

ACHIEVE MORE WITH LESS TIME

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Americans today are busier than ever, and it seems to be getting worse. High standards, coupled with an uncompromising work ethic, demanding bosses, layoffs and workload restructuring, new technology, day-to-day operations, future planning, business travel, innovation, competition, family obligations, and the details of daily life all combine to create the kind of pressure that, as one business leader put it, makes it hard to breathe. Anyone who suffers a scarcity of time must learn to be more effective in their use of time or risk becoming victims of their own success.

The solution? In order to avoid burnout you need to stop trying to go faster and instead maximize the time you have so you're more productive. Yes, it is possible, and the benefit of this is that as you gain productivity, you actually work less.

If you're ready to trade your current frantic pace of work for one that's more relaxed yet efficient, the following strategies will help you achieve more in less time.

- **Make New Time Rules**

Fact: We are all operating on unspoken time rules.

Financial advisors often advise people to set "money rules," such as "save 10% of every paycheck." Money rules help you be decisive and stay true to your financial goals. For efficiency and quality of life, you can apply the same concept to your time by setting new time rules.

Here are some of the rules other leaders have set.

- Never open my email before planning the day.
- Never schedule a meeting before 9:00 or after 4:00.
- Turn off my computer after 7 p.m.
- Keep my PDA off during family time.
- Always eat dinner at home even it means working in the evening.
- Spend no more than one evening away from home per week for a work event.
- Work on my personal goals during "my time" and work at work.
- Be home in time to tuck in the kids in every night, or at least call them to say good-night.

Would any of these rules work for you?

To set time rules, follow this simple formula:

- Notice what's not working about the way you spend your time.
- Write down what would work– the way you wish you could spend your time.

- Make a time rule that makes your time work well for you.

Here's an example:

- It's not working for me to have people walking into my office all day.
- I would prefer to have at least two consecutive hours a day with the door closed.
- Rule: I close my door for two hours a day.

Time rules, even small ones, have the advantage of being concrete and explicit, making it easier to hold yourself accountable. Once you set a rule, you'll want to communicate it so you can accommodate the people in your life. They can only respect your boundaries if they're clear. Said another way, they can only follow the rules if you set them.

- **Power Down**

Fact: Your brain gets a stress signal every time an email comes in.

Power down means turn off the technology. Yes, the wonders of technology are just short of miraculous, and today's technology can help us maximize our time. We can use it to transform not just the way our world works, but also the way we work. It can buy us time, save us time, leverage time, and organize our time.

However, if you're not careful, technology can also use up all of your time. Think about it. Just because you can be available 24/7 doesn't mean you should. Just because you can instant message at the same time you're writing a report doesn't mean you should. Just because you can perch your laptop on the passenger seat of your car to tap out ideas during traffic doesn't mean you should.

The trouble is not with the technology itself; it's the abuse of the technology that's the issue. To combat the downsides to technology, a CBS news report offered this common sense advice: "Give the brain time without stress, relaxing with family, exercising, eating well and sometimes, just sometimes, ignoring those emails." In other words, be the one to take control of your technology so you can get the important things done and not get distracted all day long.

"But wait a minute," you may be thinking. "My boss/clients/colleagues *expect* me to be available 24/7!" Realize this is not about ignoring people or shirking responsibility. It's about helping you focus so you can be more productive during your working hours. So ask yourself, "Do people really expect an immediate response or 24/7 availability? Or is that a standard I set for myself?" In reality, most people don't expect you to be there 24/7. Find out the expectations from your boss and co-workers and then create appropriate guidelines.

When you occasionally "power down," when you turn off the technology and do what brings you progress and fulfillment, you'll be much more effective in all your efforts.

- **Take a Virtual Vacation**

Fact: Research has shown that your brain needs time to rest and recover.

You'll work much more productively after you've taken a break. Just as your muscles need to recover from hard workouts, your brain needs time to recover from hard work. And while it would be wonderful to take a two-week trip to Tahiti every few months, few people can realistically do that. However, you can take a short virtual vacation as often as you like.

A virtual vacation is simply a form of meditation with a twist. As you do in meditation, close your eyes, breathe deeply, and release all thoughts. Then to go on vacation, fill your mind with restful images, thoughts, or even music. If you're worried about falling asleep, set an alarm and tell yourself that if you do fall asleep, you'll awake feeling refreshed and energized.

You can combine the techniques of meditation and imagination with exercise to really come away revived and restored. Yoga, walking, running, biking, and swimming have a rhythmic solitude that are especially well suited to resting the mind, but you can also get away from stress and frustration with any kind of sport.

Of course, it doesn't have to be exercise. A bath, a hot shower, an hour in the tub, some quiet time on the couch can all bring the rest you need if you're able to detach from the pressure and stress. Whatever you choose, be sure it *engages your mind*, either by helping you escape into a meditative state or getting you so involved in something else that you forget about work for awhile.

How exactly do virtual vacations increase productivity? They give your mind the space and rest it needs to function at its best. As a result, you gain a clearer mind with clearer thoughts, which leads to more productive work. You get better ideas, solutions to problems, and those "eureka" moments that enable you to blast through a project or shave time off a task.

Reclaim Your Time

Ultimately, gaining productivity by maximizing your time is not about what you should do; it's about what you choose to do. Do you *want* to work more productively and achieve your goals? Do you want to have more time to yourself and find ways to be rested and renewed? Then these strategies can help. So take control of your time and watch your productivity soar. And remember, the goal is not just to make the best use of your time; it's to use time to get the most out of your work and your life.

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