

# Boost Your Productivity



Take back control of your time & energy



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# Prioritize Like a Pro

Tell me: is this you? You've got 100 things on your [to-do list](#), but somehow you spend the subsequent 5 hours not accomplishing any of them.

You do a little bit here, and a little there, and then you browse the internet for a while, then you make a sandwich, then you spend a few hours down a rabbit hole of some other, entirely unrelated task that's not even on your to-do list.

We've all done this, but why?

Part of the problem is that you have so much on your plate that you simply don't know *where* to start at all.

Productivity is not about doing more things – it is about doing the right things. It is all about planning: mapping the tasks required to achieve the desired goal; and prioritizing: ensuring you are doing the right things.

*“Every minute you spend in planning saves 10 minutes in execution.”*

-Productivity Expert Brian Tracy

It takes only about 10 to 12 minutes for you to plan out your day, but this small investment of time will save you up to two hours in wasted time and diffused effort through the day.

## How to Prioritize with the Eisenhower Matrix

When your brain is swimming with all the wonderful possibilities of things you could do, or drowning in dread of all the things you have to do, you can channel a lesser-known productivity professional: Dwight D. Eisenhower.

He was known in his circles for being an exceptionally organized person, and is credited with inventing a framework called the [Eisenhower Matrix](#).

This system of prioritization can be split into 4 categories. It's a fast way to get everything in order at the start of the day.

There are two kinds of problems:  
urgent and important.

The urgent are not important, and  
the important are never urgent.

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

Urgent & Important

*do it now*

Important not urgent

*decide when to do it*

Urgent not important

*delegate it*

Not important  
not urgent

*delete it*

Get into the habit of quickly categorizing tasks by using the criteria below against your to-do list.

### The Important Checklist

- It will affect many people or projects if incomplete
- Other tasks depend on its completion
- It contributes a lot of value
- It's low effort-high results (80/20 principle)

### The Urgent Checklist

- It is overdue
- It is due soon
- It demands immediate attention
- The consequences of not doing it are immediate

Now remember, you had a lot on your plate and you were having trouble figuring out where to start. Take all of your tasks and figure out which box they might fall in.

The order in which you execute the tasks on your lists are:

- **The Do column:** do these first, as they are both important AND urgent.
- **The Decide column:** do these next, or even create a calendar invite or reminder for yourself for when these tasks will be on deck.
- **The Delegate column:** We don't all have personal assistants, but there still may be members of your team or family that can take some tasks off your plate.
- **The Delete column:** When you have a lot of tasks, anything in this list needs to get put to the side. OR, you can use these tasks as your "reward" for completing everything else in the other columns on your list.

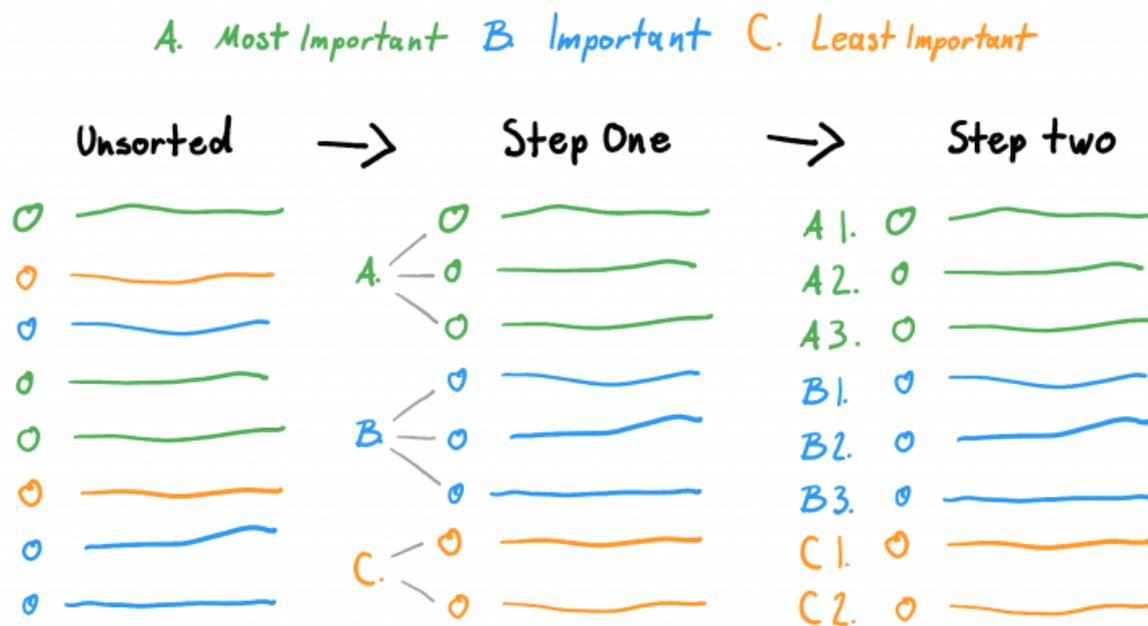
## Use the ABCDE Method for Precise Prioritization

The next prioritization method is a little on the structured side. The award-winning math nerd that lives in my head loves how this method takes into account that different tasks can take the same priority level.

Instead of randomly doing equal-priority tasks as they come along, the ABCDE method has two levels of priority. Here's the steps to take to prioritize your tasks with this method:

1. Go through your list, and give every task a letter from A to E, A being the highest priority.
2. For every task that has an A, give it a number which dictates the order you'll do it in.
3. Repeat until all tasks have letters and numbers.

Like this:



To make sure there's a point in categorizing them so strictly, you're going to have to be hard on yourself. The ABCDE method is not for the faint of heart; you have to take the time to do the prioritization and then actually follow through:

⇒ You're not allowed to start on a new letter until the previous letter is fully complete.

If you reference this against the Eisenhower method, your A tasks would be your... yep, both urgent and important.

## Rank your Work by its True Priority with the Ivy Lee Method



Despite our best efforts, we sometimes end up with a massive list of urgent and important tasks we need to get done. In which case, we need to find a way to dig deeper and find their true importance.

One of the best ways to do this was developed over 100 years ago by productivity consultant named Ivy Lee. I am amazed that I only learned of this method after I managed to wade through a challenging career in the Fortune 100. The ridiculously easy Ivy Lee Method is a way to force prioritization of your daily tasks.

Here's how it works:

1. At the end of each work day, write down the six most important things you need to accomplish tomorrow. Do not write down more than six tasks.
2. Prioritize those six items in order of their true importance.
3. Tomorrow, concentrate only on the first task. Work until the first task is finished before moving on to the next one.

4. Approach the rest of your list in the same fashion. At the end of the day, move any unfinished items to a new list of six tasks for the following day.
5. Repeat this process every working day.

Limiting yourself to six tasks (or less) each day creates a constraint that forces you to prioritize properly and then stay focused by single-tasking your way through your list.



Why the Ivy Lee Method works so well:

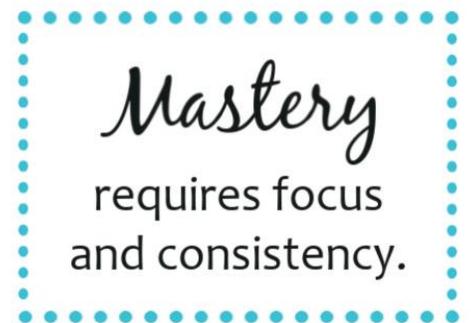
[It's simple enough to actually work.](#) In my experience, complex methods are often a weakness because it's harder to get back on track. Yes, emergencies and unexpected distractions will arise. Ignore them as much as possible, deal with

them when you must, and get back to your prioritized to-do list as soon as possible. Use simple rules to guide complex behavior.

**It forces you to make tough decisions.** There's nothing magical about Lee's number of six important tasks per day. It could just as easily be five tasks per day. However, something magical happens when you impose limits upon yourself. You can cut through the overwhelm and buckle down on the basics.

**It removes the friction of starting.** The biggest hurdle to finishing most tasks is starting them. Lee's method forces you to decide on your first task the night before you go to work. It's simple, but it works. In the beginning, getting started is just as important as succeeding at all.

**It requires you to single-task.** The myth of multi-tasking is that being busy is synonymous with being better. The exact opposite is true. Having fewer priorities leads to better work. World-class leaders in nearly any field—athletes, artists, scientists, teachers, CEOs—share one characteristic: focus. The reason is simple. You can't be great at one task if you constantly divide your time.



*Mastery*  
requires focus  
and consistency.

There will be plenty of times when these popular productivity methods don't work for you. That's okay. You're smart and flexible, and now that you know about these tips, you will use them when they're helpful and set them aside when they don't apply.

Practice these methods and adapt them to your work style and your energy flow. With a few adjustments, you'll be on your way to achieving a more productive and organized workday.

# Time Management

The first step of effectively managing your time is prioritization – identifying, avoiding and eliminating low-value tasks that end up wasting our time.

Now that we have a list of valuable work, how do we get it all done? People often believe that strong will and good intentions will drive them through their to-do lists. Instead, what turns intention into effective action is proper planning and follow-through.

Scheduling can seem like a waste of precious time that you could be using to actually get things done. But when you aren't controlling your calendar, it's easy to let distractions take over. By frontloading your decision-making on what to do, you save time and mental energy when you begin to work."

- Laura Scroggs, Todoist

For example, do you ever feel like you've spent entire days in so many meetings talking about work, that you never actually get any time to *do* any of said work?

This goes on for days and then suddenly it's the next week and you're in the follow-up meeting for something you talked about last week, and someone is asking you about the status of the project. You realize you haven't actually had any time to do any of that work, because you've only been in meetings *talking* about doing work.

This doesn't yield good results for anyone. So how do you fix it?

## Figure Out if You're a Maker or a Manager

Here's a concept that was a game-changer for me, and it might help shed some light on why the aforementioned scenario keeps happening: makers vs managers.

This line of thought was first popularized by another famous software engineer turned tech blogger, [Paul Graham](#). He realized that most job titles can be broken down into 2 categories: makers or managers.

*Managers* are just what you think: they're the people that facilitate work. They are the delegators, the project managers, the team leads. They make decisions that help move work along.

Managers sit in meetings to help understand higher-level company objectives. They remove roadblocks so their teams can continue creating. Their calendar is also the sort of thing that gives me hives.

But that's their job. That's how they operate.

A manager's schedule has each day cut into one-hour intervals. They can block off several hours for a single task if they need to, but by default they change what they're doing every hour.

When you use time that way, finding time to meet with someone is no problem: just locate the next open slot in your schedule, book them, and you're done.

*Makers*, on the other hand, are individual contributors, and their job is to execute on the work that needs to happen. Their job is to sit quietly for long, uninterrupted periods of time and get stuff done.

But makers use time another way. They generally prefer to use time in units of half a day at least. They can't create something an hour. That's barely enough time to get started.

When you're operating on the maker's schedule, meetings are a disaster. A single meeting can blow a whole afternoon, by breaking it into two pieces each too small to do anything hard in.

A maker's calendar should look nothing like a manager's calendar.

Which one are you? Figuring this out should help inform how to best fix the gaps in your time management strategy.

If you're a maker sitting in meetings or running to appointments all day, you're not able to be effective. Subsequently, if you're a manager and your makers are in a bunch of meetings, you need to identify meetings that your makers need to drop entirely.

## The Sublime Joy of Mono-tasking



Multi-tasking can seem necessary at times, and you might even be praised by your boss for doing it at work.

However, doing more than one task at a time, especially if they are complex tasks, actually tanks your productivity and your results. Not only does multitasking take more time in the end and involve more errors, it also leads to more stress.

When we multitask, we forego choosing one thing and instead we choose them all. Instead of prioritizing, we open another screen or click on another link

Part of the problem is we have way too much information. Because everything is searchable, we believe everything is worth searching. We pile up the options, and we paralyze ourselves.

If you want to be effective in your work and get more done in less time, you need to stop multitasking. Instead of doing many things at half-effort, focus on your most significant tasks, one at a time.

Interruptions are the bane of productivity and effective time management. Interruptions, most notably emails and text messages, happen so often and blend in so seamlessly with our work that it is often hard to notice them at all.

Distractions are multi-tasking in disguise and to successfully monotask, you need to eliminate these distractions.



Relegating email and social media to the preset time slots it may take some trial and error - and please allow yourself room to learn this new skill. With a little practice, you can overcome the top blockers on your path to boosting your productivity by utilizing one or a combination of the following frameworks.

# Pomodoro Technique

[The Pomodoro Technique](#) is one of the most popular tactics for blocking your time. It was invented by a guy named Francesco Cirillo while he was in college in Rome. The process is simple:

- Break a large task into smaller sections.
- Pick one section to work on at a time.
- Set a timer (preferably one shaped like a tomato, ha! 🍅) for 25 minutes.
- Jam on that singular task for those 25 minutes.
- Take a 5-minute break.
- Repeat.



Another reason this technique works so well is that it's a great way to get into the elusive "zone". You know the zone... it's a magical place where you're completely mono-focused, heads down on a project and you're working productively.

Ah, there's nothing like being in the zone, crunching numbers, drafting proposals, or drawing up plans, and yet there's nothing worse than being removed from your motivated reverie only to face a serious uphill battle to get back into it when you're ready.

Did you know that it takes about 23 minutes to return to the original task after an interruption? Dude, I am not making this up. Somebody did a study and everything. My heart sang with joy when I discovered this piece of news, because long have I railed at being interrupted (I work from home) and long has the response been, "Oh, stop exaggerating!"

No sir, I am not making this up. Ready the (long, boring) [study](#) if you want proof. Go ahead, print it out, roll it up, and smack people with it when they barge into your kitchen (er... office, whatever) and dare to interrupt you.

Satisfying.

If you're struggling to get into focus mode, give the Pomodoro technique a try the next time you need to go heads down. And keep in mind that it's okay if some days are less productive than others. You are not a robot, and tomorrow's a new day.

## Time Boxing

Assign every hour (or 30 minutes, if you prefer) of your day to a specific task. Take your to-do list and estimate how long each task will take, then plan your day out by assigning each task to your calendar.

While you're at it, assume every task will take twice as long as you expect. If you get it done quicker, congratulations—you're ahead. However, when problems inevitably delay you, you're still on schedule. Remember to include all the little things associated with your main tasks, such as commuting, breaks and admin tasks.

Time boxes remove decision fatigue and allow you to emotionally separate yourself from the work by planning ahead: If 9am-10am has already been assigned to a set task, you don't have to think about it, just follow the schedule and do it.

Ever noticed how something that you think will take 20 minutes spirals into forever?

Yeah, there's a name for that:

Parkinson's Law\*

*\*Parkinson's Law: a commonplace observation that work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.*

Well, the reverse is also true, and you'll find that if you've scheduled an hour to do your invoicing, it's less likely to seep into the rest of your whole day.

There are a couple of drawbacks to time boxing. Unexpected disruptions make it impossible to accurately schedule a whole day. Get Stuff Done enthusiasts, known and beloved for the willingness to roll up their sleeves and dive in, may recoil at the idea of planning out tiny boxes of time.

Time boxing works best for people who tend to overestimate how much they can do in a day, and wonder at the end of each day where all the time went.

## Theme Days

Here's a method that works for those who need to plan by the week instead of the day. I'm in this group myself. As a freelancer, I don't have a 9 - 5 job that lends itself to an obvious structure. But my Tuesdays tend to be like this and my Fridays tend to be like that... so a weekly approach is just what I need.

How to do it: Break your work into five (or fewer) categories, then decide which days will have which theme. Ideally, a day will only have one theme (but you might end up having more than one day to a theme).

For example, you might theme your days like this:

- Mon: Blogging
- Tues: Client work
- Wed: Marketing
- Thurs: Client work
- Fri: Bookkeeping

While this will likely be a struggle for the traditionally employed, it might still be possible to theme part of your day (your mornings, for example). Set recurring reminders in your calendar for each day to help build the habit. If you're still struggling, *Entrepreneurs on Fire* has a [podcast episode](#) to help you get started.

## Pros:

- Avoid the productivity hit associated with multi-tasking or task-switching and instead focus 100% on a set task throughout the day
- You can also theme your days according to your weekly energy levels (if you struggle with Monday or feel exhausted by Friday, save easier tasks for those days)

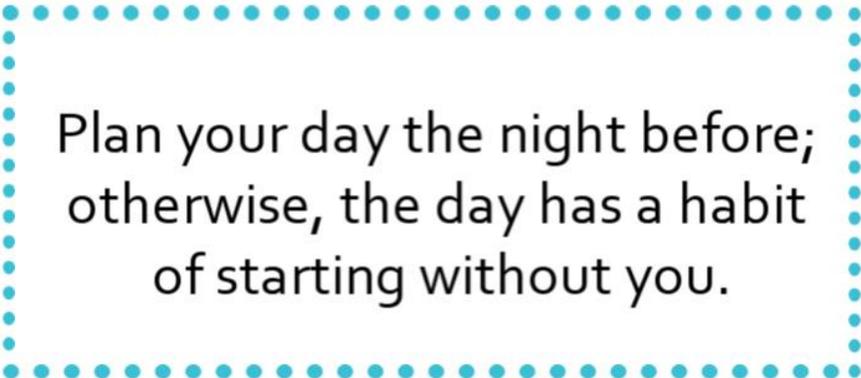
## Cons:

- Difficult when other people (employees/clients) have other ideas about what you should do with your time
- Doesn't account for your energy cycle throughout the day.

I will share more on energy cycles in the Ability to Focus chapter.

## Plan What You Need to Do the Evening Beforehand

Mornings are hectic and it's easy to forget what you should be doing if you don't have a plan in place. For this reason, spend some time each evening going over what you accomplished that day, revising future tasks on the schedule, and then fleshing out what needs to be done the following day.



Plan your day the night before;  
otherwise, the day has a habit  
of starting without you.

This includes knowing what tasks to work on, what you should wear, and what meals to prepare. Mapping out your day in advance could help you feel at ease in the evenings, and ready to go when you wake up.

## Set Aside a Regular Mandatory "No Work" Time

YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki makes it a rule not to check emails between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. As the mother of five children, she also prioritizes getting home in time for dinner with her family.

Think about it: If the CEO of YouTube is able to get home to spend time with her children, can't we make time for our interests and relationships outside of work?



Setting a period of time where you don't work has a couple of benefits. First, you get a chance to renew your energy levels for the future. Secondly, being able to step out of your usual work zone gives you the chance to come up with different ideas.

We'll go over this concept more thoroughly in a later chapter on avoiding burnout.

# Ability to Focus

I hate to tell you this, but your brain is basically wired to get distracted. Effectively, when we encounter a shiny new thing, our brain releases dopamine. And dopamine, also known as the “feel good hormone,” is the neurotransmitter responsible for feelings of bliss and euphoria.

That’s one of the reasons it’s so easy for us to get distracted when we’re trying to focus: It actually feels good.

So that’s the bad news. The good news, however, is that there are some ways to trick your brain into thinking it is being distracted, when really it is being productive:

You’re not going to like this first one, but you **must** turn off or put away anything that is sending you notifications:

- ✓ If you have desktop notifications, turn `em off.
- ✓ Put your phone on silent, and turn it upside down.
- ✓ And for the love of all that is holy, you must turn off any Slack, GChat, WhatsApp, Skype, GroupMe or any other chat app service you use.

Then, and only then, are you putting yourself in a position to get into the elusive, ethereal, high-productivity zone. You can employ the Pomodoro Technique, you

*Messaging apps and emails cause you to respond to other people's priorities, not your own.*

can burn through your Eisenhower Matrix, tackle your time boxes, whatever you want.

As you set aside time to focus on your other tasks, set aside time to check your messages. They deserve your time and attention, just not *all* of your time and attention, and certainly not your best focus. Handle these after you've done your key tasks requiring mental energy and concentration.

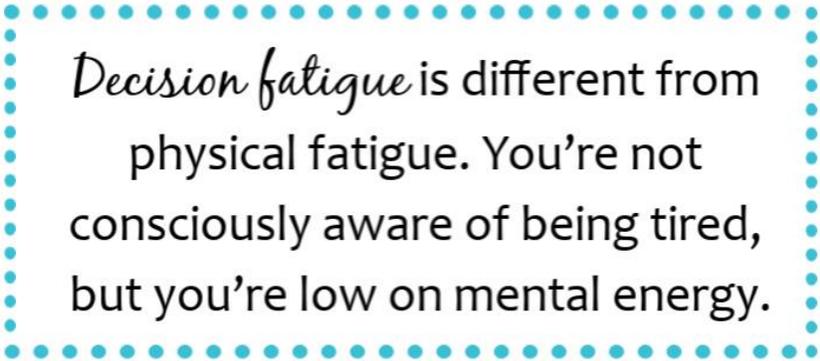
Notifications are the arch-nemesis of focus, and not just because of the initial distraction it causes. Moreover, every time you attend to a notification you have to make a decision about it: do I do it now; should I delegate it; when will I do it and do I even care? That decision making – let alone any decisions the message itself is requiring of you, will deplete your mental resources.

Having to make so many decisions that you feel depleted is such a big deal that it deserves its very own section.

## Decision Fatigue

Can you believe that the average person switches between tasks more than 300 times per day? And that's only during working hours... yikes.

Not only does this level of context switching pick apart our focus, but each of those decisions to switch tasks eats into our willpower a little bit. Eventually, we hit what's called decision fatigue: where our lack of energy and focus leads to making poor decisions.



*Decision fatigue* is different from physical fatigue. You're not consciously aware of being tired, but you're low on mental energy.

No matter how rational you are, you simply can't make decision after decision without paying a mental price. And unlike physical fatigue—which we are consciously aware of—decision fatigue often happens without us knowing.

With so many things vying for your attention, you make choices. Even ignoring something is a choice. The more choices you make throughout the day, the harder it becomes for your brain to make more.

To conserve energy, your brain creates shortcuts, like acting impulsively when making decisions. As you become fatigued by decision-making, your self-control is also depleted. When your self-control guard is down, you are more prone to make impulsive decisions that driven by the urgent need to complete the task.

## Give Your Brain a Break

The human brain can only focus for 90 to 120 minutes before it needs a break. After doing the same task for a long time, your performance on the task declines. Taking regular breaks from mental tasks improves productivity and creativity, and skipping breaks can lead to stress and exhaustion.



A study found that one thing the most productive people have in common is the ability to take effective breaks. Specifically, the most productive people work for 52 minutes at a time, then break for 17 minutes before getting back to it.

Turns out that the employees with highest productivity ratings, in fact, do not even work eight-hour days. The reason why they are able to get more work done is that they treat their working times as sprints. They make the most of those 52 minutes by working with intense purpose, but then rest up to be ready for the next burst. In other words, they work with purpose.

*Working with purpose can also be called the 100% dedication theory - whatever you do, you do it full-on.*



## Get Up, Change Gears

A person can't be 100% productive all day. As much as you want to make the most of every minute, to get stuff done, to hustle, it's just not humanly possible.

Concentration is like a muscle: It needs to rest to be able to function, and it shouldn't be overworked. Otherwise, it'll simply burn out and take longer to get back into the swing of things.

And consider this: your breaks from work don't have to mean you lie on a yoga mat trying to relax and feeling bad for being bad at relaxing. Your breaks from work can be chances to do other things, small important tasks.

Water your plants, throw a chicken in the crock pot, or walk around the house gathering abandoned socks and start a load of laundry.

Make a serious commitment to take some breaks this week. Try taking 5 or 10 minutes every hour and seeing what effect it has. The results could surprise you!

## Grab a Seat at a Local Park or Coffee Shop

There's another trick to focus mode, and you're going to like this one better.

When you're feeling particularly unfocused, you can move somewhere else to do your work.



Heading to your local park or coffee shop is a great place to resettle yourself and get back down to business. Or a library. Maybe for some people it's just moving to a different room.

My personal fave is my gym because it has a cafe/work area. This is intensely awesome for three reasons:

1. It functions as a change of scenery: there are different sights, sounds, textures, colors... it gives my tired brain a pick-me-up.
2. There are no distracting sinks full of dishes, piles of laundry, attention-seeking pets, or Amazon deliveries.
3. I can take my work breaks on the indoor track or rowing machine, thus accomplishing some #fitnessgoals during work breaks.

And no one cares if I am makeup-free or in yoga pants. It's actually better if I am.

Best of all, there are people and conversations around me... but unlike at home, I get to gleefully ignore these people. And sometimes, I'll catch someone's eyes and we give each other the little nod that says, "yeah, me too."

## Be Mindful of Task & Energy Flow

When done correctly, your daily schedule should give you momentum, not take it away. But we often forget to think about our state of mind when scheduling meetings, events or tasks. Think about the cognitive leap it takes to go from a deep-thinking exercise like writing a business strategy to daily catch-up calls.

I was stunned to learn that recovering from [switching between tasks](#) can take up a whopping 40% of our productive time.

To use your daily schedule to protect your flow, you can think of it in two ways:

### *Task Flow*

Our brains take time to get into the flow of a task. But once they're warmed up, it's easier to keep going and stay motivated. This may mean segmenting your day into activities. So, an afternoon might be dedicated just to writing, while a morning might be customer support.

This is also what Y Combinator Paul Graham calls "Maker Time"—the long stretches of time needed to work on cognitively demanding tasks like writing or coding (vs. Manager Time, which is chopped up into short segments).

### *Energy Flow*

There's a reason you're slamming through to-do list items in the late morning and can barely string together an email response by 3pm. Energy has a natural ebb and flow throughout the day, which we can use to our advantage. If we schedule it right.

# Experiencing Burnout

The most powerful detriment to your productivity is the feeling that you're overextended or burned out. Why? Because a tomato-shaped timer and a stack of post-it notes cannot win over the pervasive bleah of burnout.

It's common to bite off far more than you can chew. Especially when you own your own business. The work is hard yet well-loved, and you're never really off the clock. Some clients are way too demanding, and some projects are more trouble than they're worth. And the feeling of burnout is one of the leading causes of stress.

## Give Decision Fatigue A Rest

Have you ever heard of decision fatigue? The average person makes [thousands of decisions](#) every single day, causing a phenomenon called decision fatigue. You can actually tire of making choices, resulting in lower self-control and willpower.

This is not good news. Running your own business successfully depends on making good choices. When you're inundated with important decisions, it's a good strategy to try to clear away unnecessary distractions.

“ I wear only gray or blue suits. I'm trying to pare down decisions. I don't want to make decisions about what I'm eating or wearing. Because I have too many other decisions to make.”

Barack Obama



Steve Jobs famously had a work outfit so that he didn't have to fret about what to wear each day. It was a strategy adopted by former President Obama.

And it's not just the guys who do this. Art director [Matilda Kahl](#) wears the same outfit to work every day, as well. She says it's like setting up a bill for auto-pay, that it feels good to have one less thing to worry about.



Another good example of decision fatigue is if you're trying to eat healthy, but you've had a stressful day at work and you come home and you literally can't bear the thought of also choosing a healthy dinner. So you order a pizza. Or grab takeout. Listen, we've all been there.

We're tired. Burnt out. We don't care anymore. Just give us whatever.

## A Tale from the Front Lines

I remember once, back in my corporate America days, coming home from a long day of being a project manager and all that that meant. I wandered into the house, a little shell-shocked from my long day. My husband asked me what's for dinner. It was a fair question; I loved to cook, and unwinding in my kitchen as I pattered around making things smell good was a favorite de-stress technique of mine.

But that day, he asked me what was for dinner, and I burst into tears. I hadn't thought about dinner yet, and the idea of thinking about it right then, with zero functioning brain cells left, and my decision-making tank empty, was too much.

It turns out that crying in the kitchen after being asked a simple question is a good indicator of.... c'mon, say it with me... b-u-r-n-o-u-t.

Meal planning was the answer for me. Instead of having my outfits figured out, like Steve, Matilda and Obama – I figured out a schedule for family meals. Having the “what’s for dinner?” conversation every night was a hard No.

There’s a difference between the exhaustion of a long workday and the perpetual fatigue of burnout.

Burnout is a total loss of motivation and energy with no sign of relief. More than just increased stress, burnout causes overwhelming exhaustion and feelings of cynicism and detachment.

And while burnout used to refer to refer to the extremes dealt with by cops, firefighters and ER doctors, we now know that burnout can impact anyone.

## The Real Secret to Productivity

Another effective way to avoid burnout is remarkably simple, but also really hard. Are you ready? This is the true spice of a productive life:

**JUST. SAY. NO.**

You want to be a team player, you want to help out, you want to be seen as agreeable. Humans are social creatures, and our brains are hard-wired to get along, to please other people.

But saying yes to everything and filling up your calendar is a slippery slope towards burnout syndrome. Pretty soon, you’ll be jam-packed with to-dos while trying to balance being always available.



Instead, you need to be more deliberate with what you commit to. This means regularly revisiting your priorities and making sure they're:

- **Realistic:** Is this something you can actually do? Have you given it a realistic deadline that considers any dependencies and resources you might need?
- **Still valid:** Is this the right task to be working on? As Peter Drucker said, "there is nothing worse than doing the wrong thing well."
- **Connected to your bigger goals:** Will finishing this task make visible progress towards your long-term goals?



The reality is that saying yes to one thing is saying no to something else. What is that going to be? What's going to take a hit because you said yes to this new thing?

Is it your other important projects you're already working on? Is it your work-life balance? Something is going to take a hit. You can decide what that's going to be.

Next time you're presented with a brand new, shiny, potentially time-consuming request, here's a way to assess whether it's really worth your time.

## The DOC Framework

**D. Distraction from day-to-day:** Is the new request going to be a distraction from your business-as-usual responsibilities? Does it complement tasks you're already doing or is it a complete detour into another initiative? Remember that distractions, especially those that force you to context-switch, are creating mental load and decision fatigue.

**O. Objectives-related:** Does the new request could fit into any of your current objectives? If you want to grow your website traffic by 30%, or develop a customer portal as a means to get direct feedback, will taking on this new work help meet those goals? If so, it might be worth taking on. If not, give it the axe.

**C. Consider the upside:** Perhaps you are looking to transition to new responsibilities, and this new task will help demonstrate your capabilities. Currying relationship favor could be beneficial, and after all, you are genetically predisposed to want to. But be careful not to fall down the people-pleaser path of self-destruction. Always ask yourself: If there is no upside, why do it?

Keep this framework in mind when you're tempted to say Yes to something, even though you don't want to. Remember that it's okay to want to be agreeable, but only if it doesn't put your own well-being and productivity at risk.

## Create a wind-down ritual to separate work from non-work hours

Protecting yourself from burnout isn't just about what you do during the workday (although that is a big part). With the near depression-level fatigue that comes with burnout syndrome, we need as much sleep and rest as possible to recover.

This starts with a wind-down ritual.

A wind-down ritual is your way to signify that you're leaving work at work. If you work at home, it signals when work time ends and personal time begins. It helps you to relax, recover, and recuperate from the workday and stops your stressors from compounding.

This is a work in progress for me, too. I can be a real workaholic when I'm working on or researching a topic that interests me. Even after I've finished working for the day, I tend to find myself back at the computer again. It's one of the problems of being connected 24/7.



To properly disconnect and wind-down, you need to follow a few steps:

1. Detach from the workday by removing your work devices and replacing your screen time with something healthier.
2. Relax by spending a bit of time alone to recover from the social demands of work and home.
3. Spend time on a hobby or other 'mastery' skill—these are things that challenge you but that you enjoy.
4. Create a sense of control by following a closing ritual for the day, including writing out your to-do list, closing open browser tabs and reflecting on your day.

Here are 10 beautifully presented [tips for ending your workday](#) from the Productivity Zone blog.

## Focus on progress, not just the end goal

Productivity and burnout have a troublesome relationship. The more work you do, the more burnt out you get, and the more work you *feel* like you need to do.

To break this loop, we need to change how we measure our value. Instead of focusing solely on ticking items off a list, look at the progress you make each day.

In fact, when Harvard professor Teresa Amabile studied the diaries of hundreds of knowledge workers, [she found that](#):

*Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work.*

## Put the Productivity Power Back in Your Hands

You can take control of your productivity but remember:

There are invisible forces at play all around you that are preventing you from doing your best work. Learning to identify them is a way to empower yourself to overcome them. I hope these tools and frameworks can help you achieve every little thing your heart desires.

Be productive. Be happy.

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You've made it to the end! I hope you've learned some new frameworks to help you get more out of life and work.

If there is something you need to outsource, to make your load lighter (like managing your website, yeah, exactly that) don't hesitate to reach out.



Share ideas, get inspiration, ask questions for anything related to getting stuff done!

