The 5-Minute Guide To Increasing Your Productivity

- SPECIAL REPORT -

It's probably safe to say that everybody would like to get more results from less effort. Yes, we're talking about productivity, the elusive blend of expertise and efficiency that allows you to check off tasks on your to-do list and achieve your goals at an unbelievable pace. It's an idealistic vision of a workday and one that very few can reach. Rather than spending hours effortlessly working toward our goals, we end up getting bogged down in busy work, distracted by calls and meetings, and tossed on tangents trying to solve other people's problems.

Charles Duhigg, the author of the book *Smarter Faster Better*, defines productivity as "making certain choices in certain ways" which can change our focus from being merely busy to genuinely productive. You can go one step further and say that productivity is about making a choice to spend your time on more meaningful work and protecting that time.

To help you boost your productivity, you need to develop strategies and techniques that help you select, edit, and curate the actions that you'll take all day long. This will help to make sure that you aren't just doing more work, but the right work to boost your productivity and make progress toward achieving your goals.

Develop Self Awareness

Being able to discover the work that is most productive toward your goals begins with giving yourself the right tools that will measure your productivity. The most essential tool in your toolbox is also the simplest. Whether it's your time management app, your to-do list, or a meeting with your team to catch up, you need to get feedback so you can look at the work you've completed,

measure its impact, and suggest more efficient ways to move forward.

Feedback loops like this will measure your output and give you the self-awareness to make the right choices toward more meaningful work. Unlike a hard and fast, one-size-fits-all goal that may seem impossible to achieve, a good feedback loop will tell you where you are and allows you to make small changes toward how you work that will ultimately lead to significant improvements in your time management skills and productivity.

Commit to a Realistic Schedule

To set yourself up for a more productive day and week at work, you need to know your limitations. Despite your best efforts, you can't work non-stop. In fact, the more work that you try to do in a day, the worse work that you do.

Instead of trying to work non-stop, you need to set guardrails for quality by committing to a realistic work schedule. So, how many hours should you work in a week to be efficient and productive? The answer differs from person to person, but research has shown that working more than 40 hours a week can increase productivity to a point.

The studies have shown that once you work more than 49 hours a week, the quality of your work steadily diminishes. This means that when you work 70-hours in a week, you aren't producing anything better than the average worker putting in 40 to 50 hours a week.

No matter how many hours you work in a day, it all comes down to your effort capacity, which is the number of hours you can

spend actively working toward your bigger goals. The time spent at your desk doesn't matter if it's working toward something more meaningful. All it means is that you need to keep track of your hours so that you can ensure the results match up to the effort you're putting into your work.

Test and Refine Your Routine

How you spend your mornings will ultimately set the pace for the rest of your day. However, you choose to spend the first few hours of your day, having a clear morning routine will allow you to start your day with positive momentum by setting your priorities straight first thing in the morning. This can not only help you stay motivated, but it can also keep you away from distraction, which will help you maintain your productivity all day long when you're tempted to slip into mindless busywork.

To make the most of your morning routine, make sure you incorporate these activities into it:

- Master sleep inertia by increasing your morning activity.
- Begin your day with some form of positivity.
- Get a small win on something personal to kickstart your motivation for the day.

Go Easy on the Caffeine

For years, coffee and other caffeinated drinks have been productivity boosters. French writer Honoré de Balzac claimed to have consumed up to 50 cups of coffee a day just to keep him going. However, researchers studying the effects of coffee on productivity have found that while the drink does increase alertness

and energy when consumed in small doses, it is equally capable of causing anxiety and jittering. Most studies agree that the effect of caffeine is best suited for completing repetitive tasks and not tasks that require higher levels of creativity and insight.

If your daily dose of caffeine is part of your routine, don't expect the stimulant to replace healthier processes for improving your productivity, like getting exercise, getting outside, or taking breaks.

Block Out Time for Focused Work Daily

Nothing kills your motivation as quickly as reflecting at the end of the day and not having anything accomplished. Often the culprit for lack of productivity is busywork. Simple things like email and chat can end up taking up an estimated 29 percent of your workday, which turns out to be almost a day and a half every week.

If you want to maintain your productivity, you need to learn how to protect your time and use it for the right tasks. One way you can do this is to schedule your most important task a month in advance. However, if you can't commit to months at a time, you can also use the time-chunking technique to schedule chunks of time during the day where you focus on projects that depend on dedicated focus. When you pre-schedule these tasks, you free up your time to work on other jobs in the time that remains.

Create Productivity-Focused Templates

Unfortunately, not all jobs will allow you to schedule long chunks of uninterrupted time in advance. If you happen to be managing teams or working on multiple projects at once, time-chunking

might seem impossible to do. Instead, you can try to create templates that are rigid in defining how and when you work, but flexible enough that you can work with your changing schedule.

When you create a template that is focused on defining when and how you work, instead of scheduling your work around events and meetings that pop up, you're working the other way around. The great thing is you can modify your template depending on your specific needs. The goal is to create a working template that reflects your ideal workday with reasonable time set aside for your meaningful work, meetings, and calls.

Do the Right Tasks at the Right Time

If the thought of time chunking and templates don't fit with how you work, you can try 'location boxing,' which is a technique that involves doing certain tasks in specific locations only. For example, RescueTime CEO Robby Macdonell was struggling with switching between designing, coding, and communicating, so he decided to experiment with working on different tasks in different locations.

If you can't physically move to another location, you can also try using a different device or setup for various tasks. While this might seem simple, you shouldn't underestimate the power that small changes, like working in a different location, can have on your productivity. The practice of matching specific tasks to specific areas is extremely powerful in building new habits that it has even been used to help treat people who have insomnia.

Automate As Much of Your Communication as You Can

There is nothing more counterproductive to productivity than the endless back and forth emails when trying to schedule calls and meetings. While being personal in your communication is an essential aspect of successful collaboration, it is okay to take a more automated approach when you are trying to find a meeting time that works for everybody.

You can use a service like Calendly to automate this process, which solves two significant killers of productivity. First, there is only one email, which means you won't have to spend unnecessary time going back and forth to schedule a single meeting. Secondly, you insulate yourself from making bad decisions on the fly, which will allow you to keep your 'deep focus work' protected.

Use the 5-Minute Rule to Beat Procrastination

Procrastination is one of the few things that will quickly kill your productivity. In fact, 95 percent of the American population admit to falling prey to procrastination. To help you beat procrastination, you need to implement the 5-minute rule into your workday.

Procrastination is built on conflict and fear. If you are motivated to complete a task, your fear of failure, stress, or criticism pits your mind against itself. You end up fearing that the adverse outcome of your work will come true and you will end up quitting before you can even get started.

The 5-minute rule works because it ultimately lowers your inhibitions. You're not actually doing the task, and facing the conse-

quences, you're just working on it for five minutes. When you spend only five minutes working on a task, chances are higher that you will continue to work until you've completed the work you've started.

Often, you can't imagine feeling good about a task that you were recently stressing over. However, once you engage in the actual work, your stress goes away, and you're more likely to feel positive about the work that you are doing.

Build a Productive End-of-Day Routine

Recent studies have found that employees who start their workday off in a bad mood, tend to stay in a bad mood for the rest of the day. One of the most significant contributors to a negative morning is properly prepping the night before. Consider the difference between cooking with all your ingredients prepped versus trying to cut and measure your ingredients as the pots on the stove are boiling over. When it comes to productivity, just like with cooking, prep is key.

To build a productive end-of-day routine, you have to start by writing out the next day's to-do list. If you want to increase your productivity even further, include some unfinished tasks that you can jump right into doing first thing in the morning. This last step works because of the Zeigarnik effect, a psychological principle that describes how your brain won't let something go if we leave it unfinished. Adding this mental cliffhanger to your to-do list is a great way to get over the challenge of starting work the next day.

Prioritize Getting Enough Sleep

While you focus on ways to get the most out of your days, you also need to look at when to stop working. According to a study released by the Institute for Work and Families, fewer than half of all employees take all their vacation days. To maintain your energy and continue to be productive, you need to rest, whether when you are on vacation, the weekends, or even between workdays. Taking some time off doesn't just recharge your body, but it also refuels your mind and creative energy as well.

In a recent study of nearly 1,400 people, leisure time was found to encourage a more positive mindset while decreasing levels of depression. It has also been shown that more than 40 percent of our creative thoughts and ideas come during our downtime. So it is essential that you don't skip breaks and take full advantage of your downtime. While it might seem a bit awkward at first, you have to make sure you are getting enough rest if you want to improve your productivity for the long run.

Conclusion

Despite all the research and studies, there still isn't an easy answer when it comes to improving your productivity. Finding what works best for you takes time and your willingness to experiment with different techniques and strategies.

With these simple strategies and techniques, you can start developing your own processes to improve your productivity in every aspect of your life. Start getting more done in less time and reach your goals faster.