



SECRETS TO PRODUCTIVITY, WORK/LIFE BALANCE AND SUCCESS

Written by Matt Heinz
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My wife called it “productivity porn,” and now it appears to have stuck.

Last year, I started writing a regular column for Geekwire.com focused on workplace and professional productivity. When I shared the story of how the term “productivity porn” came to be (see the first article in this guide for an explanation), the name stuck.

Other than that title, I promise it’s all safe reading, and worth checking out to get tips on work/life balance, avoiding procrastination, going paperless and more. The following pages include several columns from the series as well as additional productivity best practice articles from the Pipeline blog.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO PRODUCTIVITY PORN: HOW TO BE LAZY, PRODUCTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL

Some of the most successful and productive people I know are lazy. They'll tell you so. David Allen, author of *Getting Things Done* and the godfather of productivity. Lazy. He will tell you this at the beginning of his seminar.

Seth Godin, who writes daily blog posts and has published four hundred books and continues to launch new businesses. Lazy. He said so in a talk he gave in Seattle last year.

There's a theme and a lesson here. You can be highly productive and very successful—but also lazy. The trick, of course, is to make better use of your time. Work smarter, not harder.

A few years ago I started spending a lot more time learning about productivity—how it works, how to make it work for me, and how to constantly make my own productivity system better. My wife, affectionately, started referring to my collection of regular productivity reading as “Productivity Porn.”

Over my next several pieces, I'll dive deeper into how you can put the lessons behind Productivity Porn to work in your own life (professional and personal). I'll save you the time I've spent reading and digesting the myriad options and perspectives out there, and instead summarize

and outline the specific tactics and best practices that work to help busy professionals, start-up founders and others get far more done in less time.

If you occasionally feel out of control, are unable to focus or prioritize, lack the work/life balance you want, or notice that you're often too tactical vs. strategic, these tips are for you.

To start, here are eight specific best practices that, together, form many of the core tenets of what Productivity Porn tries to teach and enable for its followers.

1. Do The Opposite Of What The Lizard Brain Tells You To Do

Seth's right, we all have a lizard brain telling us what to do. It's what makes us procrastinate, keeps us from shipping, and leads us away from taking risks or having courage to do something new. Seth told a crowd in Seattle last year that the secret to his success has been simply to do the opposite of what his lizard brain would prefer that he do. Not bad advice.

2. Delegate And Outsource

No matter your role or level or experience, you shouldn't be doing everything that's on your plate. There are things you should delegate to

others on your team, or outsource to someone who's better suited to do it. Some activities should be delegated because they'll get done better by someone else. Other tasks can be done faster or cheaper elsewhere. But be crisp about what your time is best spent doing, and what would be easier/faster/better to do elsewhere (for a fraction of your time to instruct and/or manage).

3. Do Less (But Choose Wisely)

Cut at least 33 percent of the work from your current plate. Would you really miss it? Would it really impact your performance, your company's performance, or your customer's overall satisfaction? I'm not talking about short-term conversations or loss. It's critical to triage what you have on your plate against what will have long-term, lasting and scalable impact.

4. Say "No" More Often (Or, Stop Volunteering So Much)

Type-A people and start-up junkies want to lead. They want to own things. They're more likely to say "yes" to a new project, or volunteer for something new. Dial that back a bit. The potentially awkward and uncomfortable moment in which you need to decline a new opportunity will save you hours or days of time down the road.

5. Network

The more people you know, the more likely you'll

find people you can turn to when you need help, or for something that can help both of you. It doesn't work if you're merely adding volume to your network and follower lists. But if you genuinely and consistently add new qualified people to your network, the chances that they'll be able to help you sooner or later increases exponentially.

6. Listen, Watch And Learn More

The next time you're in a meeting, shut up. Spend more time listening to others, asking for their feedback, watching what's going on. In too many meetings, people compete for attention. They talk over each other. They fight to see who can say the smart thing first. It's a losing proposition for everyone. The more you listen, the more likely someone in the meeting will stop the conversation and ask what you think. At that point, all eyes are on you. In less time, and after listening to the preceding debate, your feedback will more likely be thoughtful, better received, and could drive the output of the meeting more frequently.

7. Have Other People Read For You

I could spend all day reading the various sources of content (print, online, Web, email, blog, video, etc.) that I subscribe to. My favorite sources of content are those where others have already done far more reading, and have filtered the best content up to me. Read less but learn more.

8. Stop Working So Many Nights And Weekends

The amount of work you have will consume the time you give it. And if you cut yourself off at 6 p.m. on weekdays and on Friday night, it forces you to be more focused and productive during your active work hours. You know that you're checking ESPN headlines or Facebook or other non-work stuff during the workday. What if you cut some of that out and forced yourself to focus (and focus on the shorter list of work we identified above)? You'll get more done, in less time, and feel better about refreshing nights and weekends.

The benefits of all this, of course, is not just greater efficiency and productivity but also a positive impact on your own clarity and sanity.

Next time, we'll dive into some specific, tactical best practices to dip your toe into the Productivity Porn water.

SEVEN TIPS TO MAKE YOURSELF MORE EFFICIENT RIGHT NOW

You're busy and don't have time to read a lengthy intro (especially in a piece about productivity). So let's get right to it. Plenty of productivity gurus recommend an entire, complicated system to get yourself organized and working optimally. First, however, give yourself an immediate boost in productivity by adopting one or several of the tactics below. Starting tomorrow, they can help you get more time back and get more done every day.

1. Get Up 30 Minutes Earlier

Would it really be that hard to get up 30 minutes earlier? This may not be your most productive awake time, but an extra 30 minutes (when the rest of the house is still sleeping) could be used for reading, exercise, whatever you want. This alone gives you an extra 3.5 hours a week, and that's a lot of time. Plus, I bet that extra 30 minutes makes you feel more ahead of the day and in charge of what's ahead.

2. Do Your Most Important 1–2 Tasks/Projects FIRST Every Day (Before Email And Voicemail)

At the beginning of each day, you already know what one or two things are most important to accomplish. But most of us, before tackling those projects, check email and voicemail and quickly get distracted by the day's interruptions and fire drills. Nine times out of ten, those distractions can wait until your most important tasks are finished. Get them done first, and I guarantee

you'll feel (and be) far more productive every day.

This is more than just a prioritized list of projects or tasks. Be explicit about the top one or two tasks, as they're likely far more important than what's farther down the list. Crossing tasks off makes you feel good, but ignoring the top priority isn't going to move you forward fast enough.

3. Set A Morning “Daily Do” Reminder

There's likely a core set of tasks you could execute in 30 minutes or less, every day and probably earlier in the morning, that would accomplish a number of things quickly and help you feel far more on top of things. They'd keep your networking active, ensure proper follow-up on things that happened yesterday, plus ensure you're completely prepared for the day ahead.

Set a daily meeting with yourself every work day, Monday through Friday, for 30 minutes. Do it early morning (before you get to the office) with a cup of coffee, or begin a habit of starting your daily office routine on your own, free of distraction, and knock these tasks out.

The specific task list will be unique to you, but here's a sampling of what's on my “daily do” list every day:

- Check Facebook for birthdays, and wish people a happy birthday first thing

- Check Klout for notifications, and give a handful of people I know “+K” for their expertise
- Check my online spam filter (via Postini) for anything important I may have missed yesterday
- Check LinkedIn and Gist for other important update across my network, and comment back as necessary
- Scan yesterday’s schedule, and send thank you notes (email or hand written) as necessary
- Ensure all to-dos captured yesterday have been filed and prioritized (either today or for later)
- Confirm my priorities and to-do list for today, and ensure I have every resource necessary to get them done
- Confirm today’s meetings (including sending a confirmation email if necessary)
- Prepare for today’s meetings (including any documents I’ll need there, any homework I needed to complete, etc.)

4. Keep Your Email Offline, All The Time

If you use Outlook in particular, right click on the icon in the lower right-hand corner of your screen and select “Work Offline”. This will “freeze” the email in your inbox currently, and queue up anything in your Outbox to sync when you want to. This helps you focus on what’s at hand, without getting distracted in real time by new incoming messages. Click the send/receive button when you want to, but otherwise stay more focused and more productive without the constant distractions.

5. Sort Emails Into Three Folders To Focus On What’s Most Important, Right Now

I aggressively use Outlook’s email rules to manage my inbox. This automates much of the filing and sorting I’d otherwise have to do manually, especially when Outlook can recognize patterns and help me save certain types of emails for quick scanning or processing later.

For example, I subscribe to several email newsletters, but every one is automatically filed in a “reading” folder (more on that below). I get “watched item” alerts from eBay, which also get filed in a separate folder. There are certain reports I’m copied on, some of which I rarely read but want filed away for future reference. I have an Outlook rule that does all of this filing for me automatically. This tool alone saves me countless clicks and minutes every day.

For short-term processing, I typically sort the rest of my email into three folders: Action, Waiting For, and Reading.

Action: Anything that takes longer than two minutes goes into the Action folder. Very, very few of these requests need immediate response. Putting them together in an “action” folder allows me to tackle them later, and all at once.

Waiting For: I often send an email to a colleague or vendor, and wait for a response. I typically blind copy myself on these emails, and have an

Outlook rule set up so that these emails automatically get sorted into a “Waiting For” folder. This gives me a complete inventory of the outstanding emails I’ve sent for which I haven’t received a response. I’ll quickly scan this folder a few times a week, deleting emails that have been responded to, and occasionally following up with people that haven’t yet taken action.

Reading: I get to this once a day, usually in the morning or evening. None of it is urgent, and I have no problem deleting an unread newsletter if the folder is getting too large, or if more recent emails (especially in the case of news summaries) are piling up.

I file these folders in my Outlook folders with an “@” symbol in front of them, so that they all stack up at the top of my Outlook folders list. This way they’re always in front of me for easy clicking and viewing when I’m ready.

6. Use The Two-Minute Rule

Each time a new email arrives in your inbox, ask yourself: “Can I respond to this in two minutes or less?” If so, then respond right away! Don’t click or open another message just to read it. Be diligent and respond to the message you have open quickly before moving on

7. Carry Idea Capture Tools With You At All Times

Mind like water, memory like a sieve. At least five times in the past week, I’ve had an idea while

driving. Thanks to Dial2Do (and hands-free Bluetooth if you’re reading this, highway patrol), I quickly leave myself a message. When I eventually check my email (where my message has been translated and delivered), I realized all five times that I’d already forgotten the idea. My brain had moved onto something else, and that thought was lost in the process.

Without the instant capture, those ideas may have been gone forever.

The best way to allow yourself to be innovative, to free-form new ideas, is to practice “mind like water.” That means, basically, to let your brain improvise. Let it go where it wants. And when it lands on something good, write it down (or record it), so you can stop thinking about it and return your brain to the improvisational stage. The trick to this, of course, is to write down or otherwise record as many of those “random” ideas and thoughts as possible, as soon as they happen. That means carrying pen and paper as often as possible. Using services such as Dial2Do or a digital voice recorder when driving or exercising. Or AquaNotes in the shower.

Not every idea is brilliant. Most, in, fact, are either mundane or, on second thought, not a priority right now anyway. But you’re not worried about quality, just capture rate.

SEVEN WAYS TO ACHIEVE WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Productivity too often can become more than a means to an end. If left unchecked, being more productive can simply make you feel compelled to fill additional time with more work. That's a fine outcome if you need to (or want to) get more done. But balance—time away from work—is equally important to being more productive during work hours as well.

Successful productivity makes you more efficient and effective with the time you choose to give to work, so that you can choose to spend more time with your family, on hobbies, just “vegging” out, or simply recharging to be more effective the next day. Below are seven specific things you can start doing right away to take back more time and increase your work/life balance.

1. Take Tuesday And Thursday Evenings Off

Leave the office as close to 5 p.m. as possible, and turn everything off until the next morning. No email, no Crackberry, no working. I guarantee those days will be your most productive of the week. Why? You have a deadline. You can't leave things to work on or “finish up” later in the evening. You'll be more focused on cleaning your plate and preparing for the next day before you stop working for the day at 5 p.m.

2. Take A Lunch And Get To Work (But Not On Work)

At least 2–3 times a week, break for lunch. Get

away from your desk, leave the building if possible, and separate yourself from the day's immediate priorities. Walk in the sunshine, eat in a park, but do one of two things: one option is to have lunch by yourself, but with purpose. Bring a specific topic you want to think about and focus on—without interruptions, and outside of your normal environment. Bring a paper and pen to record your ideas as you eat. The other option is to be more intentional about catching up with those outside of your office, your company or even your industry. Find people you can lunch with and learn from. Gain from their perspective well beyond your own, to bring renewed energy and creativity to your own areas of expertise and focus.

3. Schedule Time Off And Stick To It

You can't work all the time. Even if you love it, even if parts of your business feel like fun, you have to step away. This includes scheduling real vacation time. Block time well in advance, book tickets and hotels, and get away.

Better yet, do the same thing for a 24-hour period over the weekend (say Saturday afternoon to Sunday afternoon). Get your spouse or significant other to help you stay accountable to this if you need the help. But this will force you to be a bit more efficient during your work time leading up to those breaks, and it will make you more energized when you pick things back up.

4. Exercise And Eat Better

Make time for this, too. Sign up for a 10K a few months from now and shame yourself into sticking to a training plan. Bring your lunch to work more often instead of grabbing an expensive and greasy sandwich. Be really careful about what you eat and drink when traveling (and consider getting up just 30 minutes earlier to hit the hotel gym briefly). You will feel better, have more energy and endurance if you do these things.

5. Find A Hobby (Ideally One That Doesn't Include A Screen)

I'm a truly awful woodworker. I'm the kind of guy who will measure five times, cut once, and still screw it up half of the time. But after sitting on my butt in front of a computer and in meetings most of the day (and after putting the kids to bed), it's really relaxing to do something with my hands. Plus, the required focus of doing something precise like woodworking (not to mention trying not to cut off a finger) forces me to stop thinking about work. Even if I just have an hour or less, it's time well spent.

Find what you're excited about—gardening, scrapbooking, bowling, whatever—and make a point of engaging in it on a regular basis. Join a group, get friends to participate, and otherwise make commitments so you stick with it.

6. Prepare For Tomorrow Before You Leave The Office Today

Dedicate 15 minutes at the end of your day to prepare for tomorrow. Assess what was completed today, what remains, what new priorities may have been added to your plate, and write a quick list of the top three to five things that need to happen tomorrow. Additionally designate the one most important thing you need to accomplish, which will be what you do first when you get in.

This frees your mind to focus on whatever you need to that evening, without worrying about how to make your next day (or at least the next morning) more efficient.

7. Leave Work For Tomorrow

You can't get everything done today, nor should you. Take time to go home, be with your family, watch a ballgame, get some exercise and enough sleep. This means being comfortable with leaving some work for another day, as well as leaving other projects on the table indefinitely. You can't do everything, and you need balance—not just for yourself and your family, but to make tomorrow a more productive day as well.

SEVEN TRICKS FOR BEATING PROCRASTINATION

We procrastinate for a variety of reasons. Fear. Intimidation. Laziness. Distractions. All reasonable obstacles. But if you're prioritized your tasks and projects correctly, the work still needs to get done.

I've found that procrastination can be the single-largest hurdle keeping individuals at all levels from being more productive and getting more done. It's a silent killer, easy to justify in the moment, until that high-potential time has passed and you still aren't done.

Everybody I know who has a proactive strategy to fight procrastination still suffers from it regularly, but there are several tricks and best practices that can help you win the fight far more often than you lose it. Here are seven tips to get you started.

1. Break What You're Doing Into Smaller Tasks

The project at hand can seem too large and intimidating. So instead of tackling it all at once, break it down to individual tasks. If you're writing a column like this, for example, start with a brainstorm of ideas or an outline. That's likely the first step of the project anyway, and getting that done gives you both progress and momentum.

2. Use The 10-Minute Rule To Get Started

No matter how big or intimidating the task in

front of you, giving yourself a limit of just 10 minutes to get it started often feels far more manageable and something you could get rolling on immediately. Most of the time, you'll get through that 10 minutes quickly but also feel like you're already on a roll and will want to continue.

Sometimes all it takes is getting started to break through the procrastination. Worst case, you stop after 10 minutes but already, mentally, have a far better picture of what it'll take to finish (which, in turn, will make future procrastination for that specific project far less likely).

3. Put A Reward At The Finish Line

What do you get when you finish? What do you NOT get until you finish? Make it something fun and motivational—a coffee run, a piece of chocolate, 15 minutes reading your favorite blogs, something enjoyable that will further motivate you to get off your duff and get started already.

4. Eliminate Distractions

It's way too easy to entertain distractions when you'd prefer to do almost anything but the job in front of you.

It's hard enough not to sift through email, the stack of papers on your desk, or click the RSS feed tab on your browser. When it's really time to work, turn off as many distractions as

possible. Close your email and your browser if possible, close your office door or put on headphones (even if there's nothing coming through them), and put your phone on forward. Eliminate anything and everything that could be a distraction (especially for those critical first 10 minutes you need to gain some momentum with the project).

5. Shorten Your To-Do List

Sometimes procrastination rears its ugly head when you have too many things to choose from. If your to-do list is too long, that alone could be intimidating enough to draw your attention elsewhere. What's the most important thing to do on that list? What things can you explicitly put on an "optional" list, or even just a list that can be tackled tomorrow, so that today's list is both prioritized and manageable? Getting through 2–3 critical tasks is much easier than staring at 8–10 on your list.

6. Create Uninterrupted Time To Focus

Much has been written about how massively distracting it is to start and stop projects all day. Eliminating distractions around you will help, but try to set up longer periods of time to focus and execute. Brad Feld recently talked about this in his blog, referring to one of his portfolio company's desire to be a "monastic startup"—meaning they focus on giving their developers as much long, uninterrupted time to work as possible. When you have something important to

get done, block your calendar and give yourself the time you need to mentally and fully engage.

7. Cancel Unimportant Commitments On Your Calendar

I'm sure your calendar is full, but is that next meeting really that important? Is it more important than getting today's most important project or task completed? Attending optional or less-important meetings is a form of procrastination. Cancelling, delegating or deferring non-critical meetings not only eliminates this particular procrastination excuse, but allow for more of the "monastic" time you need to get things done.

These are all easier said than done, and (if you're like me) you'll still suffer from occasional bouts of procrastination. This article after all, was supposed to be written yesterday.

SEVEN STEPS TO GOING PAPERLESS

I love paper. I hate paper. Independent of format, print or digital, what I want is information at my fingertips when I need it, wherever I am. I want instant capture of ideas, to-do's and notes (which for me still requires paper) but I want that paper to disappear as quickly as possible.

Less paper helps me focus. Less paper makes me more efficient. Less paper is a competitive differentiator.

This isn't paper-free. I'm not there, and doubt I ever will be. But I've eliminated at least 80 percent of paper from my life with a significant, measurable improvement in efficiency, access and results.

Here are the seven steps I use to make paperless a reality in my life.

1. Use Paper First As A Capture Tool

I keep an 8.5 x11 inch pad of paper with me for all meetings, and I put the date, topic and/or client at the top. Throughout the meeting, I take notes, put boxes for to-do's, like normal. I'll do the same throughout the day in other situations with index cards, torn out pages from magazines, anything physical that can quickly summarize and/or remind me of what was discussed and what I need to do.

2. Process Paper Into Online Systems

The to-dos on those meeting summaries are translated into my Outlook Task lists. Meetings get scheduled, outsources tasks get assigned.

3. Process All Other Inbound Paper Similarly

This includes business cards, letters, bills, anything else you get that's paper-based. Everything has a purpose, a next step, something you need to do as a result. If it's just something you want to keep for reference later, there's a place for that too (keep reading). I have a physical "inbox" at both my office and home office to collect these physical documents and reminders for processing.

4. Scan All Documents Into A Secure, Cloud-Based Filing System

You can use Dropbox, box.net, SharePoint, Google, doesn't matter where. The key elements are organization and access. I use an organizational system that's based on a combination of function and customer/client names. All of my meeting notes for the past three-plus years are saved in a secure database online—organized by topic, client and date. These documents are, in turn, available to me literally anywhere—at my office, on my laptop, my iPhone and iPad. I use a Fujitsu ScanSnap to quickly transform two-sided documents into PDFs.

5. Online Task, Calendar And Reminder Management

My preferred system is still Outlook. I'm familiar with it, our Exchange server makes it available anywhere, and it nicely integrates several common systems I use daily (email, calendar, tasks, contacts). There are countless tools you can use similarly today, may for a lot less money (i.e. RememberTheMilk, Toodledo, etc.)

6. Actively Use Mobile Apps For Further Information Capture

Whenever I can, I capture information straight into digital systems. I'm getting better at using Evernote for note capture especially when traveling—at events, conferences, and other places where carrying just my iPad is ideal. In the car and elsewhere I don't have access to paper, I'm a big fan of Dial2Do, which via speed-dial quickly records a voice instruction and translates that into email (where I can move it quickly into the appropriate next-step system).

7. Ubiquitous Moleskine Notebook

During the workday, I carry this with me at all times. It's always in my right inside jacket pocket, and a pen is clipped right next to it. Fast and easy note taking and to-do recording when I don't want to interrupt the rhythm of a conversation by flipping open a device. Any next steps or to-do's are processed using the steps above, and "finished" pages are clipped in the corner so I can quickly flip to the latest pages in the notebook.

If you've read this far, you're likely either interested in trying something similar, or think I'm a nut. Whatever you choose as your own process (online or offline, digital or paper) clearly isn't going to work if it doesn't make you comfortable and isn't something you can sustain on a daily basis.

HOW TO ACHIEVE “INBOX ZERO” IN 60 MINUTES OR LESS

Whether you perpetually have hundreds if not thousands of emails in your inbox, or you’re coming back from a long weekend or true, “unplugged” extended vacation, you have a problem. It’s not realistic to declare “email bankruptcy” and start from scratch, but the last thing you want to do is waste your entire first day sorting through email. That’s no way to get real work done.

Last year I came back from a short two-week paternity break to more than 2,000 unread emails. An hour later I was down to 12 emails in my inbox. Don’t get me wrong, I had a ton to do and get caught up on. But my inbox was not my to-do list. To quickly get caught up and stay focused on what was immediately most important the rest of the day and week, here were my best practices for sorting through an overwhelming inbox.

(These tips work whether you’re coming back from a long period away or if you’ve just let your inbox get out of control.)

Write Down The Time And Number Of Unopened Emails

The job at hand may intimidate you, but it’s going to be really cool to look back at where you started from. Trust me.

Delete Everything That’s Not Important Or Urgent
This means status notifications, spam, newsletters, Twitter alerts, etc. You don’t really need to be caught up on each and every one of

these, especially since new ones will start flowing later the same day. To quickly get through the backlog of email and focus on what’s important moving forward, it’s critical that you declare “information bankruptcy” on the vast majority of information you otherwise may have consumed in the time you were away.

Sort Email By Conversations And Delete All But The Most Recent Mail

Gmail does a great job of this for you automatically, but Outlook makes it easy to do as well (so does the Mac, even if you’re using Outlook). Don’t worry about attachments you may have missed. Worst case you can go find them in your Deleted Items folders, but chances are you won’t need them (or they’ve been made irrelevant by someone else’s response or a more updated version anyway).

Separate All Emails Where You’re Only On The CC Line And Put Them In A Separate Folder To Read Later

Most of these you will scan and delete quickly, eventually, but these emails don’t need your attention right away.

If you were a priority participant or contributor, you wouldn’t have been on the CC line. And if someone does really need your attention on one of these, they’ll find you directly now that they know you’re back.

Write down the time and number of unopened

emails again. You will be amazed at how many emails you've already eliminated from your inbox, and how quickly it happened. The next few steps will take a little more time, but this quick update will help motivate you.

Complete, Respond To And Delete Any Email That Takes A Minute Or Less

These might not be the more important and urgent tasks on your list today, but you can bang through these quickly, get them off your plate, and it'll not only make you feel good to get stuff done but will take advantage of the "fog" you'll still have getting back into work mode. None of us are 100 percent ready to tackle our most important work the morning after being away. Getting through the quick, fast and easy stuff makes you immediately productive but in a way that helps get your brain and creative juices back in gear.

With What's Left, Make Project And To-Do Lists For The Next Three To Four Days

The rest of the content of your inbox is going to take you longer to complete, but it doesn't all have to get done right now, or even today. Start making lists of projects and tasks to complete in the coming days, and separate those lists by deadline or context. If it doesn't have to get done today, put it on tomorrow's to-do list. You'll likely tackle some of those things later today anyway, but put only the critical items on today's list. Whether you use Outlook Tasks, pen and paper, or something in between, get the list organized in a way that isn't intimidating and isn't in your inbox.

Congratulations! You just sorted hundreds of emails in record time. Before you take a victory lap, or get lost in your RSS reader, dig immediately into your priority tasks for today. Get at least one done before moving on.

All the work above has helped you ease back into work, gradually start getting things of substance off your plate. Now your plate is clear, the backlog is gone, and you can focus on what's most urgent and most important.

ELIMINATING MEETINGS: EIGHT WAYS TO TACKLE THE BIGGEST TIME-WASTER IN YOUR BUSINESS

You've heard it (or probably said it) many times before: "I can't wait to get out of all these meetings so I can actually get some work done!"

Meetings are critical to most organizations, but the vast majority of meetings you attend on a regular basis are too long, unfocused, unnecessary, or otherwise wasting your time.

For most of us, seeking to get more done in less time, meetings are the single-worst time waster and barrier to productivity in our professional lives.

You may not be able to eliminate every meeting on your schedule. Some are quite valuable. But if you were to inventory the regular meetings on your calendar, and those on your schedule this coming week, how many do you think will really help you get your job done? How many will result in positive, proactive action, direction or progress for your organization?

How many of those meetings could be reduced, made more productive, or eliminated altogether?

You're not going to boil the ocean (or clear your entire schedule) this week. But, starting with meetings you control or influence directly, apply the following eight best practices to make

meetings more productive, make them shorter, or get rid of them.

1. Establish Clear Objectives And Expected Outcomes

Why is the meeting necessary? What does success look like at the end of the meeting? Clearly define these objectives and outcomes, and ensure everyone invited understands them as well.

2. Determine The Right Format And Length

Do you really need to get together in person? Can this meeting take place via a conference call instead? If the business is quick, can it be done in a stand-up environment (where attendees stand and conduct business quickly)?

And please (please) stop using a full hour as the default meeting time. If you truly need a few key stakeholders together live to resolve an issue, but it can be done quickly, schedule 15 minutes. Understand your objectives and scope of the discussion well enough to more accurately set the time required. Then focus on getting it done and get back to work!

3. Publish An Agenda In Advance

In addition to objectives, publish a clear agenda of what's required in the meeting. Allow attendees to suggest edits or additions to the

agenda, but once you get there, stick to it! If other ideas come up, great, but those are for another meeting (or offline discussion between fewer people, or email, etc., but not in this meeting).

It's possible that a clear objective and agenda up front will help you realize that the meeting isn't necessary in the first place, that fewer people are required, or that it needs more research or due diligence before the group is gathered. Many workers think an agenda takes too much time, but in reality a well-written agenda will render many meetings moot before they begin.

4. Clearly Identify The Right Attendees And Their Roles

Most meetings include too many people. There are usually a core group of attendees who do the work, and others that mostly observe or attend because they want to be "in the know."

Force your meetings to require and include fewer people. Use a good meeting summary to communicate outcomes to those who need to know, but don't need to be there as it happens. Reading a summary takes a fraction of the time, typically, as the meeting itself.

Should one of those attendees be an administrative assistant whose role is to write the meeting summary and document action items? It's possible that this investment of their

time will save your organization many hours of time from more senior and more expensive resources who otherwise would have "had to be there" to keep track of what was discussed.

5. Crisply Document Action Items And Owners, And Follow Up

Too many meetings (even those that were worthwhile to begin with) end without any resolution or next steps, and attendees walk away without a clear, across-the-board understanding of what's required next and who owns what.

Someone in the room needs to be responsible for documenting action items and owners. This is another reason why having an administrative assistant present may be the most important role and investment in the meeting to maximize it's immediate and long-term value.

6. No Laptops Or Smartphones

If you have time to check email in the meeting, you either don't really need to be there or you're wasting everyone else's time by not giving the meeting your full attention.

If attendees are checking their phones, it's a clear sign that you're off track, off agenda, and no longer running an efficient meeting.

Force laptops and smartphones out of the room. Consider requiring attendees to leave all devices

at their desks. Watch how much more quickly everyone is motivated to get business done and end the meeting!

7. Be On Time Or Don't Participate At All

Respect each other's time. If your organization has too many back-to-back meetings, consider working with your IT department to add a natural five-minute break 55 minutes into the hour, so that you have at least five minutes to end the previous meeting, get to the next one, and start on time.

Many meetings end late (therefore making the next meeting start late) because they aren't well managed, don't include clear roles or objectives, and don't have anyone helping to document next steps and owners afterward. When these roles are missing, attendees scramble at the "end" of the meeting to ensure something of value is recovered, which usually ends in frustration, confusion and inconsistent expectations among departing attendees of what they agreed to and who's doing what.

8. Set Criteria For And Regularly Review

"Recurring" Meeting Requests

Your calendar full of meetings is bad enough, but I bet a significant portion of those meetings show up again and again. The "recurring" meeting is the single-biggest culprit of wasting your time, as they're too often a lazy way for an organization to update itself on things that could be communicated in other formats (email, memos,

wikis, etc.) or conducted as-necessary, with fewer people, without requiring a regularly-scheduled meeting.

These same "recurring" meetings almost always go on far longer than they're valuable. I recommend ending each recurring meeting with a quick look around the room to make sure the next one is necessary. Cut off those recurring meetings as soon as they lose their value.

NINE PRODUCTIVE THINGS TO DO DURING A FLIGHT DELAY

Traveling is an exercise in wasted time. The lines, the security pat-downs, and the inevitable delays. Clearly you want your flight to leave on time, but if you use the time right, a flight delay can be an excellent way to catch up on work you otherwise might not prioritize.

Do it right, and a flight delay can end up saving you time, increasing your efficiency and accelerating your success and results. Really!

Here are nine things I try to do during flight delays to achieve those goals.

1. Keep A List Of Things To Brainstorm

There are always things I need to do that require little more than my brain and something to write on. Brainstorm topics can include an upcoming blog post (write the outline!), the key points for a plan you need to develop, new channels you want to test in an upcoming marketing campaign, new offers to throw into an existing channel or sales effort, etc. Oftentimes, the brainstorm is the hard work. Once you have basic ideas down, finishing the work (or plan, or blog post, etc.) is like running downhill.

2. Do A Brain Dump

There are lots of things in your brain that come and go. And unless you put them into a trusted system, you're bound to never act on those ideas. Some are strategic, some are

tactical, but if they're important to you they need to be somewhere you can reflect on and prioritize them (now or later). Take time during a flight delay to let your brain wander and write down whatever comes up. Could be a new product idea, a reminder to buy cat food when you get home, whatever.

3. Have A Call List Ready

Which calls do you need to return? Who haven't you caught up with in a long time? Consider the time zone of whomever you're calling, but the list of people you could call is extensive. A colleague with feedback on a project or a new idea. A friend who just got a promotion. Someone in your network you haven't connected with in far too long (this could be a daily list).

Have a few emails that need returned? Make a call instead. I bet you have a far more productive, valuable conversation and exchange than what would have been delivered with a short email.

4. Inventory Your Bigger Projects

What are the big projects you're focused on right now? Are any of them stuck? Do any of them require a next step from you, or something from another individual or company, to keep on the right track? I recommend having an inventory of your current projects with you on a regular basis (even if it's recorded online somewhere). When you have time (and ideally at least once a week),

work through that list and make sure each has a specific next step that someone owns. This is pure GTD.

5. Prep For Or Recap Your Recent Trip

If you're on your way out of town, make sure you have a comprehensive inventory of your priorities. What would success look like on the trip home? What do you need to accomplish, gather, execute or finalize before you step back on a plane? If you're on your way back home, write up a short recap of your immediate to-do's. When you get home and back in the office, you'll immediately be busy and behind. If you write up your to-do's from the trip now, you're far more likely to get them done (and benefit from the results).

6. Network

Email former colleagues. Write a few unsolicited LinkedIn testimonials. Use the downtime to get back in front of people who have helped you in the past, whom you might be able to help today, and who could be a partner in the future.

7. Catch Up On Email

Yes, spending time in email is OK. But I give you one caveat—do it in offline mode only. Ignore the temptation to import new emails that will only distract you. Instead, get caught up on the backlog (there's good stuff in there!). Focus on putting a few follow-up emails from your recent trip in the Outbox to sync when you're back

online. I promise this will get you working through your inbox and priorities faster.

8. Find Some Good Podcasts

There are still a ton of great podcasts being produced on a regular basis, on every topic imaginable. Think of them like "listening to blog posts," especially if you prioritize topics you'd otherwise want to read in a blog or newsletter or trade magazine.

9. Call Your Mother

Or your father. Or your sister. Or your kids. Being productive isn't all about business. Our lives get so crazy, it's easy to get sucked into work and neglect (or push to another time) the people who matter most to us.

What do you do during a flight delay? How do you use that time?

DAVID ALLEN: “THE THREE REASONS YOU’RE FLOUNDERING”

I’m a huge David Allen fan, using many of his productivity tenets as the foundation of my personal productivity system. I highly recommend reading *Getting Things Done* at minimum, and subscribing to his great newsletter.

In a recent newsletter, Allen shared three common reasons why people flounder and, generally, fail to get work done. It was a great write-up, and I wanted to share it here as well. Thank you David for your ongoing, consistently excellent advice to keep us on track and moving forward.

There are three common reasons why most people seem to flounder with their personal workflow. At least part of their systems lack one or more of three essential variables: consistent, current, and contextually available. This was reaffirmed for me in a coaching session I did with a senior executive. Here’s what showed up:

Consistency

She had some phone call reminders on pieces of paper, some in her head, some on sticky notes stuck to the phone. Keeping the same kind of reminders about the same kinds of to-do’s in different media in different places is hugely inefficient and confusing. Information or reminder triggers of a specific type must be kept in the same place, the same way, all the time.

Otherwise we have to make the “what do I do with this?” decision with every such particle, and that throws up a quick barrier to engagement. She decided to go with simple file folders labeled “Calls—Work” and “Calls— Personal”, as the best way to manage those, and sanity began to prevail.

Currency

No matter how consistent the system is, if it is not current (i.e. completely up to date with all items in a category) it still can’t be trusted in a way that relieves the psyche of the job of remembering and sorting. You’ll look at a list and some part of you knows it’s not the whole list, so (a) you won’t totally trust your choices and (b) you’ll still try to use your head to keep track. And if your brain still has that job, instead of trusting your lists, you won’t be motivated to keep your external system going (it will be too much work for the value received.) You’ll feel like it’s hard work to keep the list and will resist looking at it anyway because you’ll know it’s only partial and it will remind you that you’re “behind.”

Contextually Available

She had been trying to organize action reminders by project or by topic, instead of by where the reminder needs to be seen in order to get it done. Project thinking and planning need to be seen by the title or topic, because that’s when we need to see that information

(when we're meeting or thinking about it). But reminders of the next actions required need to be seen where those actions can occur—phone calls when we're at a phone; errands to do when we're about to go out in our car; emails to send when we're at our computer; etc. Information and action reminders should always be stored in such a way that we are likely to see them when we need to see them, and can use or move on the data. If you store your Next Action reminders by what or who they're about, every time you're in a place where you can do work (at a phone, at your desk, in your car, at home) you'd have to look through dozens of folders or files to find reminders of all your options. And when you're running fast and only have a short window of time, you won't really check the whole inventory and you're likely to make choices from latest-and-loudest instead of objective overview.

THE THREE-SECOND RULE FOR EMAIL INBOX MANAGEMENT

There are books and books written about workplace productivity, with a significant portion of that literature devoted to our email inboxes. These best practices cover a variety of good ideas—from folder structure to automated rules to delegation and so on.

But the single most important rule you can follow (even if you don't do anything else, and your inbox is overflowing on a daily basis) is the three-second rule.

If you look at an email quickly but get intimidated about what to do next, the three-second rule is going to change your life. When we don't know what to do next, or get intimidated about what that next step might be, we often defer the decision until later. Unfortunately, if you do this for dozens or hundreds of emails a day, you're just delaying decisions and actions that, often, can be done in seconds or minutes themselves.

So the three-second rule is simple. Read the email and force yourself to spend three seconds deciding what to do. It can be that you really need to schedule a meeting, or you need to make a go/no go decision, or something else that's simple but needed just a couple seconds to decide. Not every email is that fast and simple, but I bet you'll find that a surprisingly high volume of your emails actually are.

By forcing yourself to take those three seconds, you'll clean out your email very quickly, and free your time (and your mind) focus on the issues that need more of your devoted, uninterrupted time.

Give it a shot today. Take some email from the weekend, block out 15 minutes, and dig in. Let me know how it goes.

TWELVE TIME WASTERS THAT WILL KILL YOUR STARTUP'S PRODUCTIVITY

The last thing most start-ups can afford is wasted time. By definition you're still trying to figure out if you have a business, what your customers will respond to, what strategies and tactics will scale revenue and, eventually, lead to profitability and some kind of exit.

But every day, we let time wasters creep into our businesses and cause massive distractions from the core work that will achieve our short and long-term goals. Below are twelve of the most common and damaging time wasters I see on a regular basis, as well as some ideas for how to avoid or eliminate them in your business.

1. Email

We equate "doing email" with working, which of course is wrong 90 percent of the time. Checking email most often means we're looking for work, instead of getting the core priorities in front of us done. It feels good to respond to email quickly, get a cleaner inbox, and get that small sense of accomplishment. But it's at the expense of real work.

What if you had your email in offline mode all the time? New messages could only come in when you press the send/receive button. Outbound emails would queue up in the Outbox. Then, start checking your email far less often. This alone will help you and your organization get a ton more work done.

2. Meetings

Most meetings either aren't necessary or don't need nearly the number of people in attendance. Meetings are often used as a lazy way of trying to make decisions and update others. Think about the meetings you've been in over the past couple weeks. How many could have been handled instead via a quick phone call or someone in the group making a recommendation and soliciting feedback? How many meetings did you attend where you could have instead received a short, well-written summary afterward to stay up to date?

Now look at your meeting schedule for the next couple weeks. Which meetings aren't really necessary? Which don't require you in attendance? I bet you and your entire team can get several hours of productive work time back this way.

3. Meetings Without Objectives Or Agendas

Recurring meetings are notoriously guilty of clogging up your team's schedule as a means of updating on one thing or another. Some are very worthwhile—a weekly review of a pending launch, for example, where there's a set agenda to review progress and metrics, and to discuss/resolve challenges.

But too often, meetings are scheduled with little more than a subject line. What are you trying to

accomplish? Why does everyone on the invite list need to be there? Why do you really need an hour for that conversation? With a clear agenda, that hour-long meeting might be done in 15 minutes if you stay focused and make good process. Then you, at minimum, have 45 minutes back.

4. Laptops In Meetings

There is no clearer sign that you're either 1) in too many meetings, or 2) don't really need to be in the current meeting than if you spend most of the time with your nose in your laptop. You're not getting much out of the meeting, you're distracting others, and you're far less productive with whatever you're doing vs. staying at your desk and focusing on the work at hand.

There are exceptions to this, of course. But most of the time, laptops aren't used for taking notes or presenting data or other activity germane to the meeting. If the meeting is important and you need to be there, put the laptop down and keep the meeting focused. The time you invest now should save you and the organization far more time long-term.

5. Multiple Monitors

If used right, multiple monitors can make you more productive. Less time back and forth between windows, for example, can add up to significant time savings. But if all you're doing is keeping Outlook or HootSuite perennially up on

one screen, you're likely constantly distracted by new messages when you should actually be doing something else.

Unless your specific job is to manage your company's social channels, you don't need to be in Twitter all day. You don't need to respond or retweet right away. You could spend all day watching relevant Twitter feeds and get very little important/urgent work done. Use those multiple monitors judiciously.

6. Commuting

How many hours do you and your team waste behind a wheel, sitting in traffic? This could be time back for work, or for play. Both are important. I could argue that the single-most important productivity tool for your team is a paid bus pass each month. Put them on public transportation and the commute time is theirs again.

Yes, taking the bus can take more overall time to and from work. But that's time when someone else is driving, to use as you wish to get work done, catch up on some reading, or even just relax and prepare for the day ahead (or decompress on your way home).

But if you must continue driving, use tools like Dial2Do to at least capture the good ideas you'll have that otherwise would be lost to the road.

7. Long To-Do Lists

You don't need more things to do. You need fewer, more important things to do. Fewer options, well chosen, will help you get far more done for the business. This is a prioritization methodology you can teach your entire team.

The biggest problem with long to-do lists is that they actually paralyze people who can't decide what to do next. It also makes it far too easy to get the quick and easy work done first, which makes you feel good but might not really move the ball forward. Short to-do lists—just five important priorities and an explicit #1 priority for the day—will actually help you get more done and make sure the right things get done first more consistently.

8. Preparing For Board Meetings

Have you ever added up the hours across the organization devoted to preparing for a recent board meeting? The countless revisions to the slide deck, the new reports and data compiled from and by individuals across the company, and so on. And how much of that data and deck did you end up actually using?

I'm willing to bet your investors didn't intend to spend their money paying for your team to prepare for their meetings. I bet they also get more value out of discussions that focus on your challenges and obstacles vs. reviewing data that's more important for internal leadership teams

and perhaps individual board members to grok in a different context.

More and more people are rethinking the board meeting, many of them the same investors that start-ups think they're building those long decks for to begin with. Worth reading a couple perspectives here, here and here.

9. Not Firing Fast Enough

Keeping the wrong employees around will kill your organization and productivity. Cultural misfits will distract people. Employees who can't focus, or aren't right for the task at hand, are literally keeping someone more capable from getting it done more quickly. And the longer you wait to make a change, the more damage you do to the company—in terms of productivity and cultural integrity.

10. Executing Without Customer Input

Are you building products based in input from a few key executives? Have you changed your direction (strategically or tactically on a particular project) based purely on the opinion of a board member? Is your development team triaging features based on anything other than customer input?

If you don't have a crystal-clear understanding of your customer's current priorities, pain points and needs, it can be very difficult to execute efficiently. Product and feature triage based on

what's easiest to build may help you get done faster, but may do nothing to solve the customer's problem. Maybe the customer doesn't actually need more features. Maybe they just need their current features to work better. Building products and services that don't directly map to customer needs and input can be an enormous productivity killer for organizations. Because if they didn't need it, or don't value it, it might have just been a big waste of time.

11. Executing Without Metrics

You need to decide how you're going to measure something before it's built, or before execution begins, not after. Because if you can't measure its value and impact, how do you know it was worthwhile? How do you know if you should continue to invest? Metrics aren't always easy, but they're table stakes for ensuring focus and productivity.

12. Indecisiveness

You may not know what you're doing. By definition, your business is likely trying to do something completely new so there will be plenty of ideas and tests that don't succeed. Some decisions will be wrong. But the worst thing you can do is fail to make a decision, fail to give a project or feature or test a go or no-go call.

Use the data in front of you to 1) decide if it's worth trying at all, and 2) decide how and when

you'll give it a shot. This relates to full go-to-market strategies as well as the smallest, tactical tests. Indecisiveness will paralyze your organization, especially if your employees are left guessing which direction you want them to go. Not every decision can be made right away. But even putting a timeline on a decision will let the organization focus elsewhere and not get distracted in the gray.

This is far from a complete list. Very curious to hear in the comments what other time-wasters may have invaded your organization, which time wasters continue to give you a challenge, and what you may be doing or have done (successfully or unsuccessfully) to eliminate them.

HOW TO KEEP YOUR BIG COMPANY FROM ACTING LIKE A START-UP

Much has been written about why it's important for new businesses and start-ups to keep from acting like big companies. But that doesn't mean the start-up environment is a model of efficiency and productivity.

There are, in fact, several common start-up characteristics that big companies should avoid to increase their chances of success and growth. Here are a few.

Don't Be So Reactive

It's easy for any business to get into fire-drill mode, and equally easy for start-ups to justify being reactive (they call it "nimble") to take advantage of market opportunities. But even when you're blazing a new trail, you need a plan. You should know where you're going to focus—strategically, for the year, with your department, and yourself this month, week and today. Yes, there will still be fire drills. But know what's important and put your focus there.

Plan Farther Ahead

Running a business in a brand-new market isn't an excuse to execute without a plan. It's also not an excuse to plan months or just a couple quarters ahead. Have a vision for what success looks like 12 months from now or more, and use that vision to guide your daily decision-making and execution today.

Institutionalize Learning And Best Practices

You tried this trade show last year. What did you learn? What was worthwhile and what was a waste of time and money? It's particularly easy for start-ups to let institutional knowledge leak out with role changes and turnover, or simply because those minute best practices were forgotten a year later. Take the time to document what's working, and keep them in a centralized, well-organized place for anyone to access later.

Avoid Being Penny Wise And Pound Foolish

I attended a meeting with a start-up once where we spend an hour debating a \$50-dollar expense for an upcoming event. The overall budget for the event was \$10,000. Was that a good use of an hour, with six people in the room? Or if there's a clear opportunity to accelerate your goal achievement with something that wasn't previously budgeted, do you push for it anyway? Be frugal and watch your pennies, at every stage of business growth, but keep a lookout for opportunities that may not have been planned, but will move you forward more quickly.

Document And Leverage Processes For Repeatable Tasks

The person responsible for executing your webinars today? They likely won't have that job in two years. So when someone new steps in, will they know how to do it just as well? Too often in

the start-up world, repeatable tasks of all sorts are executed each time like it's the first time, without following a process or set of best practices. Document the repeatable tasks and projects so others can easily step in and make them better moving forward.

Keep Your Best People For More Than One To Two Years

Start-ups are notorious for high turnover rates. But if you've identified your "A" players, do what it takes to keep them. Find what motivates them the most (cash, stock, responsibility, recognition) and ensure you're executing a mutually-beneficial value exchange.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS: ELEVEN WAYS TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY AND SUCCESS

We have a specific, measurable set of objectives to drive our business in the New Year, plus I've developed with my wife a set of goals for our family in 2013.

The 11 resolutions below sit somewhere in the middle. Most are work-related, but together they represent an effort to work smarter and more efficiently, helping me get more done faster and increase time for family, personal interests and serendipitous professional opportunities. Without further ado:

1. Read The Wall Street Journal Every Day

I set this as a goal every year, it seems, and each year I get a little better. It has been a mistake to try and get myself to read the Journal every morning, as family commitments (and early wake-ups from my one-year-old) made that tough. But there's no reason through the day or after the kids go to bed I can't get through the paper quickly. Every day there are at least a handful of articles that make me smarter, give me an excuse to share something with a prospect or partner, etc.

2. Inbox Zero

More on the full Getting Things Done (GTD) process later, but I work hard to make my work surfaces as clean as possible, helping me focus

on what's most important right now. A big part of that is about email. I still think our email largely represents someone else's priorities, and should be kept offline most of the time, but there's no reason not to actively triage inbox content according to a set of rules that clear it out, set a task list for later, and move on to more important things right now.

3. No Working On Tuesday And Thursday Nights

I actually find myself working smarter and harder during the day Tuesdays and Thursdays when I've done this in the past. I get more done these days, in other words, meaningful work, vs. when I let things stretch into the evening. And I really love that extra time with my family, with personal interests, etc. Working less doesn't always mean working less.

4. No Computers Or Devices In Meetings Unless Necessary

I am so bad at this, and there are times when a computer open during a meeting makes sense. But that's the minority exception to the rule. In general, if I'm able to stare at my laptop or smartphone during a fair portion of a meeting, I probably shouldn't be in the meeting in the first place. And if I should be there, I should focus, be more productive, and hopefully help us get things done and out of the meeting faster.

5. More Phone Calls

Yes, that's right. I want to spend more time on the phone. Oftentimes it feels faster to shoot someone an email, but it's more impactful to pick up the phone and talk to them. It can actually be more efficient to do a real-time back-and-forth via phone, and worst case (since few people use the phone as much these days) it makes a great impression.

6. More Offline Work Time

I'm writing this post with email in offline mode, and my wifi turned off. There are still distractions around me, but no new email notifications, no new tweets, no instant messages. This post (and my content marketing strategy in general) is a priority, so if I'm going to do it right, I want to focus on getting it done well, done quickly, and done period so I can move onto something else.

7. Refine My "Daily Do" List

Every morning at 7:30 I have a "meeting" with myself that's essentially a reminder to do a bunch of stuff daily. It has historically included things like follow-ups from yesterday's meetings, confirmations and prep for today's meetings, skill endorsements in LinkedIn, etc. I will refine this list for the New Year, so that it includes daily to-do's specific to our business goals as well as some of my personal goals for 2013. I highly recommend a similar daily habit for yourself. Some of those daily to-do's may become second nature, but it's great to have that daily reminder to get it done regardless.

8. Increase Automation (Do More, But Do Less)

Most things you do on a regular basis can be automated, or done by someone else. I still make active use of TimeSvr, for example, to take care of repetitive tasks on my behalf. I have Eloqua to automatically do lead follow-up (including with leads from SlideShare) where we used to do that manually. This year I want to automate more of my social following and notification tasks, plus increase synchronization of work done remotely.

9. Better GTD Discipline

I'm a productivity porn nut, and David Allen's Getting Things Done (GTD) methodology is at the core of my system. But I've gotten lazy. I don't do weekly reviews every week as I used to, my Projects discipline has gotten sloppy, and I'm not great at capturing everything I want to capture on a daily basis. I'm going to re-read Getting Things Done this month and re-up on the core components.

10. Improve Consistency Of Execution

I highly recommend a quick read of The Checklist Manifesto, which outlines several instances across use cases in which checklists have significantly increased consistency of execution and results. I've been thinking a lot the past few weeks about how this book applies specifically to our business—both how we operate internally as well as how we service our customers. I'm convinced it has significant implications for us, and expect it could have the same for you.

11. Focus On Priorities First!

The late Stephen Covey taught us about the difference between urgency and importance. You can spend a lot of time doing urgent things, great things, things you can justify that are smart and good for your business. But there's also a reason why Verne Harnish recommends not just having a "top five" list of priorities, but also designating your "one of five" and getting it done FIRST. That one thing is likely complicated, it's likely hard, it's likely not the easiest or most fun thing on your list. But it's at the top for a reason. I'm going to focus this year on getting that "one of five" done first each day.

It's easy to make New Years Resolutions and simply add more work to your day. Most New Years Resolutions lists add to our workload without subtracting something else that gives us a reasonable chance of achieving the goal.

But I think this list is largely a zero-sum on my time. It's clearly an increase in "asks" of myself, but if I execute well it actually cuts time and saves time elsewhere.

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Heinz Marketing is a Seattle marketing agency focused on sales acceleration. Heinz Marketing helps clients achieve sustained sales success by growing revenue from existing customers and cost effectively identifying and winning new customers.

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