

# *YOUR BEST JUST GOT BETTER*

7 Keys To a More Productive Day



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## 7 Keys To a More Productive Day

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### Why be (more) productive?

The “return on investment” for managing your time is not just “more time.” In fact, the real ROI comes in what you can **now DO with the extra time** you’ll get as a result of being *more* effective, *more* efficient, and working *on* your priorities, not just thinking about them. It’s time to get to the things that are important...not just the things that are urgent.



What does the word “success” mean to you? I’d recommend you get a note card (or a big, huge white board above your desk!) and write the word “**success**” on top. After you write that word, go ahead and write a 10-20 word definition of that word for you. (If you’d like, look it up online or in your dictionary.)

Then, read your definition once a day, every day, for the next 5 days (early in the morning!).

## There Are Four Limited Resources

Time management, time blocking, and time saving are all things that people talk about in work...and in life. Time, however, is just ONE of the limited resources we manage - and, in fact, it MAY be the “most” limited resource because now matter what, (forgive the pun) time is ticking.

1. **Time:** There are 1,440 minutes in a day. No more. No less. So, look at what you’re doing IN time, not WITH time. If there is a way to get a 25 minute project done in 15 minutes, find it. If, one day a week you can line up your meetings so that people come to you (or a conference room right near your desk) do that. Find ways, each day, to best use those 1,440 minutes.
2. **Energy:** We have natural cycles. Are you a morning or afternoon person? Do you have boosts of energy (or down time) at specific times during the day? Your brain weighs about 5% of your total body weight, but uses over 20% of the energy available. Get enough rest, eat right, exercise, engage in activities that engage your energy and you’ll better use those 1,440 minutes.
3. **Focus:** A mentor/friend of mine, Allyson Lewis (author of *The 7 Minute Difference*) is convinced that our attention span ranges from about 20 seconds to 20 minutes. That’s about how long - don’t believe this, test it out today! - we can hold our attention on one, single thing. What we focus on, or continually re-focus on, will absolutely affect what we do with those 1,440 minutes.
4. **Systems and Tools:** Have you ever checked your email inbox and seen someone’s name, and had that sudden hit of adrenaline/anxiety that you “might” have missed something? How about seeing someone’s Caller ID on your phone? Systems and tools can be set up to help us get more done, faster; not simply remind us of what we’re managing (or what we’re late on!).

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*#IDeA : Turn your workspace into a science lab. Study you. How do you think?  
How do you focus? And, how do you get back on track?*

### I am at my best when...

This is an activity that I lead all my clients through. When I work with you one-on-one over two days, we spend time on Day One (and we go over this daily for the next few weeks) identifying your own “recipe” for having a great day...then, a great string of days, a great month and a great year.



Because everyone has their own definition of success, it’s important to know where you need to go, what you need to do, who you need to be around to increase the likelihood that success can happen every day! Knowing you, how you work, and what it will take for you to be your best is a critical component of workplace productivity and professional performance.

## “I’m at my best when...”

Take out a blank piece of paper, and in BIG letters on top, write, “I’m at my best when...”

Under that, write at least 7 things you know would go into you setting yourself up to engage, productively, effectively, efficiently - at your 100% - during the day.

- Where will you need to have gone?
- What will you need to have done?
- How will you have to have been?
- and more...

Among my own, “I’m at my best when...” statements are:

“I’m at my best when I eat a complete breakfast.”

“I’m at my best when I say thank you to someone around me.”

“I’m at my best when I reach out to a mentor asking for advice/ideas.”

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*#IDeA : Sit down with someone smarter than you. Let them know what you're dealing with, working on or thinking about. Talk for a few minutes and then LISTEN.*

### What are your MITs (your Most Important Things)?

Because there is SO MUCH to focus on, we sometimes forget to focus on the *most important things*.



When we focus on something important, it's not always easy to stay there until we're done. Throughout the day, you'll start, stop and start again, working on those things that are important and urgent, important and not urgent, not important and urgent, and not important and...not urgent!

Try *THIS* activity out for a few days: each evening, write down your (no more than 4) **MITs** for the next day. Even on the weekend, and especially before important workdays, write down the things you know you want to focus in on over the next 1,440 minutes.

(These are *not to-do's*, they are areas to focus on, engage in or talk about.)

## Maximize Interruptions

One of our most limited of all resources, our own focus (what we see, hear and do) needs to be “encouraged” by identifying the things that we’re going to pay attention today.

Each time we interrupt ourselves, or get interrupted, we lose track of what we were working on, and spend valuable time “remembering where we were just a moment ago.” (For example: Have you ever walked into a room only to realize you forgot what you were originally going to do?)

Here’s how you can maximize (yes, Maximize!) interruptions:

1. Write down in a journal/notebook/legal pad as much as you can that you’re thinking about during the day for the next 5 days. OVERDO this list, ‘cause you’ll eventually get a sense of the kinds of things/topics that interrupt you through the day.
2. Create pages in your planner (or files/folders/bookmarks on your computer/PDA) to capture ideas and topics to ask people the next time you see them. Again, overdo these inventories so that when you next sit down with that person, you can move forward on more than just the “one pressing issue” when they come to interrupt you.
3. Finally, do that SAME thing with the bigger projects you are managing. Keep a folder, file, white board or stack of papers with “like items.” When you see or hear something, when you print or collect something, when you have something that you want to use/access/refer to later, you’ll be more effective if it’s there and easy to find and organized.

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*#IDeA : Productivity is also a process, not only a product.  
Your day is made up of process-product-process-product.*

### We are our habits and we do what we've always done

**Marketing:** the action or business of promoting and selling products or services

**Strategy:** a plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall goal



Growing up as a student, an athlete and a “serial entrepreneur” (I sold lemonade, went door to door washing windows and even had a booth at my university’s student center selling Italian sweaters...) I used to think that Practice Makes Perfect.

Imagine my surprise when I realized I was wrong...

## Practice makes comfortable

From the time you wake up (on your own, with the sunlight or after pressing the “snooze” button a couple of times) your body and mind are engaged in a process of “seeking normal.” Normal ... that’s what is comfortable, it’s what we do without having to think about what we do. Make sense?

Practice may not make perfect, but *studying* our practices can lead to incredible boosts in time management, productivity and workplace performance.

1. Read the book, “One Minute Manager,” (<http://www.bookswerecommend.com>) years ago, this book by Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson changed the way I lead, taught and managed my professional relationships. Throughout this book, you’ll find ideas you can use RIGHT AWAY to improve the way you engage in your everyday productivity.
2. **Inventory #1:** What have you done by 11am?  
Make a list of the 30-40 “things” you do between the time you first open your eyes in the morning until about 11am. Once you identify WHAT takes time, then you can make 3 very important decisions: (1) What to **delete**? (2) What to **delegate**? (3) What to **combine**?
3. **Inventory #2:** What systems and tools do you rely on to get your work done?  
Make a list of the gear, tools and systems you need to be most effective/productive. When you have THAT inventory you can ask, “What do I need to know about this tool to save time each day?”
4. **Inventory #3:** What do you do monthly to invite relaxation, revitalization & rejuvenation into your life?  
Make a list of 12 (yes, 12) things you can do over the next year to “**tap the well**” and get back to the reason *WHY* you want manage your time, get more done and experience more success in your work and in your life. Each month review this list and pick one to schedule in your calendar!

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*#IDeA : To perform in life and at work, you must know HOW you work.*

*Watch yourself from time to time.*

### Productivity partnerships

Look in the mirror for a minute...you're not going to change years (or decades!) of habits by reading one book, attending one seminar or meeting one coach. Instead, pick an idea and stick with it ... over time. Ask someone you know, see regularly and respect to “check in” with you weekly for the next 5 weeks. Let them know you are focused on improving and you are looking for suggestions.



Identify a significant “productivity” goal and get going! A great way to do this is to meet with people, talk about your goals and make incremental and focused progress toward those goals.

## Are you willing to step it up?

Health clubs know something we can learn from: Group classes increase participation. One reason I joined my local running, triathlon and cycling clubs is to continue training with and around others. Something happens when I work out with friends: I engage ... more.

Over the years, I've found I can use this same approach to enhance my career, my network, my knowledge and my relationships.

1. **Career:** As a “thinker” in the space of Performance and Productivity, it’s important that I continually reach out and see what’s working (or not). I schedule 4-6 weekly phone calls with my clients, each call lasts 10 minutes or less, where I talk to them about my research and writings. Knowing I’m going to talk with a client “sometime soon” increases accountability and engagement.
2. **Network:** We are our network. What you talked about with the people you spent time with last week will drive what you talk about this week. Want to talk about *something else* next week? Spend some time and meet someone new this week. Build your network and you’ll get more engaged.
3. **Knowledge:** What do you *need to know*? With the pace of work and life moving as rapidly as they are, there’s probably a book that came out just this week that’s worth *you* looking at. Please, if there’s one you see that is worth ME looking at, please let me know! [Jason@WomackCompany.com](mailto:Jason@WomackCompany.com)
4. **Relationships:** My current mentor (no, he doesn’t know it, but I’ve learned a TON from him) in the sphere of relationship building and influence is Dr. Robert Cialdini. If you haven’t seen his stuff, check out the book Influence. Link here: <http://www.BooksWeRecommend.com> ... it’s well worth it!

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*#IDeA : Listen...to...your...own...words. Watch what happens when you give yourself even a little bit of your own attention.*

### Look at where you are...

Somewhere - in a stack on your desk, or your email inbox, or your voice mail box, or a notebook - is an inventory of unfinished business. To-dos, projects, actions, reminders...the stuff that when you look at it you might think, *“Oh my goodness, I’ve still got so much to do!”*



A reason I give for keeping some kind of “daily journal” is that it gives subjective-objective data points relative to our progress over time. Subjective ‘cause they are our observations during moments in time. Objective ‘cause we wrote them down and can reflect on them later ... and, they keep us honest!

## ...in relationship to where you were

There is one thing you can do to improve your productivity multi-fold starting today. Build in a regular, specific, complete debrief process. Learn from what happened, recognize wins, and build momentum for what is to come.

1. **Conversations:** What are you talking about as compared to what you want to be talking about? At the close of each day, consider replaying some of the conversations you were a part of. Are there some things you said you wish you shared differently? Are there people you need to speak to again soon to clear the air about anything you're working toward?
2. **Projects:** What went right? What didn't? What surprised you? What was the biggest risk you took, and how do you feel about it? And finally, where could you have "lived a little closer to the edge?" Is there something you could have tried that would have been a risk or out of your comfort zone?
3. **Meetings:** How did they go? Who was there? Who *should* have been there? And, who *should not* have been there? What could you do differently for upcoming meetings to maximize everyone's time? What could you do the same as last time?
4. **The Week:** Knowing that some of the things we did over the past 5-10 days are actually supporting us moving forward is significant to our success. In our book [The Promise Doctrine](#) we talk about the importance of "celebrating" accomplishment. See if sometime in the next week you can find something to work toward - and then publicly celebrate that win!

PS: All topics apply to all areas... <http://www.womackcompany.com/projectdebrief>

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*#IDeA : Imagine a life without change, uncertainty or difficulty.*

*What would be left?*

*Repetition of what you already have. Quick, go make a new promise!*

### Action follows thought...follows view

What you see can easily change what you think about. What you think about can change what gets done. So, several times each day, direct your focus to what you need to do, think about, engage in and give yourself *“the gift of your own attention.”*

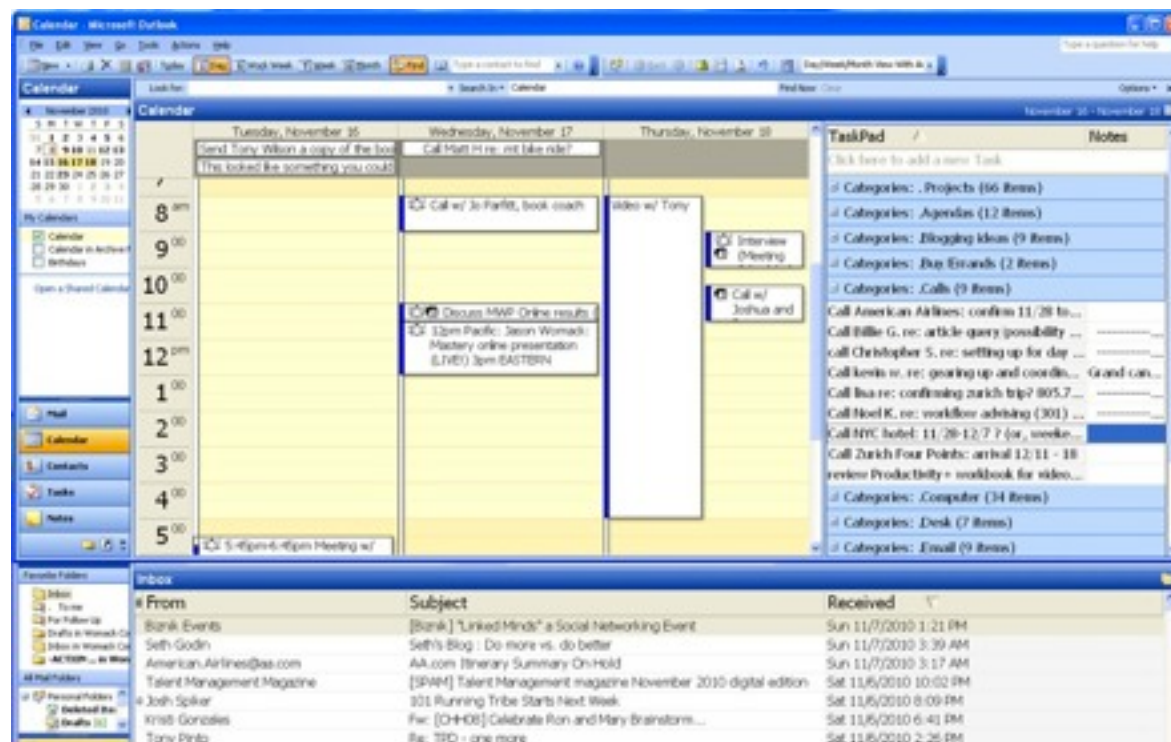


Whatever time management system you use build your personalized “daily dashboard.” Write down (or type) the elements that come together to help you get done what needs to get done. In a digital environment, your “dashboard” will include your reminders, your to-dos, your appointments, your text-voicemail-email messages and more...

## The Microsoft® Outlook® Dashboard (<http://www.outlookdashboard.com>)

Because SO many of our clients use (count on?) Microsoft® Outlook®, we have pushed harder on that than any other tool/system out there to keep track of it all. If possible, consider making the below your “Startup Screen” (much more information on the website: [www.outlookdashboard.com](http://www.outlookdashboard.com)).

1. On the left of the screen, is everything that is *due*. If something is for today, it's above each day. If it has a time, I usually set a reminder with it!
2. On the right, my “outstanding tasks and projects.” I get to see, at a glance, everything I still need to *do*.
3. If you have room, *right click* over your mail bar (lower left) and open Mail in a new window. Then, you can position your mail to see what's *new*.



I can teach an online “Productivity Through Technology,” 30 minute course for your team if you're interested let me know!

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#IDeA : Who is introducing innovation *into* your life...  
and, the what you're *doing* with your life?

### #IDeA: Innovate. Design. experiment. Assess

The next book I'm writing is all about the "Process and Product of Engagement." The process is quite simple, actually, the best way to get from here...to there...is to, well, get started.

By writing it down, claiming it, telling someone what you're going to do, day-dreaming, we immediately begin increasing our productivity. Getting started is one thing, keeping it going another.



Innovation is the action or process of innovating. It's a continual act, movement and process. We have an idea, we work to set it up, try it out for a while and then assess whether or not it's worthwhile to keep on going.

From reading this small book, *what can you get started on today?*

## Checklist for action

It's really (really, *REALLY*) easy to put these kinds of books down (or, simply close the PDF as the case may be) and say, "That was nice, but I don't have time for that."

If we want to get something different...we gotta do something different. Take one thing you thought of from reading this and write it on a note card (or on your bathroom mirror with a white-board pen ... trust me, you can wipe it clean later!) and focus on it over the next 5 days.

1. Build your "I'm at my best when..." inventory. If you can share your list with someone who can help you, a friend, an assistant, a colleague, a significant other ... someone who, during the early part of each day could say, "**Hey ... are you at your best?**"
2. Identify *your* most important things. Consider making THE inventory (might be 20, 30 or even 40 things) and then working on them in some kind of rotation. Remember to pick only 4 to work on each day, this gives you a little bit of leeway so you can really **engage with them throughout the day.**
3. As Newton wrote, "A body in motion tends to stay in motion..." as do our productivity patterns. If we continue to do what we always do, the possibility that we'll keep getting those results does indeed increase. ***Identify and question your patterns.***
4. Build your network, increase your influence, and step up. Sometimes it's easier to work in partnerships to get there. Work with a friend, meet a colleague for lunch, schedule weekly phone calls with someone who will encourage you to do just a little bit more ... **and hold you accountable.**
5. Debrief...everything. Practice stopping from time to time throughout the day to ask, "Am I really working at my best?" Listen to the answers and **course-correct from there!**

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