

# X PRODUCTIVITY

*“There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently  
that which should not be done at all.”*

**- Peter F. Drucker, writer and business consultant**

What is the fastest, most direct way to accomplish the most important goal in your life right now? The answer to this question is the essence of incredible productivity. First, you must know exactly which goal in your life supersedes all others. Second, you must have specific knowledge of how to go from where you are to where you want to be with as little effort as possible. Third, you must have a steadfast commitment to make progress towards that goal every single day. By definition, productivity refers to the amount of output that is created. To maximize your personal productivity, simply increase the daily output, both in quantity and quality.

One of my greatest challenges while writing this book revolved around my ability to effectively communicate a clear message that was both interesting and informative. I struggled to create chapters that I loved because I was concerned about the quality of the output. I am a perfectionist by nature so it is quite difficult for me to produce a chapter, an assignment, or a product that is not stellar in every way. However, I realized late in the game while finishing the book that in order to produce a book worth reading I would have to write a lot, hundreds of pages more than I would ever end up publishing. I needed to dramatically increase the quantity in order to ultimately improve the quality. In other words, if I was willing to write hundreds of pages worth of bad content, then I would eventually find myself with a few pages that were worth reading. Said another way, if I increased the quantity I would also be increasing my experience. As my experience increased, so did my expertise. As I learned more about how to effectively write a great chapter I would be able to produce higher quality work in shorter periods of time. The logic here is simple but the potential is enormous. I realized that I needed to sacrifice in order to win. I needed to devote myself completely to writing as much as possible in order to end up with a book that impressed me. *Productivity is more about quantity than quality because quantity ultimately leads to quality.*

If you have a lot to accomplish it only makes sense to take a minute to ask yourself how you could go about getting everything completed in as little time as possible. What may

be surprising is that productivity can be more about passion than well-thought out strategies. If you want something to happen you will make it happen. An intelligent person may be able to figure out a way to complete a task efficiently, but it does not mean her or she has any motivation to actually do the work. Productive and successful people ultimately work harder than everyone else, though they are not necessarily geniuses at anything. If you have ever experienced self-limiting beliefs, you may have thought that your success in life was based on your intelligence, talents, or genetic makeup. The reality is that how you get through your day is predominately affected by your efforts, not your brains. The best part is that once you start to work hard, and do so consistently, you will naturally gain more experiential intelligence that will allow you to complete tasks faster, with less energy, and get more done.

How you spend your time each and every day, or how much output you produce, is the greatest determining factor in your present and future success. Time is all you have. The only constant in life, the thing that has never changed and never will, is the tick of the clock. There will always be 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week, and 365 days in a year (give or take a little for leap years). All of us have the same amount of time and yet, some create enormous success while others squander their lives away for years. The only difference is the utilization of time. In order to achieve great success, the only attitude you could possibly embrace about time would be

a positive, butt-kicking demeanor. Make every day count by increasing the quantity of work that leads to incredible achievements.

*“It’s been my observation that most successful people get ahead during the time other people waste.”*  
- Henry Ford, *entrepreneur and industrialist*

### **Prioritization**

How productive do you feel today? How often do you end your day with a great sense of satisfaction because you accomplished a lot? Are you the type of person that misses appointments, forgets tasks, loses your keys, or stumbles through a messy pile of clothes looking for your favorite shirt only to find your toothbrush? Being unorganized and lacking the ability to complete tasks quickly and easily will almost always hinder your ability to live your best possible life. Those who are the least productive and capable of getting things done are unnecessarily stressed, behind schedule, and bitter about life. In fact, studies have shown that employees with clean desks are more likely to be promoted and given raises than their messy counterparts.

Force yourself to prioritize whenever possible. One of the simpler ways to implement priorities is to create self-imposed barriers to the things you want. For example, you really want to watch TV, but you have not exercised yet today. If this has become a nasty habit, then don’t let yourself continue the streak. From now on, you cannot watch TV until you

have exercised, period. This is the same strategy my parents used to encourage me to finish my homework as a kid. I was not allowed to play with my friends or entertain my brain until I completed all my assignments. Who was surprised when my homework was always done? Not my parents. I did not make that connection myself for years, but it works very well.

Do what is obvious and do what is right. If your home looks like a tornado just barreled through it, if your to-do list is a mile long and you have not worked on it since last summer, if you are living by the seat of your pants and you never feel accomplished, just stop and do the obvious. Find the hottest fire in your life and put it out first. Then, every day from now on, focus on the most pressing item on your list. Author Brian Tracy refers to this method as *eating the frog* in his book *Eat That Frog!*. Do the hard stuff first, as soon as you wake up, or at least right after you have had your coffee.

Good productivity can be expressed as the completion of your most important goals in the most effective way possible. Being productive is not just being busy. Being busy may mean you are getting the right stuff done, but not necessarily. Those who accomplish the most know how to focus on what matters and ignore that which does not. Cleaning your bathroom six times a day is not effective or productive - it is just busy and a little OCD. Type A personality types, like myself, tend to overdo their to-do lists and spend an extraordinary amount of time doing "stuff" without any sense of prioritization.

If you learn anything from this chapter, let it be that ability to take the necessary steps to master prioritization and take action on what matters most. Being able to distinguish useful work from useless distractions will save you an incredible amount of time and push you further and faster towards your goals than almost anything else.

*"God put me on Earth to accomplish a certain number of things.*

*Right now I am so far behind I will never die!"*

– Anonymous

## **The Backbone**

A few months after I moved to Boston I created the organizational system that I still use today. I named the system *The Backbone* and it has literally become the core structure that dictates how everything functions in my personal and professional lives. The Backbone is essentially a document management system that organizes my digital and physical paperwork. It is not a piece of software, so it can be used on paper or on a Mac or PC. At the core, I divide everything into either *Personal* or *Professional*. I chose these two major categories because almost everything you do in life can be quickly categorized as one or the other. Remember, effectiveness and productivity are all about ease of use. From there, my life is organized into logical folders that keep only the essential stuff I may need well into the future. I use this system on my computer and in a small file cabinet for everything from my weekly lists

of goals and cooking recipes to medical receipts and customized resumes. Literally anything you or I could possibly want to save and use is kept in a logical order to quickly access it. The possibilities of this system are endless in the sense that I divide my calendars, email, photos, iTunes playlists, clothes in my closet, address book, and many other areas into relevant “folders.” The real key to The Backbone is simplicity. Don’t keep anything you don’t need and periodically go through everything to eliminate anything you no longer have use for. Once you have narrowed down your stuff to the essential, create logical categories to store your documents, files, and physical stuff. For example, in my Professional folder everything is located under one of three categories: Education, Employment, or Entrepreneurship. In the Personal folder, the major sub-categories are Goals, Health, Relationships, Spirituality, and Wealth Management.

To learn more and get a jump-start on your own organization you can access some of the documents I use including a budget, weekly goal organizer, password manager, and more.

Visit: [GraduatedAndClueless.com/begin-here/starter-kit](http://GraduatedAndClueless.com/begin-here/starter-kit).

*“Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.”*

*– Dale Carnegie, self-improvement pioneer*

## Equilibrium

In college my friends picked on me because of my intense organizational tendencies. I would clean my room at three in the morning after a few hours of heavy drinking. I organized my clothes by colors. I even knew the location of every item in my room because everything had a predetermined location. My friends thought it was hysterical to move one small item to see if I noticed (I always did). Having a place for everything, or having equilibrium in my life, is what allows me to stay organized and move forward confidently.

The idea of establishing and maintaining equilibrium is to find harmony with your physical space and create mental clarity - no unattended mail, no extraneous paperwork, no trash on the floor, and nothing out of place. It is similar to Feng Shui, but you dictate what equilibrium looks like for you. You will not have to hire an expert or a maid, just focus your energy a little each day on feeling great and creating a physical space that motivates you to tackle your goals. For example, at the end of each day I pick-up of all extra stuff that is lying around my house, write a new to-do list for the next day, shower, and do yoga. The goal is to end the current day as organized as possible so that the next day will begin with a clean slate, ready to take on the challenges I am sure to face. When you reach complete equilibrium your physical space, to-do list, and your body will be clean, organized, and reenergized.

## Zero Inbox

Don't let your email consume you. The *Zero Inbox Policy* can be used for your entire life, especially your to-do lists, email, physical mail, and any other area where work piles up. To implement this methodology, simply keep your email inbox empty all the time. When a new email arrives in your inbox, it is up to you to get rid of it in the most effective manner possible. After you read the email it is time to trash it or move it to a folder. Only temporarily keep email in your inbox if it is a reminder to do something specific. If the email warrants a new to-do, write it down on your to-do list in another location and then either trash the email or move it to a folder. Those are your only options. This forces you to read every email and address it accordingly. Use this same strategy with paperwork, mail, food on the kitchen counter, and any other area where odds and ends can pile up easily.

## Minimization

To minimize the amount of email you receive you will need to unsubscribe from everything you do not absolutely care about. It is easy to be on every e-newsletter out there, including mine, so make sure the content enhances your life in some way. Make it a practice to unsubscribe from every email that you can before you trash it. Also, label the email as junk if it looks like spam, and let your email filtering system handle the rest from there.

In order to minimize the amount of time you may end up spending checking your email, make use of *batching* as much as possible. Batching is simply checking your email a few times a day and taking care of everything all at once. If you check your email throughout the day you will spend much more time on it than if you simply did it only once or twice per day. Don't forget to apply these principles to your physical mail, magazine subscriptions, homework, projects, or other work you may have. Batch whatever you can and stop doing anything that does not make your life incredibly amazing. Limit your magazine subscriptions, especially if you don't read them. Move all your bank statements to electronic or paperless options. Automate your recurring bill payments. Give away all the clothes you never wear. Clean out your kitchen every week and discard all the old food. Stop using a home phone, fax line, or cable TV. Load all your CDs into iTunes and then sell the CDs. Dump everything out of your purse (or man purse like I carry) and only put back in what you absolutely need on a daily basis. For more awesome productivity tips and lifestyle design ideas check out Tim Ferriss' book, *The 4-Hour Workweek*.

### **Run Your Personal Life Like a Business**

If your life were a business, how profitable would it be? Would your customers feel comfortable at your store or would the mess scare them away? Could you outsource the work you are doing now to someone else? What if you could

hire employees to do the work you don't enjoy? Applying basic business principles to your everyday life is the essence of running your personal life like a successful business. The trick is to look at your life from the lens of someone else. New perspectives will shed some needed light on problems you have not noticed before. The easiest way to get started is to go shopping as a customer yourself. Visit someone else's life for a while and see how they live. What problems do you notice right away? What does their store (house) look like? How organized are they? How do people wealthier than you live? How do people who have fewer resources than you get by? Analyze other people and then use their best ideas to help improve your everyday life. Could you outsource your recurring chores to a maid service, lawn maintenance company, or a bored teenager in your neighborhood? Be creative and find ways to live smarter in order to begin living better.

### **Steve Pavlina**

Steve Pavlina is a well-known expert in personal development, mostly due to his website, [StevePavlina.com](http://StevePavlina.com). The name of his popular blog is *Personal Development for Smart People* and it has over 800 posts, which could fill dozens of books worth of material. Steve is able to accomplish this enormous amount of content creation due to his highly productive lifestyle. He often blogs about how to utilize time and he shares personal anecdotes that highlight his impressive schedule. Steve is also a big reason why I experienced a revolution in my

dietary system, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 12. I have listed an excerpt here from one of Steve's blog posts that summarize his highly productive daily routine. Though his example may be difficult to follow as written, use his ideas as a guide and a recommendation to improve your daily life.

### **Steve Pavlina's Highly Productive Daily Routine**

- Get up at 5 am, 7 days a week
- Exercise first thing in the morning while listening to audio books
- Do high value tasks at the start of each workday, and delay routine items till the afternoon
- Eat at least 90% raw vegan foods
- Maintain a clean and uncluttered workspace
- At the end of the workday, write a to-do list for the next day
- Visualize goals/intentions at least once a day
- Read during the last hour before bed

### **Weekly Goals, Checklists, & Organizational Documents**

Your to-do list is a choice. Every item is optional. When it comes to creating your goals for the week, remember that you have the option to never do any of it. I say that because many people feel trapped by their to-dos. Don't ever feel like you have to do something. Choose to do it. Stay conscious and make an intentional decision each and every time. Your goals

are not required, no matter who is expecting something from you. Make it a habit to sit down on Sunday night and write out the goals you intend to accomplish throughout the week. Assign each goal a day to be completed and prioritize the most important goals early in the week.

If you don't use a planner of some sort, you need one. Digital or physical, template or self-made, post-it note or notebook, you need something to keep yourself on target with your short and long-term goals. In my life I use a number of organizational tools to keep all my information in check. A few of them are available for you in the *Starter Kit* on [GraduatedAndClueless.com](http://GraduatedAndClueless.com). I organize all the information I feel is necessary and then I keep going. I am a little OCD when it comes to this stuff but I am working on cutting back. Ultimately, you want to have a system for everything. The more data you have about your life the more you will know. Keep an exercise log to monitor your progress over time. I have kept one for the last four years and I can see patterns of my best and worst habits. If you don't already have a document or software program monitoring your online username and passwords, get one now. I use a password-protected digital spreadsheet to monitor my own and I have heard great things about *1Password* for the Mac. Otherwise, just find a secure way to monitor your login info.

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### **Jeff Sanders' Productivity Powerhouse System**

1. Allocate time every week (like Sunday night) to plan the upcoming week.
2. Make a list of everything you feel compelled to accomplish in 7 days.
3. Prioritize your list and complete the most important tasks early in the week.
4. Set a completion date for each goal.
5. Schedule time to read books, exercise, be social, and take well-needed breaks.

### **The Most Direct Method for Overcoming Cluelessness**

1. Acknowledge that you don't know something, that you are frustrated, lost, confused, and/or need help.
2. Gain knowledge about the topic: explore, read, listen to podcasts, go on adventures, and seek out the unknown. This requires proactive work on your part.
3. Narrow down your choices and make a decision: it involves risk and you could be wrong. This does get easier with more knowledge.
4. Take action. Begin by doing something useful and do it often. Create powerful, positive, and permanent habits that lead to success every time. This, too, requires practice but also gets easier over time.
5. Repeat.

### **Cluelessness Self-Evaluation**

1. Would you call yourself a productive person? Would others describe you as efficient, effective, or productive?
2. Do you value organization? Do you want to increase your efficiency or does your current system work well?
3. Does your organization create forward momentum towards your goals?
4. How could you create more time in your day for the things you want the most? What could you do to improve your daily habits?
5. If you could start from scratch, how would you re-create your life?

### **Daily Bold Action**

1. Adopt a clean desk policy, zero inbox system, and a clean living space organizational system.
2. Identify three bad habits you currently have that reduce your productivity or simply waste your time.
3. Brainstorm three great alternative habits that you could instill in your life quickly and fairly easily. Set a goal of switching out the old bad habits for the new better ones within the next 30 days.

### **Additional Resources**

1. *Eat That Frog!: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time* by Brian Tracy

2. *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*  
by David Allen
3. *One Year to an Organized Life: From Your Closets to Your Finances, the Week-by-Week Guide to Getting Completely Organized For Good* by Regina Leeds

**SOURCES**

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