

An Organizational Guide to Improve Productivity

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Some days are just flat-out challenging, and that's a normal part of life or work. Still, if you think these days are happening more often than you'd like, it might be time to step back and take a long look at how you structure your day. It's easy to slip into a routine that nibbles away at your productivity, sapping you of the time and energy you need to meet your goals. Keep in mind, there's no "silver bullet" that'll magically restore you to full-speed functionality. But a few common-sense tweaks can be surprisingly effective.



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Limit Social Media

A few minutes on LinkedIn to see who's been promoted, a quick look at your daughter's Facebook page and a few minutes of welcome laughter with your favorite Twitter feeds add up rapidly. Unless you're the company's Social Media Director, leaving these sites unopened during work hours is a productivity-enhancing slam-dunk.

Tame the Email Monster

Managing your inbox can threaten to be a full-time job. But it doesn't have to be that way. Use filters – the sender, keywords in the text or other criteria – to sort your emails automatically into folders, so you don't have to screen them manually. You don't need many: one for high-priority items, one for low-priority items, one for legitimate notifications and offers and another for spam. If you want to organize them further for archival purposes that's fine. Just don't do it during your most productive times of the day.

Go a step further and block out specific times to read and respond to emails. Have your account send an auto-reply, something along the lines of "I read and respond to my emails between 11:30 a.m. and noon, and again between 4:00 and 4:30 p.m. If you require a response before then, contact my assistant at"

Eliminate Distractions

Even the slightest distractions can derail your trains of thought for several minutes, but you can avoid them in the following ways: 1) turn off email and social media alerts on both your computer and your phone and, 2) block out specific periods when you're unavailable to your staff or colleagues, plus be sure everyone knows about them. Unless your job

involves calculating nuclear launch codes, you can probably carve out a few hours without your absence causing any problems.

Delegate, Delegate, Delegate

Integrity and a strong work ethic sometimes conspire to make you less constructive, because you're willing to take on duties that really don't need to be on your plate. Next time, try a different tact. Ask yourself whether you have a staffer who can handle things for you. This may be difficult if you're the hands-on entrepreneurial type. But learning this lesson is a key to growth.

Some forms of delegation are less obvious than others. For example, signing up for the Office Depot® Automatic Subscription Ordering Program means you don't need to interrupt productive work to take care of a last-minute order. You can focus on your work, while your vendor keeps you supplied.

Stand Up Occasionally

If you spend all day in your chair, your thinking can become as sedentary as your body. It's important to get up and move around occasionally. Numerous studies have demonstrated that movement is good for your concentration and your health. Spending a few minutes walking in the fresh air can clear away the cobwebs, leaving you physically and mentally fresher.

Know Your Best Time and Defend It Fiercely

If you're more productive between 8 and 10 a.m., move heaven and earth to maximize that time. Postpone your emails, have your calls screened, defer meeting with your colleagues and focus on your goals for the day.

How you address your work during your prime time is up to you. Some people find it best to start with the most difficult or time-consuming task and get it out of the way quickly. Others prefer to build momentum by starting with a few short, quickly accomplished tasks. Choose a strategy that works best for you and stick with it.