessary tasks. Some you may have already completed, some may be out-dated and others may just not make sense anymore. Eliminate as much as you can.
2. **Automate** – You may have reoccurring tasks on your list (i.e. bills) that you don't have to be doing yourself. Automate as much as possible and you will create time for other tasks. At minimum, you can automate most parts of your finances.
3. **Delegate** – You may have things on your list that need to be done, but that doesn't mean *you* have to do them. Decide what you're willing to delegate and find the right person for the job. Try websites like Fiverr and Elance to find help.
4. **Postpone** – Many of the things on your list should simply be postponed. They may be important things that need to be done, but there also may be so many more important things that you just can't do them right now. It's OK to postpone.
5. **Breakdown** – Now you should have a list full of the top priorities and the must-do items. Break them down into reasonable increments and small sessions. You're getting ready to start scheduling everything that's left.

6. **Schedule** – Now that you have everything broken down and you know about how much time you'll need for each, put everything into your schedule. Once it goes into your schedule, check it off your to-do list. You now have a time slot for everything.

That's it. **Your schedule is the most important part.** If you want to get things done, you must make time for them, therefore you must schedule them.

It's Really That Simple

If you can't find time in your schedule for a task, you may need to put it off. You will also need to stick to your schedule to make this work.

For really large projects, schedule it daily.

For example: If you're writing a book, figure out how many words or pages you want your book to be. Divide that number by the number of days you want to complete your book in. Then write that many pages or words each day.

Once you put this stuff into your schedule, you'll be amazed at how it actually gets accomplished. To-do lists are awesome, but only when we actually do the things on the list!

I am guilty of having an overflowing to-do list. That's exactly why I knew I had to find a way to clear it, and of course, share that way with you. It can be stressfull to feel like you're never going to clear your list.

Now I hope you feel like you can clear it.

4 Productivity Principles You Need to Know

You want to work smarter, not harder. You want to be more efficient – more productive.

But what are some practical and applicable principles and techniques that can help you do that?

Here are four of the foundational principles you need to follow to achieve more in less time…

1. Pareto Principle

Pareto Principle – The 80/20 rule, which states that roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes or 80% of the results come from 20% of the work.

Think about it. In your work, business or side hustle, where do the results come from?

Asking this question will help you determine where to invest your time.

This also goes for your personal life as well. Exercise, dieting and personal development are a few examples.

This rule really shows you that you don't have to be perfect, you just have to focus on what's important.

Put this into action: Write down your top three most productive things in your work and in your personal life. Try to put at least 80% of your focus on your top items and watch the results role in. You may find that you're spending 80% of your time on things that really don't matter – things that are only getting you 20% of the results.

2. Parkinson's Law

Parkinson's Law – An adage that work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion. In other words, if you plan a one hour block for a task, you will work at a pace that gets the task done in an hour.

If I plan to write an article in two days, I will write it in two days. If I plan for 90 minutes, I'll get it done in 90 minutes.

This is one of those crazy laws of life that just seems to work. Use it your advantage.

Most importantly, if you know you can finish something within a given time period, stop wasting your time and dragging it out.

Put this into action: Use an actual timer and start setting some limits. Set a time to begin and a time to stop working.

3. Pomodoro Technique

Pomodoro Technique – The process of breaking your work into chunks. 25 minutes of work, followed by a 5 minute break – that's one pomodoro. Once you complete four pomodoros, take a longer break (20-30 minutes).
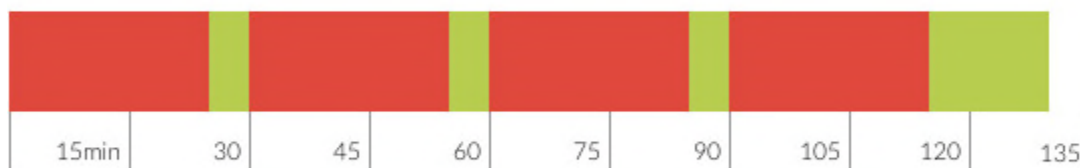
Parkinson's Law is in full force with the Pomodoro Technique. Before long, you'll know what you're capable of during a 25 minutes pomodoro and you will start knocking things out.

Put this into action: Get a timer and start the clock. Work for 25 minutes, rest for five. After four times, take a 30 minutes break. Then repeat the process.

4. Eisenhower Matrix

What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important. -Dwight Eisenhower

I've heard this referred to as many different things and countless authors have used it in their books, but it's most commonly referred to as the Eisenhower Matrix. It's as simple as it looks, but it does require you to be honest about your tasks.

You'll separate everything you need to do for the day into four categories:

- Urgent and important (do these immediately).
- Important, but not urgent (create your plan to do these).
- Urgent, but not important (delegate or automate these).
- Neither urgent nor important (eliminate these).

The problem is that we tend to focus too much of our time on the "urgent, but not important" and too little of our time on the "important, but not urgent". And that's completely backwards. Often, the "important, but not urgent" things are going to produce the greatest results in your life.

If something is important, but not urgent, that means 1) it could be one of the most important things you'll ever do, and 2) it's easy to keeping putting it off.

Put this into action: Create your own box. It doesn't need to be fancy; a simple paper and pen box will do. Write down a list of everything you need to do (or could do) today. Put each item in it's place. Then follow the place in parenthesis above for each item (ex: do urgent and important tasks immediately, eliminate neither urgent nor important tasks, etc.).

If You Want Freedom, Limit Yourself

So now that our to-do list is in order, we have to ask ourselves a few questions…

What's the point of productivity apps, to-do lists and organizational methods?

Why does an article about "10 quick productivity hacks" catch your attention so easily?

The answer is simple: freedom.

We're all looking for more time and ways to work "smarter, not harder"…and we should be. But you may be missing the first step.

What's the first step? Well, if you want more freedom in your life, first you must limit yourself…

Why Another Tool, App or Hack Isn't the Answer

Increasing your productivity is awesome. Half of this blog is dedicated to doing exactly that, but it's important to increase your productivity in the right areas.

You may be spending hours to make something more efficient, when in reality, it should just be eliminated.

Tools are great for working smarter and getting organized, but first, figure out what needs to go. Then you can start using the tools to make yourself more productive with what's left.

What You Need in Your Life

What is truly important to you? Family? Relationships? Your business? Leaving an inheritance? A legacy?

That's your starting place.

Are you working hard towards things that aren't important? You may be. We've all been guilty of it.

Limiting yourself starts with limiting distractions.

So what are your distractions? Television? Video games? The internet? Facebook?

It's true that being productive means accomplishing what you've set out to accomplish, thus, playing video games for a couple hours on a day you've set aside to play video games for a couple of hours is actually…productive. But that can't be everyday.

Your Top 20 (Or Your Top 10, Rather)

Think of a quick, mental list of the top 20 most important things in your life. How important are the last 10 things? Are they even necessary?

In my list, I would include my relationship with Jesus, spending time with my family, my commitment to the Air Force, exercise and this blog in the top five. The next five may include some important things like reading and traveling, but I can assure you that the last 10 items would need to go.

How much can you cut out and how much more time would that give you to focus on your top 10?

What You Need [to cut out] in Your Life

Personally, I know that I could spend much less time scrolling my Facebook news feed and I have. I've trimmed my life down to the bare bones and I keep trimming away.

How do you decide what you should cut out? Simple, just ask yourself if it's getting you closer to your goals on the top 10 items. If it is, keep doing it. If it's not, cut it out.

Playing video games with my kids on a Saturday gets me closer to my family goals. Playing video games by myself for 15 or 20 hours a week gets me farther away from my family goals. Therefore, I don't have time for the latter.

Here's How Freedom Through Limitation Works

If you want freedom, you must limit yourself. Overindulgence is not the answer.

I could try to explain "freedom through limitation" and the importance of it all day, but instead, I'll save your time and use an example to sum it all up. Here's how this works:

Cheat days are a great example and they work for almost everything.

The most common use for cheat days is dieting, but it can also work for other things you typically overindulge in, like technology. Here's how it works: give yourself one day each week to overdo it. Eat whatever you want, watch TV all day, play video games from morning until midnight, if you want.

But here's the kicker: you have to stay disciplined for the rest of the week. A cheat day on a diet won't be effective if you're cheating throughout the week as well. Once you get this down, it's extremely freeing. The food will taste better, the games will be more fun and you'll still be working toward your goals.

The best part? You won't feel guilty for doing it.

I remember the first cheat day I gave myself when I first started the Body for Life diet, that helped me lose 50 pounds of fat. It was a good day. I ate everything that I had wanted to eat all week. It felt great knowing that I was still climbing toward my weight loss goals, as I was eating half of a large deep dish pepperoni pizza. And after an entire day of it, I was ready to not look at unhealthy foods for another week.

Set Limits and Give Yourself Freedom

So if you want to put this into action today, start with a cheat day in some area. See how freeing it is and then branch out into the rest of your life. Adding discipline into your life will only give you more freedom. Limits allow for freedom; the freedom to live your life to the fullest.

If you want true freedom in life, you must limit yourself. When we overindulge on a daily basis, we feel terrible (mentally and physically), we feel guilty and we often feel sorry for ourselves. We don't even enjoy the things that we continuously overindulge in. Moderation and limitation brings the enjoyment back.

If you want to feel better and be happier, set some limitations. You'll thank yourself.

How to Focus Your Time on What Matters

We are always trading our time for something. Everything we do is a trade-off.

If you want to be happy, accomplish your goals and live a fulfilled life, you'll have to stop focusing on what doesn't matter and start focusing on what does.

How do you do that? You've got to take your time back. Start by spending less time on these 5 things:

1. Spend less time on "what to wear"

Create an easier method for getting dressed, like eliminating things in your wardrobe that don't match. This way you'll know you can wear any shirt, shoes and pants together and they will match. Or you could go even more minimal and use a method like President Obama's idea to

only wear blue and grey suits. Focus your time and energy on more important things. Some people are actually starting to wear the same thing everyday to avoid this daily decision and focus their time on what matters.

2. Spend less time on "what to eat"

Separate your meals into two categories: meals for fuel and meals for pleasure. Instead of using those valuable morning brain cells (some of us only have so many in the morning) to decide what you'll have for breakfast, simply have the same thing everyday or plan your meals ahead of time. Figure out which meals are truly for pleasure, such as dinner with the family or eating out with friends and use those meals to carefully decide what you'll eat; for the rest of your meals, don't waste time on them.

3. Spend less time accommodating others

This goes back to learning how to say "no". You only have about 25,000 days in your adult life, don't spend them accommodating the needs of other people. Caring about others is important; however, being a people-pleaser can be a trap that steals your time. You can apply this in several ways, such as avoiding unknown phone calls and only checking email once or twice per day. Unknown calls steal your time and break your focus, and they are almost always unimportant (read: if they're important, they'll leave a message). Checking your email constantly can be extremely distracting and most of the items in your inbox are for someone else's agenda. Put others on your time.

4. Spend less time complaining

We all know that complaining doesn't help anything and we all do it at one point or another. Not only does complaining not help, but it actually shifts us into a negative mindset and kills our focus. Try a 30 day no-complaint challenge. Simply go 30 days without complaining about a single thing and then see the results. When you're forced to practice optimism in every situation, you'll be surprised at how much better things will go. You'll have ideas that would have never happened if you were complaining – you'll be forced to look for solutions and change situations instead of complaining about how bad they are. Try it and let me know the results.

5. Spend less time regretting

We've all missed opportunities. If we make a mistake and learn from it, it's no longer a mistake, but more of a growing experience or a lesson. Look back on anything that you're not happy with. Make up your mind to take a lesson away from whatever it is and then forget about it. It's done. It's over. It already happened and it can't be changed. Now that you're no longer complaining, it only makes sense to stop regretting. If you eliminate the time you spend regretting, you'll force yourself to be future-minded instead of living in the past. You'll reap some awesome benefits when you're living in the present and looking to the future. The past is over so get over it.

Here's the bottom line: Eliminate trivial choices so you can spend more time making decisions about things that matter.

Want even more time in your day? Figure out how much time you spend on everyday things and learn what's stealing your time.

A Weekly Review to Give You 10 Extra Hours Each Week

The idea of a weekly review was first made popular by David Allen.

He suggests that you cut out a block of time each week to review the previous week, and an additional block of time to plan the upcoming week.

I've learned a lot from his methods and I incorporate much of his teachings in my processes.

But the fact is, you don't want a weekly review that takes several hours to complete. Because you won't do it.

Here's a quick weekly review that doesn't take all day, and will save you countless hours throughout the week…

1. Clear

- **Clear your work area.** This includes your physical desk, and your computer desktop. File all of the loose papers and close all of the unneeded windows on your computer.
- **Clear your inbox.** Inbox zero is a good goal, but don't obsess over it. When I clear out my inbox, I file it into "Action Required" if there is action to be taken on the email, "Reference" for non-action emails that I may need information from, and "Archives" for everything else. If you need to find an email, do a quick search. This will eliminate all the time spent filing, and searching has actually been shown to be quicker than looking for a filed email.
- **Clear your head.** You should have a way to collect ideas that come to you throughout the day, but if you've been thinking about something and you haven't written it or typed it down yet, do that now. I created a simple "Idea Capture" list in GoTasks to accomplish this.

2. Reflect

- **Review the previous week.** Figure out what went right and what went wrong. The good and the bad, because you can learn from all of it. Come up with a list of questions to ask yourself like "What did I do well?…and not so well?" and "Did I reach my goals?", etc..
- **Review the specific hours you spent.** Did you spend more or less time reading than you wanted to? What about working on your side project? Journaling? Exercising? Writing? This will really highlight when you've been putting something off for a long time. It only takes a few weekly reviews to realize that you're never going to get to some things unless you start putting them in your schedule now.
- **Review your "someday, maybe list".** If you don't have a "someday, maybe list", you should start one. It's one of David Allen's ideas that stuck with me. You know all of those big dreams and ideas you have, like learning a new language, taking a self-defense class or going skydiving? Things you've always wanted to do, but you can't do them right now? You're never going to actually do any of that if you don't write it down somewhere to remind yourself that you want to do it. Just don't forget to actually review this list each week.

3. Plan

- **Schedule your to-do list.** Make sure everything that's done is checked off, and look at what isn't done. Once it's down to only things you haven't yet completed, you're ready to schedule. The only way you're really going to clear your to-do list is to schedule what's on it.
- **Schedule your upcoming week.** Yes, schedule everything. I schedule time for work, writing and exercise, but I also schedule time for reading, journaling and doing whatever I want. That's right, it's perfectly productive to have time set aside to do whatever you feel like doing at the time, but letting that happen all the time is morbidly unproductive. I even schedule when I'm going to run errands based on where I'll be throughout the week.
- **Learn to be flexible.** Sometimes you have to say "no" to people when you already have things on your schedule, even if it's something that can be done later. It's important to stick to your schedule; however, you don't want to become a time nazi. It's ok to break away from your schedule occasionally, just don't make it a habit.

I do my weekly review on Sunday evenings. It doesn't matter *when* you do it, only *that* you do it.

Final Tip: One thing that's helped me a lot with my to-do list is adding a "next action" beside each item. This makes it super easy to schedule. If you have a large project on your to-do list, simply ask "what's the next action that needs to happen for this item?" It may be as simple as doing some internet research. If that's the case, schedule that internet research. This is a sure way to be productive and to clear your to-do list.

The most important thing is to not make this review process easy enough so you'll actually do it. Mine takes about 30 minutes, and never more than one hour. That's less than one hour for an entire week. That's what people mean when they say a one hour weekly review can save tons of hours throughout the week. It's true. One hour of planning can add up to 10 hours of productivity to your week. Planning is powerful.

How Much Time Does it Take You to _____?
What's Stealing Your Time? Here's How to Take Control

Chapter 4

Let Them Do the Work: Learning From Others

There are plenty of things that have already been figured out by others.

There's no need to make "trial and error" your primary form of learning.

So let's dive into some ways you can learn how to be productive from people who have already been successful at it.

First, we'll go back and take a look at what we can learn from Benjamin Franklin about productively, in regards to the 13 virtues he lived by. Then, we'll look to some awesome podcasts you can subscribe to right now. Finally, we'll close this chapter with several TED talks that will positively shift your paradigm.

Benjamin Franklin's on Productivity

Benjamin Franklin was widely known for his practices and habits…specifically: his virtues.

He was a lifehacker before it was cool.

He believed in living a fulfilling and productive life, which is what brought him to these 13 virtues.

I'll go over each one and show you how to apply them to your life to increase your productivity.

The 13 Virtues

1. **Temperance**. Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
2. **Silence**. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.
3. **Order**. Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.
4. **Resolution**. Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.
5. **Frugality**. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.
6. **Industry**. Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
7. **Sincerity**. Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
8. **Justice**. Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
9. **Moderation**. Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
10. **Cleanliness**. Tolerate no uncleanliness in body, cloaths, or habitation.
11. **Tranquillity**. Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.
12. **Chastity**. Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.
13. **Humility**. Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

1. Temperance

Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.

Food provides energy, but overeating (or eating the wrong kinds of food) can kill productivity. How productive would you be after eating a couple thousand calories of junk? People do it everyday. McDonald's for lunch, and then they wonder why they feel so tired in the afternoon. Or a huge bowl of sugary cereal for breakfast, and then they think they have some sort of [Chronic Fatigue Syndrome](), because they're "always tired." *By the way, CFS is very real, and I'm not making light of it, but if you're constantly tired, try changing your diet first.* As far as drinking goes, drinking too much alcohol will not only eliminate any chance of productivity for that day, but it will steal the day after as well. To sum it up: eat like an adult and drink responsibly.

2. Silence

Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.

Trifling (unimportant or trivial) conversation is one of the biggest time wasters of this day. Small talk is fine for a few minutes, but don't get carried away. How often have you talked to someone for 30 minutes, only to realize you didn't talk about anything of importance? Yeah, me too. We're all guilty of doing this a little too much. Don't let it steal your time. On a similar note, there's absolutely no place for negativity in the realm of productivity. Negativity is useless.

3. Order

Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.

Home organization can steal so much time. As they say, "a place for everything, and everything in it's place." Make sure you have a place for everything in your home. Nothing will waste more time than walking around trying to figure out where something goes. It may take a few days to make a place for everything, but it will save countless hours down the road. Make a place for everything, or get rid of it, and make time for what's truly important.

4. Resolution

Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.

Do what you set out to do. But an important step before that is to actually set out to do something. Plan your time before it happens. Set daily goals and beyond. You need an agenda to strive for, and then you can accomplish the day's work.

5. Frugality

Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.

Do the right things. Don't waste the precious things. Time is one of the most wasted things of our day. Like I said above, set out your plan and do it. If you always do what you planned to do, time is not wasted. That can mean getting a lot of work done, or relaxing the day away. If you plan to do it, it's productive – work, as well as rest.

6. Industry

Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.

Define and eliminate the unnecessary. Resolve to live a choice-minimal lifestyle. Get rid of the distractions. That could mean negative friends, clutter around your home, or something as simple as cable TV.

7. Sincerity

Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.

Choose your words carefully. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Don't drag others down, and again, don't waste your time on meaningless conversation. Strive to always do right and good, whatever that means to you.

8. Justice

Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.

Hold yourself responsible and accountable to others. Do what you need to do and don't do what you shouldn't do. Don't make excuses. Sometimes just eliminating what you shouldn't be doing can add hours to your day. And you know what you should and shouldn't be doing.

9. Moderation

Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.

As simply and cliché as I can put it, "everything in moderation". Hard work is good, relaxation is good, fun is good, but all of those can be detrimental if you overdo it. Try to stay clear of extremes – they're usually harmful.

10. Cleanliness

Tolerate no uncleanliness in body, cloaths, or habitation.

Live a clean lifestyle. Stay disciplined to be clean in your hygiene and habits. Eat a clean diet. Keep clean friends, not just in hygiene, but in their habits and lifestyle.

11. Tranquillity

Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

We all make mistakes. Successful people usually make more than anyone, and that's because they understand the power of learning from their mistakes. Don't let mistakes or errors hold you back. Learn and move on, and you'll get better. Every time. It's only truly a mistake if you don't grow from it.

12. Chastity

Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.

This was a pretty bold statement for the times. It's pretty plain and simple: don't indulge in sexual actions that will compromise your body or your emotions. With a culture of casual sex and one-night stands, this is an important topic. I'm not telling you how to live your life – that's up to you – but from what I know and from what studies show, this type of behavior is only going to cause problems. Don't think about the short-term pleasure, think about your long-term character and emotional stability.

13. Humility

Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

Humility is one of the foundations of character. This should be obvious as to how it applies to your character, but how does it apply to productivity? In several ways. The most important being this: **practicing humility helps you learn and move on easier than someone who is prideful.** If someone corrects you, accept the correction and take a lesson from it. Even if they're wrong, there's still a lesson to be learned. Defending your position or explaining why someone else is wrong is a waste of time. Don't worry so much about what others think.

Read these virtues for yourself and truly think about how they apply to your life.

10 of the Best Productivity Podcasts Right Now

"There are few uses for a smart phone that are more productive than listening to a good podcast."
*
-Abraham Lincoln

If you're into podcasts, you know there are thousands to choose from.

It can be overwhelming to find the best ones. And how do know which podcasts are the best? Reviews? Ratings? Recommendations?

I've been listening to podcasts for years and I've listened to the good and the bad.

I could put together a list of the top 100, but I'll save your time. Why subscribe to hundreds of podcasts when there are plenty of old episodes to go through?

Even if you just listen to few, you'll be busy browsing the archives for months if not years. So here are the top 10 best podcasts on productivity for 2015…

1. The 5 AM Miracle

New show released: Weekly
★★★★★

The 5 AM Miracle is hosted by Jeff Sanders. I've been listening to his podcast for a few years now and I look forward to it every week. This show is dedicated to "dominating your day before breakfast". Jeff gives all kinds of advice on productivity, increasing energy levels, waking up early and getting things done. He also talks about plant-based nutrition for increasing your energy levels and he eats *a lot* of bananas.

2. Achieve Your Goals

New show released: Weekly
★★★★★

Achieve Your Goals is Hal Elrod's podcast, usually hosted by Nick Palkowski. Hal Elord is the author of *The Miracle Morning*, which I highly recommend. Hal talks about different strategies and ideas for achieving your goals and he has some highly-accomplished guests on weekly to teach you how they achieve their goals. I listen to every new episode when it's released and I have gone through the archives to hear all the old ones.

3. [This is Your Life](#)

New show released: Weekly

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

This Your Life is Michael Hyatt's podcast, hosted by Michele Cushatt. Michael Hyatt, former Chairman and CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishers, shares everything he has learned as a CEO to help you with your productivity. The show is geared towards bloggers and writers, but everyone can benefit from the information he shares. He often gives tips and ideas that I haven't heard elsewhere. It's not the basic advice that you can hear on any other podcast.

4. [Daily Discipline](#)

New show released: Weekly

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

Daily Discipline is hosted by Rory Vaden. Rory goes into detail about how to create more discipline in your life. He interviews an expert guest each week. He is also the best-selling author of [Take the Stairs](#) and [Procrastinate on Purpose](#). He usually speaks for the first part of the episode and then interviews a guest in the second part. He gives some seriously practical and applicable advice on productivity through discipline and habits.

5. [Entrepreneur on Fire](#)

New show released: Daily

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

Entrepreneur on Fire is hosted by John Lee Dumas. John gives you actual advice that you can use. It's all actionable tips and ideas. He releases a new episode every single day, as he chats with experts including Tim Ferriss and Seth Godin. If you're ever not sure what to do, just scroll through his archives for hundreds of episodes on everything you could imagine. He's actually not too far from having a thousand episodes in his archives (just under 900 right now).

6. The Art of Charm

New show released: 3x/week
★★★★★

The Art of Charm is hosted by AJ and Jordan Harbinger. These are two regular guys who are interviewing experts from all over, asking the questions that you want to ask. The show is funny, fun to listen to and informative. They also talk about relationships and self-confidence. If you're looking for a productivity podcast, you'll learn a lot from this one.

7. Beyond the To-Do List

New show released: Usually weekly
★★★★☆

Beyond the To-Do List is hosted by Erik Fisher. This is one of the most popular productivity podcasts and for good reason. Erik has talked to just about every productivity expert out there. This show is all about achieving goals and becoming more productive with all kinds of practical tips. He also talks about priorities and how to know which work to get done.

8. [The Productivityist](#)

New show released: Weekly

★★★★⯨

The Productivityist is hosted by Mike Vardy. This show is hit or miss, but the good episodes are *really* good. The first episode I ever listened to seemed boring and I almost turned it off, but he said something that caught my attention, so I decided to listen to another episode and I loved it. So, be sure to try out a few different episodes before making your decision with this one. Also, the beginning of the episodes can be a little slow, so stay tuned through the first part.

9. [The Tim Ferriss Show](#)

New show released: Weekly

★★★★⯨

The Tim Ferriss Show is hosted by, you guessed it, Tim Ferriss. This show is categorized under investing, since that's the main focus, but I thought it made sense to put it on this list. First, this is a finance and productivity blog, so a podcast with both of those things needs to be on here. Second, this show is full of advice from all kinds of experts (including Tony Robbins and Ramit Sethi) on everything you could imagine. It will give your productivity and your finances a boost for sure.

10. [The Productivity Show](#)

New show released: At least weekly

★★★★★

The Productivity Show is hosted by Asian Efficiency. This is my most recent find. It's also one of the newest podcasts on this list. I've read the Asian Efficiency blog before, but I really enjoy the podcast. The show is based heavily on David Allen's GTD philosophy, though they also talk about other effective productivity hacks and time management techniques. So far, from my recent listening, I think I'm going to love this podcast. They also talk about habits and rituals a lot, which I love.

*Note: Abraham Lincoln did not actually say the beginning quote. At least, not as far as I know.

6 TED Talks That Will Change the Way You View Productivity

I'm a long-time fan of TED talks. In fact this post is kind of a "part 2."

I wrote [6 TED Talks That Will Change the Way You Think About Money](#) in early 2015.

Ever since I published that, I've wanted to post about productivity TED talks. Here it is.

The whole idea of a TED talk is to change your thinking. I've watched countless hours of these talks, and the speaker is always attempting to either change your mind, or your mindset. That's exactly what these speakers do. And that's a good thing.

Chapter 5

A Few Things I've Found to Increase Productivity

My morning ritual is the foundation of my productivity, from day to day.

So we'll start there…

I have two personalities. My night self and my morning self.

Sometimes we don't get along.

When my night self decides to stay up a little later, my morning self isn't too happy.

My night self goes to sleep thinking about all of the great and productive things I'm going to do in the morning.

But sometimes my morning self wakes up thinking my night self is an over-achiever and I should go back to sleep.

Sound familiar? Here is how I am able to combat my morning self and get stuff done…

My Morning Ritual

My day begins at 5am, as I ~~roll~~ spring out of bed and make my way to the computer.

I write for an hour and then I'm off to the gym.

When I get to the gym, I lift weights for an hour. (while listening to a great audiobook or podcast, of course)

Then I get my daily hour of cardio, either with my squadron or on my own.

After that, I head back home, work on my blog for about half an hour before getting ready and heading off to work.

But it wasn't always like this…

How I Became a Morning Person

I decided one day that I wanted to be a morning person. I woke up earlier than I ever had before.

I had the most productive morning of my entire life, so then the next day I woke up and did it again, right? Nope.

I let my morning self defeat me the following day. That's when I realized that I have to learn how to deal with the morning me, by planning ahead the night before.

My night self was all about the things I was going to accomplish in the morning, but my morning self thought my night self was crazy and expected too much. I would wake up thinking about the mountain of tasks I planned to do. It was intimidating.

Eventually, all of that changed and I started waking up consistently and energetically. **Every morning.**

Here are some things that I started doing:

- Sleeping 7 hours (minimum) each night
- Drinking water as soon as I wake up
- Having a ritual at night to wind down
- Rewarding myself for waking up daily
- Only drinking caffeine before noon

I know this is where most people would say something about the importance of breakfast, but since I subscribe to the intermittent fasting philosophy, I don't eat breakfast…at least, not until lunchtime.

It's important to eat high quality, real food. However, many studies are starting to show that when you eat makes very little difference.

How to Perfect Your Mornings

I used to sleep until noon. I wasn't always a morning person.

It is possible to "become a morning person". You just have to take it one step at a time.

Here are some ways to deal with the morning you:

- **Commit to One Thing:** The idea behind this is that you commit to doing just one thing that gets you out of bed, like brushing your teeth or drinking a glass of water. After that, you can go right back to bed. However, once you are up and thinking clearly, you will usually stay up.
- **Think About One Thing:** Stay in the "one-thing" mindset. As soon as you wake up, you're mind is flooded with everything you have to do all day. That's not very motivating for the morning you. Take it one step at a time. By the time you get to the other things, you'll be wide awake.
- **Schedule a Nap Later:** It's much easier to get out of bed when you know you can take a nap later on. Naps are actually used by some of the most productive people in history, including Winston Churchill, Thomas Edison and John F. Kennedy. So don't feel lazy, it's productive!
- **Plan Your Mornings:** You're more likely to wake up if you prepare the night before. Set out your clothes, setup your coffee for easy preparation, write a to-do list…these are just a few of the ways you can plan your morning. Remember, a productive morning starts the night before.
- **Drink Some Water:** The morning is the most important time to hydrate your body, because you just went 7 or 8 hours with no water! And water is the most important thing we put into our body, which makes it a great start to the day. After drinking a large glass, you may not even need coffee.

- **Stop Hitting Snooze:** The snooze button is our first opportunity to practice discipline or procrastination. Don't start your day with procrastination. Once your morning self gets out of bed, you'll realize those 9 minutes weren't worth it. Why not, just buy an [alarm clock without a snooze](#)?

While we're talking about alarm clocks, you could always try this:

The Key to Habit Building

If you're used to waking up at noon and you decide to start getting up at 5am, that shouldn't happen in one day.
That's a 7 hour difference! And making that change instantly can guarantee failure.

The key positive habit building is starting small and increasing gradually.

Try waking up 30 minutes earlier, each day, for a few days. If you find that you're very tired that way, just start cutting back by 5 minute increments.

Make small changes. Build habits gradually and you will stick with them.

It's also much easier to get up when you have a blueprint for your life, like this one you created in [Chapter 2](#).

3 Apps That Are Taking My Productivity to the Next Level

I don't like to have a hundred different apps on my phone.

The more I have, the less benefit I get from the ones I do have.

For me, the 80/20 rule definitely applies to the apps I use on a daily basis.

I'm using [actually less than] 20% of my apps for 80% of my productivity. And here they are…

1. [Blinkist](#)

Blinkist offers over 1,500 book summaries, with 40 new summaries each month. And these are the good books.

Blinkist creates the best book summaries I've ever read. You can use it on the website, or you can use the app on your phone. When you use the app, you can even get the audio version of the book summary.
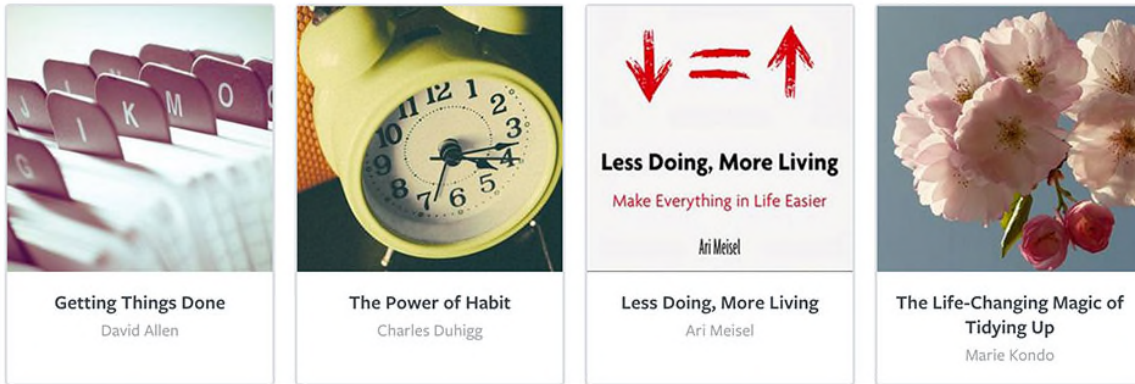
I never knew book summaries could be this effective. I've read book summaries before, but I always felt like they were lacking. These are different. I have to highlight and review the summaries a few times to feel like I've retained most of the points.
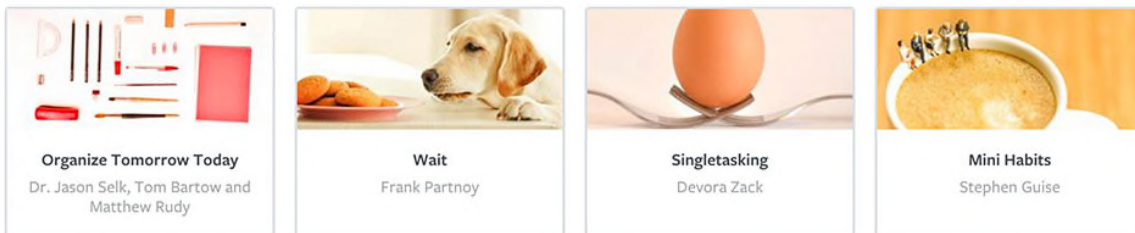
Just to test out the quality, I went through several summaries of books that I've already read, and it seemed like the summaries captured over 90% of the book. For example, I started with David Allen's *Getting Things Done*, and compared the notes that I had taken from reading the book once through and listening to the audio book once. From both sets of notes, there were only a handful of things that weren't in the book summary, and those things weren't that big of a deal.

It goes back to the 80/20 rule. With few exceptions, 80% of the information comes from 20% of the book. If you select the right pages, you can get 80% of the book from reading 20%. That's what book summaries are. Of course, it's still good to read, but adding book summaries to the mix is a way to change it up and get more out of your overall reading plan. This is similar to how I recommend going back through the books you've read and just reading the highlights, except someone else took the highlights out for you.

Not only does Blinkist have some of the best books (including most of the books on my top [finance books] and top [productivity books]), but the summaries are well written and easy to read. Here are a few of the books from one page:
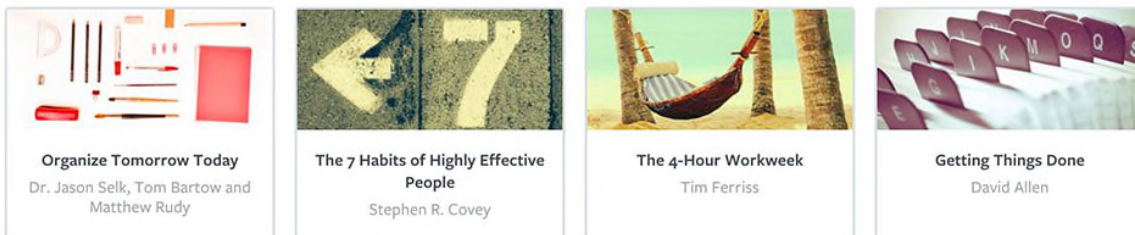
Getting Things Done — David Allen
The Power of Habit — Charles Duhigg
Less Doing, More Living — Ari Meisel
The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up — Marie Kondo

Just added

Organize Tomorrow Today — Dr. Jason Selk, Tom Bartow and Matthew Rudy
Wait — Frank Partnoy
Singletasking — Devora Zack
Mini Habits — Stephen Guise

Featured audio books 🎧

Hear them on our iOS and Android apps

Organize Tomorrow Today — Dr. Jason Selk, Tom Bartow and Matthew Rudy
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People — Stephen R. Covey
The 4-Hour Workweek — Tim Ferriss
Getting Things Done — David Allen

I signed up for the free 3-day trial, and quickly upgraded to Blinkist Plus, because I could see the value immediately.

Of course, if you sign up and you don't care for it, there is a 30 day no-questions-asked money-back guarantee.

Try Blinkist for Free

2. **Productive App**

Productive App is the best habit tracking app I've ever used.

I have completed more of my habits each day since I got the app than I ever have in my life.

Building good habits is the foundation of a successful life. You won't start to achieve goals, without first building good habits.

You can set habits for morning, afternoon, evening, or "any time during the day." And the app makes you want to complete things. You want to slide your finger across the item and check it off. If you check off everything for the day, you have a perfect day. Then you can try to go for a streak of perfect days. It's fun to look in your "Life Stats" and see how many perfect days you've had.
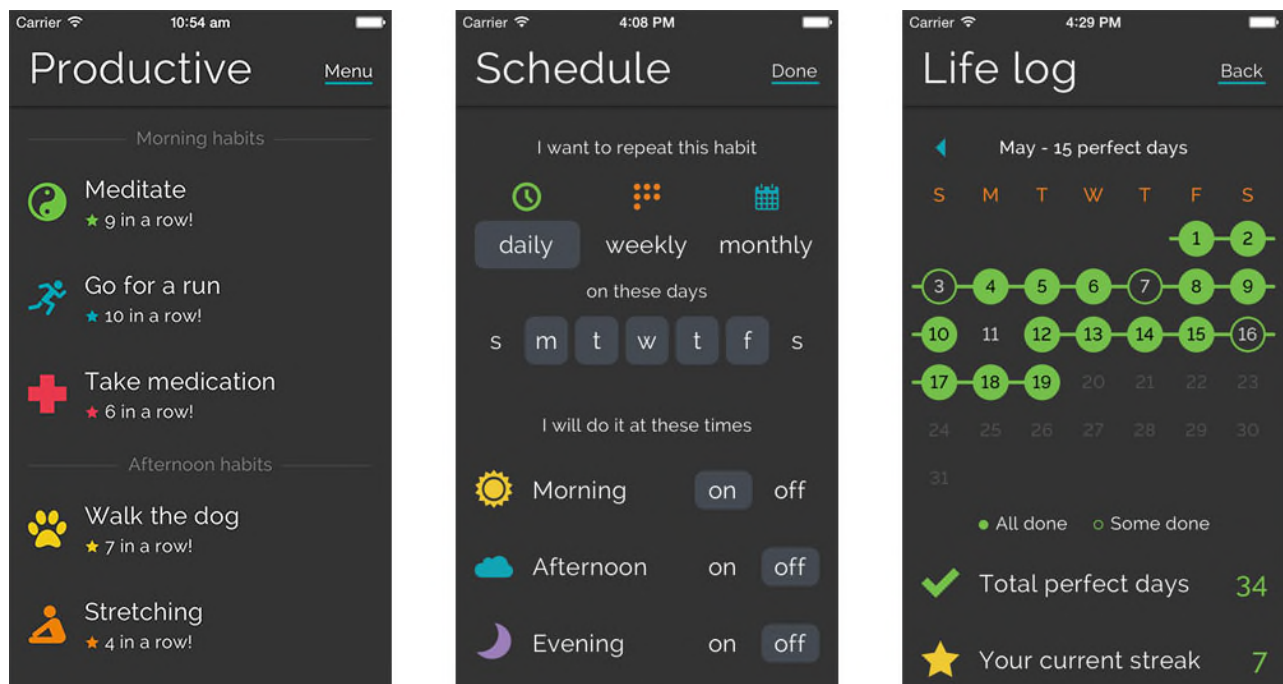
I've put my entire morning ritual and evening ritual into the app to track. And I've added several habits to each of those rituals since.

Since I have downloaded Productive App, I have:

- Written my MITs (Most Important Tasks) for the next day, every night
- Stuck with my exercise routine, and gradually increased it weekly
- Taken my vitamins every single day, morning and evening
- Weighed myself every morning
- Flossed every evening

These are all things that I did some days, maybe even most days, but now I do them everyday.

If I open my phone and want to get on Facebook, or some other unproductive app, I first open Productive App. If I have a habit to do, I'll do that instead of opening Facebook. It's amazing how much less I open other apps now. I have a lot of habits in the app. Mostly tiny habits.

As a side note, this app was actually created by Jaidev Soin, the creator of the *Balanced* app, which was one of my favorite apps in the past. Everything that *Balanced* was lacking is available in Productive App.

You can download Productive App for free, and track your habits. I upgraded to Premium within the first day. It's only a few dollars, and it couldn't be more worth it. I would easily pay 10 times that much, now that I've used it for a couple months. With Premium, you can add unlimited habits. And you get access to stats and data to help you see trends, strengths, and weaknesses in your habit building.

[Try Productive App for Free](#)

3. **Swipes**

Swipes is a task managing app. But it's different. And better than the rest.

Swipes took the GTD (Getting Things Done) philosophy and turned it into an app.

You add tasks like a regular task manager, but that's the only thing that's like a regular task manager. First, you have to actually do the task at a certain time. If you add an item, it will ask you when you want to accomplish it. If you don't do the item, it will prompt you to reschedule. So your items never go undone, they just get rescheduled. And you can only reschedule a task a few times before you realize how much you're procrastinating.

The other amazing part of this app is the action steps. If you have a project to do, that's not a single task. And this app recognizes that by using "action steps" that you can add to a task. The task might be "Make a Presentation," but the action steps will include "Create an Outline, Draft the Review, Submit to Supervisor, etc.." That alone is worth having the app. It helps to break down the projects that seem so daunting.

Here's a quick screenshot of a few of my tasks:
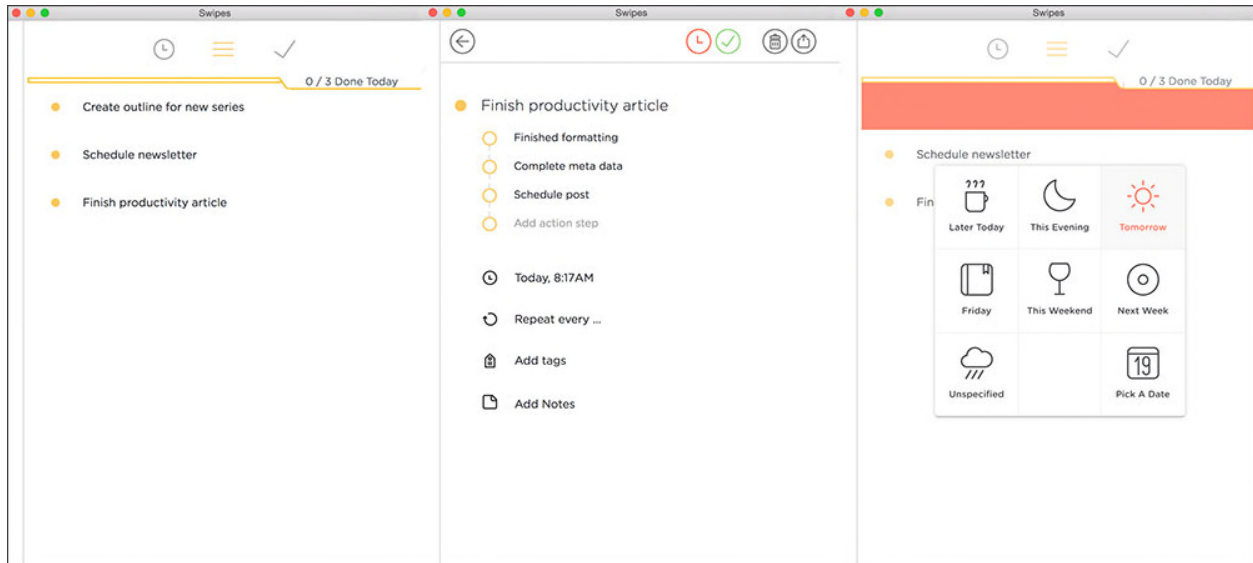
Swipes is free for now, but they're working on a premium version. I suggest downloading it before the premium version is released, so that you have a chance of being grandfathered in if they remove features from the free version.

[Try Swipes App for Free](#)

3 New Things I've Been Doing to Increase My Productivity

I'm a walking productivity experiment.

I like to try new things and find new ways to increase my productivity. Then I bring you the results and let you decide whether or not to implement these things in your life.

I've been doing three new things that have really been working to make my life more productive and actually, all three of these are saving me money too.

These are kind of random, but brilliant and you won't find these all over the internet like most tips. Here's what I've been doing…

1. James Bond Showers

You may have read about the benefits of cold showers, but have you heard of a James Bond shower? I first read about them on [The Art of Manliness](#) and this is how they work:

1. Turn the water on to hot temperature.
2. Wash your hair and your body like normal.
3. When you're ready to rinse, turn the water to cold.
4. Turn off the shower. Step out. Feel amazing. Look like this:

So why are these showers so awesome, or more importantly, why are they so productive? Well there are several reasons to take cold showers and you can read those here, here and here. I'm not going to bombard you with the information you can get all over the internet, but here is what I have noticed since I started taking James Bond showers (or cold showers in general):

- I feel more alert.
- My energy levels significantly increase for hours.
- I spend less time in the shower, since the water is cold.
- Therefore, I save money by using less water (especially less hot).
- This may just be a mind game, but they seem to put me in a good mood.

I feel better overall when I take them and it's still this way after several months. I can't recommend them enough. Just try it a few times and see if you notice a difference. If you do, you're welcome. If not, just go back to your regular old boring hot showers.

2. Activating Caffeine

If you have ever ingested caffeine while you were sitting down and remained sitting down, you probably noticed that it didn't do much for you. Sure, it may keep you from falling asleep, but it most likely didn't make you feel any more energetic. There's a reason for this…

Caffeine has a much stronger affect when you start moving after taking it. If you wake up and get caffeine in one form or another, try doing a quick set of jumping jacks or going for a brief run or a brisk walk. You'll notice almost immediately that the caffeine basically activates.

Here's how well this has worked for me:

I used to drink two cups of coffee each morning, then it went to three, four and I ultimately realized I had a problem at six cups. It wasn't the coffee's fault. It was doing its job, but I was just sitting there drinking an entire pot of coffee, so I wasn't getting the full benefit.

Now I have changed two things. First, I bought this amazing Aeropress Coffee Maker, which is super cheap, easy to use and only takes a few minutes to brew…

Here's how it works:

Getting the Most from Your AeroPress® Coffee and Espresso Maker

Congratulations! As the owner of an AeroPress coffee maker, you have in your hands a simple device for making the best coffee or espresso you've ever tasted. It's easy and fun.

For a quick start, watch a video on the AeroPress product page of our web site, www.aerobie.com

Brewing a Double-Espresso, a 10 Ounce Mug of American Coffee, or a Latte:

1 Remove the plunger and the cap from the chamber.

Chamber   Plunger   Seal   Filter Cap

2 Put a filter in the cap and twist it onto the chamber.

3 Stand the chamber on a sturdy mug.

4 Put two AeroPress scoops of fine-drip grind coffee into the chamber.

Scoop

5 Pour hot water slowly into the chamber up to the number 2. Use 175°F (80°C) water for the very best taste.

6 Mix the water and coffee with the stirrer for about 10 seconds.

Stirrer

7 Wet the rubber seal and insert the plunger into the chamber. **Gently** press down about a quarter of an inch and maintain that pressure for about 20 to 30 seconds until the plunger bottoms on the coffee. **Gentle** pressure is the key to easy AeroPressing.

8 You've just made a double espresso. For American coffee, top-off the mug with hot water. For a latte, top-off the mug with hot milk.

Cleanup and Storage:

Remove the cap and set it aside. Push the plunger to eject the "puck" of spent grounds into the trash (or save for compost or plant food.)

Rinse and/or brush away any grounds left on the rubber seal. The seal has already wiped your chamber clean, so no further cleanup is needed.

Always eject the puck right after brewing and store your AeroPress with the plunger pushed all the way through or completely removed. Storing the seal uncompressed will keep your seal air-tight for years.

Next I started consuming only one cup of coffee (granted there will be a little more caffeine in coffee made with an Aeropress), but I started doing 10 minutes of exercise soon after I finished my cup. Not only does this mean I'm consuming less coffee and caffeine, but I'm also saving money by not buying as much coffee in the first place. This all just one more way to use caffeine more effectively.

Exercise can increase the affects of caffeine and I highly suggest taking caffeine before you workout; however, you don't want to overdo it. Too much caffeine before an extended workout can rapidly increase your heart rate to unsafe levels. The bottom line: don't be an idiot.

3. Eating the Same Meals

I recently started a new diet to lose a few pounds and to write about the results (walking experiment, remember?). Well so far, I've lost 17 pounds and I'm just now in my fourth week. Also, I'm feeling great while doing it. I'm tracking all my results and I'll be writing about it soon, but for now, I just want to go over the productivity part of this diet.

I'm eating the same meals over and over again. It seems that most successful dieters who planned to lose fat and/or gain muscle have had the best results by eating the same meals over and over again.

This works in a few ways to make me more productive:

1. **Meal-time decisions.** I literally only have to think about what I'm going to eat when I cook my meals, which is only a few times per week – I can cook in bulk since I know I'll be eating the same few meals again and again.
2. **Less cooking time.** Since I am cooking in bulk, I only spend a few hours each week in the kitchen. Not only am I not having to decide what to eat, but I can cook my food faster in general. It just takes cooking a few meals to have my food for the entire week.
3. **It saves money.** Buying food in bulk is a common tip for saving money, but often it doesn't make sense – especially if the food is going to go bad before you use it. When you're eating the same meals over and over, you can buy in bulk and know it will get used.

About the Author

My name is Kalen Bruce, and I am the founder of MoneyMiniBlog. I'm really trying to start a revolution here with all this "mini blog" talk. I think mini blogging will become more popular as our days seem to get busier and our attention spans get shorter. Whether your attention span is short or not, mini blogs are much more convenient to fit into your life than full length blogs.

Mission Statement

I'll show you how to control your finances, create positive habits and get the life you want, through research-backed articles. I keep it short, sweet and simple.

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And so much more...