

The Ultimate Productivity Guide

World's best practices how
to increase productivity
and live a better life.

Hey,

I am Zdravko Cvijetic, but you can call me Z.

I'm a writer, educator, and the founder of Zero to Skill.

Today I am proud to partner with Readdle and introduce you an exclusive edition of The Ultimate Productivity Guide, so you can learn about best practices on how to increase productivity, and live a better life.

Over the last seven years, I've researched, studied and created some of the most powerful productivity tools and methods.

What initially started as a battle with laziness and procrastination ended up being one of the most crucial things I've done for myself.

By implementing what I've learned in my life, I was able to take control over my time and build useful habits, which allowed me to achieve a number of my biggest goals in life.

From starting a profitable online company, building a globally recognized blogging career, generating over 35 million readers, to being featured in prominent media publications such as Forbes, CNBC, Business Insider, Huffington Post, Inc., New York Observer, and others.

All while leading a fantastic social life, travelling over 30 countries worldwide and reaching the optimal level of fitness and health.

This is not an outcome of exceptional circumstances. I had no starting advantage. I've done this all by myself, and you can do it too.

Luckily, you don't have to spend seven years doing this alone.

You will have this compilation of the best productivity methods and techniques which will help you master your time and take your life to the next level.

Also, if you are interested in an audio version of this guide, [you can find it here for free](#) - it's narrated by me personally.

CONTENTS

1. How to Make the Most out of The Ultimate Productivity Guide
2. Productivity Principles, Rules & Tips
3. The Starting Point
4. Phase One: Direction
5. Phase Two: Elimination
6. Phase Three: Optimization
7. Phase Four: Execution
8. Bonus Edition
9. Final Thoughts

How to Make the Most out of The Ultimate Productivity Guide

Before we dive right into the meat (which is what you came for), I briefly want to share two ways to approach this guide:

1. Consume and apply it in the exact order I designed it in.
2. Skim through it and choose a technique that makes sense for you today.

The first approach will take a bit longer, but you will get compounded results and have a higher chance not to fall off the wagon.

The second approach is shorter, and it's perfect if you are just looking for a quick productivity boost.

Productivity Principles, Rules & Tips

Here you will find a few principles, rules and tips that will help you make the most out of this guide and get your productivity to the next level.

Take Care of Your Health

The most important thing you can remember is to take care of yourself and your health first, before engaging in anything else.

This means:

1. Make sure you sleep enough & get quality sleep
2. Pay attention to your diet
3. Engage in a form of a physical exercise

These three are the prerequisites for being energetic, focused and healthy.

Practice Consistency

This is the golden rule of productivity.

No matter what you choose to do, it is vital you pay attention to staying consistent. This is especially important in the beginning, while you're still forming a habit.

Do it every day.

It's far more valuable to do one habit for seven days, even if you do 10 minutes each day, instead of doing it one day a week—even if it is for 5 hours.

Remember:

If necessary, sacrifice the Quality, and the Quantity, for the sake of CONSISTENCY.

Live a 24-Hour Life

We, humans, are creatures of instant gratification. We will always do everything in our power to reach pleasure as fast as possible.

That's why anything that requires commitment for a longer period of time, especially when we don't see the results right away (i.e. losing weight), tends to overwhelm and demotivate us.

To prevent this, practice living a 24-hour life. That means you should make a plan for a longer period of time, but think and act only in a span of one single day.

Don't think about a month from now. Don't think about the next week.
Don't even think about the next day.

Only day that's ahead of you.

Your goal is to do better than you have done it the day before.

Maximize Your Support System

No matter what your goals and priorities are, tell people close to you what you're doing.

Explain it so they can understand why you are doing it, why it's important to you. Tell them that you would appreciate the support and accountability.

Trust me, people are willing to help if you are ready to commit.

Plus, this makes a bit of an exciting challenge to keep up with your goals.

Invest in the Constructive Side of Your Personality

Every day you wake up, you have a choice.

Whether you will invest your precious time in the side of your personality that likes to take it easy, procrastinate, and indulge in all kinds of pleasure.

Or you will invest your precious resource in the side of your personality that gives better return on investment. The one you know will deliver results.

Remember, you have full control and choice where your focus and attention will go.

So, choose wisely.

Stop Hying Yourself up Before Sleep

Promising yourself that you will get up early, rock your day, just builds up the expectations, which only leads to demotivation if you don't follow through.

Instead, wake up and go from there. One thing at the time.

Take Notes

Writing things down, either on paper or in a digital form, is a great way keep track of your priorities, thoughts, ideas and progress.

Try to gradually add this in your life and remember to evaluate your notes every single week.

This is important because you can make sure you are on the right path and you can adapt your strategy if necessary.

The Starting Point

Do you know what is the best thing about time?

Everybody has the same amount of hours per day.

“Talk about an ideal democracy! In the realm of time, there is no aristocracy of wealth and no aristocracy of intellect. Genius is never rewarded by even an extra hour a day. Moreover, there is no punishment. Waste your infinitely precious commodity as much as you will, and the supply will never be withheld from you. Moreover, you cannot draw in the future. Impossible to get into debt! You can only waste the passing moment. You cannot waste tomorrow; it is kept for you. You cannot waste the next hour; it is kept for you.”

– Arnold Bennett

Stop for a moment and picture the most successful person you can think of.

Got it?

Perfect.

What makes that person incredibly successful is that they have learned how to use their time efficiently and have created a habit out of it.

And one thing they have in common with you is those same 24 hours within a day.

That is the beautiful part about it.

Because it means your best chance to be successful in life, is to utilize your time efficiently and effectively.

The moment you wake up, you have a clean slate.

No matter who you were the day before or what happened, the moment you open your eyes, you have a whole new beginning.

However, you must learn how to use the most valuable resource, because you can never get it back.

So, if you are ready, let's begin.

PHASE ONE: DIRECTION

One of the biggest mistakes majority of people make when they get a sudden urge of motivation is to create a to-do list and start working on it.

This usually leads to falling off the wagon a week later, and getting swept away with everyday responsibilities. Only to repeat this exact process few weeks later, and get the exact same results.

That's why the first thing you will do is set the right foundation, which will make sure you know exactly which goals you want to pursue, what are your high-leverage activities and skills, what you need to do on a daily basis to get the results you want.

Goal Setting

Just like everything in life, when you have clarity, it's easier to accomplish what you set out to do.

That is why you need to intentionally set direction in life, without allowing the life, environment and dynamic change to set it for you.

You should be smart about how you distribute resources, because if you don't have goals, it is quite easy to waste time "by accident."

Goals work like a lens of a camera.

If you set the lens and focus correctly, you will be able to take a clear photograph. If it is out of focus, your photo will be blurry.

That's why it's important that you are crystal clear on what you want to pursue.

When it comes to setting goals, there are tons of guidelines.

However, we will keep it simple here.

Focus on one year ahead, and set one primary goal and couple of secondary ones (which you focus on once you've finished working on the first one).

Make your goals specific, and phrase them in a way as if you have already achieved them.

Example: I have lost 10 lbs (4.5 kg) by May 1st, 2018.

High Leverage Activities

Usually, for every goal, there is a number of activities that can deliver results, and the thing is, only a few of them can get you the results faster.

But first, you need to list down everything you can think of that can help you achieve your goals.

Once you have a list, you should implement Pareto Principle or the 80/20 rule, which states that 80% of results come from 20% of your activities.

Ask yourself following three questions:

1. If I had few hours a day to commit to my goal which item on the list would add the most value, and help me get closer to my goal?
2. If I could do one more thing on the list, which item would deliver the best results?
3. Finally, if I could do just one more thing, what would that be?

For instance, if your goal was to lose 10 lbs (4.5 kg), there are hundreds of different things you could do that can deliver results.

But, just fixing your diet can do the trick, and it will work better than all of other ones combined.

By defining your daily baseline of calorie intake and making sure to stay below, it can give you the results, even if you didn't do anything else.

What about working out?

It's great, but working out is just a supplement to the diet. It will help, but if you are eating junk food and dangerously crossing your daily baseline, no matter how much you worked out, you won't reach your goals.

Makes sense?

Now it's your turn, do this for your goals.

High Leverage Skills

It often happens that we don't know how to do certain items on the list, so you need to acquire knowledge to execute those activities.

Next to high leverage activities, you should define what skills you need to learn to accomplish your goals.

When I started Zero To Skill, I needed to learn over 30 skills, from things like setting up a blog (buying a domain, hosting, theme and then integrating all of that), content writing, copywriting and many other skills.

Not only that it helps you accomplish your goal, but it makes you grow and gives you additional skills which you can use anywhere else.

So ask yourself:

What skill(s) should I learn, which will help me complete my high leverage activities, and accomplish my goals?

Then, repeat this for your other goals.

The Ideal Day

Mostly, we have similar days, and the challenge is that we often depend on external circumstances and other things we have to do.

Most people are in the mercy of everything that happens around them (meetings, commuting—traffic, and so on), and day in, day out they have less and less control over their daily schedule.

To get ahead of this, and start taking control, you need to design an ideal day for yourself.

This will allow you to schedule high leverage activities, skills and be more focused overall, because you know what you want to do.

Note: this doesn't mean you need to map out every single minute, only the most important items.

Here are few questions to help you create one ideal day for yourself:

- When do you wake up? What do you do in your morning ritual?
- What's your most important goal and what do you need to do today to get closer to it?
- How many hours per day do you want to work?
- How does your working space look like?
- How do you get in the state of flow?
- Who are the people that you spend most time with (family, friends)?
- What hobbies do you have? Reading? Dancing?
- What's your ritual before going to bed?
- Finally, how do you feel throughout the day?

PHASE TWO: ELIMINATION

Just like anything important in life, you want to make sure that you have removed obstacles that are holding you back.

That's why here you should assess how you spend time, and then develop a bulletproof strategy to eliminate negative habits, overcome laziness and procrastination, so nothing stands in your way.

Personal Time Assessment

The first step is to assess how much time you spend on different daily activities, such as sleeping, eating—preparing meals/buying groceries, commuting, work/university, chores, family, friends, partner, hobbies, television, internet, exercising, other.

Below you can see an example for one activity.

Internet/TV:

- Workweek: 5 hours per day X 5 = 25
- Weekend: 7 hours per day X 2 = 14
- Then you add these two together, to get your weekly total for internet/tv (in this case 39 hours per week)

Repeat this for other activities you usually spend time on (you can use previously mentioned examples).

Once you have your weekly total for each activity, add them all up.

Then take the total number of hours per week (168) and subtract it with your weekly total.

168 (number of hours in a week)—_____ (your weekly total) = _____.

This will give you the overview of how you spend time, but will also show you a gap that you are not aware of.

You will notice how much time goes on activities that are time wasters - television, social media, or others.

Tracking Time & Evaluating Results

Keeping a time log of your most important activities and evaluating it at the end of the week is extremely important.

This will allow you to see what causes the inefficiency and whether or not you can do it better next time.

To keep this simple, once per week (ideally on Sunday), sit down for 30 minutes and ask yourself these questions:

- When was I most productive? At what hour?
- What made me productive?
- When was I unproductive? At what hour?
- What made me unproductive? How can I improve this?

You can also ask yourself these questions after every day if you want to take your efficiency to the next level.

The Procrastination List & The Cost of Procrastination

Now that we have assessed where you currently are, we will move to the second important piece.

Answer these questions:

- What are the activities you procrastinate the most on?
- What cost does/will it have on your health, finances, stress, social life if you continue procrastination?
- What would happen if you stop procrastinating?

Make sure to be honest here. You're answering these questions for yourself, no one is going to judge you.

Now that you have successfully analyzed how you spend your time and elements related to procrastination, we will move on to methods and techniques you can use each and every day to overcome procrastination.

Procrastinate on Procrastination

In the book 1984 (Nineteen Eighty-four) by George Orwell, there is a chapter where the members of the Outer Party are torturing Winston (the main protagonist), trying to break his spirit, and as they are beating him, there was one particular sentence he kept repeating to himself:

"I will confess, but not yet. I must hold out till the pain becomes unbearable. Three more kicks, two more kicks, and then I will tell them what they want."

This got me thinking.

Usually, when we want to establish a good habit, we tend to procrastinate and postpone positive behaviour.

However, you can use this for the negative behaviour as well.

Usually whenever we want to establish a habit, for the first two weeks the habit is fragile. In order to maintain it, you need to resist temptation until it becomes easier and consistent.

Whenever you get the urge to indulge in any activity that doesn't support your habit, tell yourself that you can do it, but tomorrow. As a reward.

Just postpone it for one day.

If the urge comes again, ask yourself these two questions:

1. Does this activity support my habit?
2. Does this activity make it harder for me to establish this habit?

All you need to do is answer these questions, and when it comes to your rational mind, it will be easier to resist.

The following day, you can repeat the process.

The Procrastination Pyramid

Whenever I catch myself procrastinating, this is my go-to trick and it always works, because it's simple.

The first thing you need is one high leverage activity you tend to procrastinate the most on.

Here's my example:

- High leverage activity: Writing & publishing an article (articles)

Now, writing is too generic, I'll deconstruct it into mini activities (the ones which I follow):

- Come up with a topic for the article
- Write headline
- Research (keywords, facts, quotes, stories)

- Do a brain dump
- Organise it in sections
- Write each section separately
- Edit the article
- Add SEO
- Proofread it
- Find a cover
- Format the article on Medium
- Publish the article
- Promote it

Whenever we have something to do, any activity, we think of it as one big thing.

This automatically demotivates us and our go-to action is to procrastinate.

Here comes the trick.

In these moments, I've programmed myself to stop thinking about everything I need to do, instead I get myself to break down my high leverage activity into smaller pieces, and convince myself to do the first one, which is the smallest.

Now, the perception of the task is not that big; it starts to look manageable, plus I like coming up with ideas.

All I need to do is to sit down, and start writing down.
Nothing complicated or hard.

However, the moment I sit down and start working on it, it becomes natural to continue working past the topic I've chosen for the article, naturally move into finishing the headline and I do it without thinking about it.

Since I was immersed for a couple of minutes, the state of flow starts to develop, together with a momentum.

Without noticing it, I start researching and following the next steps.

Before you know it, it has been three hours, and the article is published.

It all started with figuring out what do I want to write about.

Now it's your turn. Take your high leverage activity and deconstruct it into smaller ones.

The 2-Minute Rule

“If you can do a task in two minutes, do it straight away.”—Sam Bell

Most of the tasks that you procrastinate on aren't actually difficult to do—you just avoid starting them for one reason or another.

It's surprising how many things we put off that we could get done in two minutes or less.

For example, washing your dishes immediately after your meal, taking out garbage, responding to an email and so on.

The rule is clear: if it takes less than two minutes to complete, do it right away.

As simple as it gets.

Implement The X Method

This is probably the easiest way to stay consistent with your habits.

Take a big calendar that has a whole a month (or create one with a big paper and a marker).

Put this on a wall that you see everyday.

For each day that you do your habit, you get to put a big X on that day.

After a few days, you'll have a chain, and you'll like seeing that chain, especially when you get a few weeks under your belt.

Your only job then becomes not to break the chain.

Don't break the chain.

This method works and it's fun, especially when you keep it up for a while.

PHASE THREE: OPTIMIZATION

Almost two-thirds of our lives are spent on everyday activities such as sleeping, eating, grocery shopping, cleaning, commuting and others.

We are made to believe that these activities are the way they are, without questioning whether or not we can do anything about it.

That's why here I will show you how to optimize and fine-tune these activities to regain several hours per week and increase the enjoyment while performing each one of these activities.

Specify The Most Repetitive Activities

The first thing you should do is list down every activity that you repeat every day, or few times a week.

These activities are usually our most common ones, the ones that don't require too much mental effort.

Outsource

Outsourcing becomes one of the most useful tools for your life when you realize the value of your time.

An example would be:

If your hour is worth \$30, and you are still cleaning your apartment (which takes 2 hours), you are wasting \$60, plus 2 hours of your time—which is far more important.

However, if you hire someone to clean your apartment, who you pay \$15 per hour, you can use your time for other more valuable things.

Even if your goal is not to earn more money, you can use this time with your family, friends, or just engaging in things you love doing.

Ask yourself:

What activity takes a lot of time on your hand, but doesn't cost too much to outsource to someone, so you can get more time back?

Examples: Having someone deliver groceries for you instead of you going to buy them, or having someone prepare food for you, clean apartment, clean clothes, and so on.

Just imagine the amount of time you could save for yourself.

Bulk up Your Tasks

We tend to do activities whenever they pop up - thinking this is efficient, but overall this tends to consume a lot more time on a weekly basis.

And to improve it, I suggest that you dedicate a specific time of the week to do the following:

- Grocery Shopping
- Apartment Cleaning
- Decluttering

This way, you will save a massive amount of time a week, instead of going every day, doing one thing at the time.

Optimize Eating Habits

This works well with bulking up tasks.

We spend a lot of time thinking about what to eat, buying groceries and preparing our food.

One simple solution is to find one day a week (ideally Sunday), and allocate 15–20 minutes of your time, and plan your weekly meals.

Here's what you can be specific about:

1. What time of the day you want to eat each meal?
2. Which meals you want to eat for the entire week?
3. Which groceries you need for these meals?

This way, when each meal comes, you know what you are eating, you have the groceries, you just need to prepare it (if you haven't outsourced it already).

Reclaim Dead Time

Dead Time = *time spent on activities that don't require too much mental effort, but can be used more productively.*

An example: commuting/working out/buying groceries

To be productive, find something you can do while being engaged in these activities.

Possible options include: listening to audiobooks/podcasts/reading books/using apps like Duolingo or Memrise for quick language learning.

You can actually download a free audio version of this guide on this link.

The main idea here is to do something that will give you value while performing items that you already are committed to spending time on.

Say No to Things That Are Not Supporting Your Goals

It's often hard to refuse someone's request or an invite to a party (even if we really don't want to go).

So majority of people accept these requests and invites, and lose their precious time in places they don't want to be.

You need to get good at protecting your time, and respecting it. If you don't do this, other people won't do it as well.

Remember that you are not saying NO to others, you are saying YES to yourself.

PHASE FOUR: EXECUTION

This is where everything comes together.

At this point, you have already defined the direction in your life, you have successfully removed obstacles from your life, and you've optimized things that you do every day.

In this phase, you will learn how to do more in a week than you have usually done in a month.

I suggest you start looking at your day in three parts:

1. Morning Routine
2. Daily Routine
3. Evening Routine

DESIGN A MORNING ROUTINE

An effective morning routine is an incredible way to kickstart your day.

For me, establishing a habit of getting up early and implementing a morning routine had the biggest impact on my life, because it allowed me to focus several hours on myself and my biggest goals.

If you want to wake up early, my suggestion is move the waking up hours gradually.

If you are currently getting up at 8 am, and your goal is 6am, start with 7:50 am, then 7:40 am, and so on, until you reach your goal. Then work on maintaining it.

Note: you might experience energy drops in the first couple of weeks. However, that is normal until your body adjusts to the new schedule.

Pro tip: if you experience a sudden drop of energy, take a 20–30 minute nap.

There are usually five things you would want to achieve in the morning:

- Become alert
- Take care of your emotional state
- Take care of your intellectual growth
- Take care of your health
- Work on your long-term goals

Your morning routine should consist of your high leverage activities, the ones that help you achieve your most important goals.

An example:

If your goal is to start a blog, a high leverage activity would be to write an article every week, and your routine would be to write 30–60 minutes in the morning.

Below you will find few super tips to make your routine more efficient.

Get a Small Win

Do something that will make you feel proud (like making the bed).

Drink Water

Your body just went 6–8 hours without the water. Drinking a glass or two right after you wake up is a perfect way to hydrate your body and increase alertness.

Meditate

Some people have resistance towards meditation, but let's make this simple.

Take 5-10 minutes of your day, sit somewhere quiet and close your eyes. Just relax and be aware of yourself and the environment.

Thoughts are okay, embrace them. Then just focus on your breathing.

That is it.

Read or Consume A Course

Try to establish this as a part of your routine, that every morning you read several pages/a chapter, or find an online course, or other material you can go through, to develop knowledge for certain areas.

Also, if you are interested in a audio version of this guide, you can find it on [Zero to Skill](#) for free.

Exercise

Nothing can kickstart your day like working out.

It can be any physical activity (a gym, yoga, walking, jogging, swimming). Or at least take 5 minutes to stretch.

But just move.

Set The Priorities for the Day

I suggest defining 2–3 important things you need to accomplish in a day. Also decide when will you work on them.

Out of these 2–3, pick one most important high leverage activity that you will work in the morning.

Start small and then, over time, increase time invested in this activity.

Say NO to Email & Social Media Until...

...you finish with your morning routine!

Don't check email & other apps more than two times a day.

The reason for this is that you are always under influence of external stimuli, so the first thing in the morning you want to protect is your attention and focus.

Allow yourself the first hour of the day without interruptions.

Transition to Daily Routine

In the beginning, you won't notice the difference, but later as you create each one of these routines for yourself, you will have a sense of accomplishment after each one finishes, especially if you did more than you wanted to.

Just imagine how three big wins throughout the day would make you feel.

For the majority of people, Daily Routine is usually a time where you focus on your work.

So let's see how to create one for yourself.

DESIGN A DAILY ROUTINE

Next to the morning routine, you should have a daily routine, which will help you stay focused and know exactly what are you working on.

This will help you stay on track, without getting swept away with meetings, people and other distractions.

Block Time aka Schedule a Meeting With Yourself

You should schedule a meeting with yourself based on the high leverage activities you defined, and start with the most important one.

For me, that is 60–90 minutes of my time devoted to my business.

I have these blocks throughout the day. During them, I complete zone in, without any other disruptions.

You should also dedicate 2–3 (or more) blocks of time each day where you will only focus on yourself and the most important work.

Declutter Your Environment

Make sure that your working environment (both home and office), is simple and contains only the items that you need for the task at hand.

Create a habit out of this because it will save you much energy in finding items you need.

My personal preference is to have only the laptop (maybe an additional screen, if needed), headphones and water on my table.

No phone, chargers, wallets, photographs, and other things.

Just by implementing this, your distractions will minimize drastically.

Organize Your Computer

After you finish decluttering, you should organize your computer.

The first step is to delete everything you do not need—files, apps, old movies that you watched two months ago...

The second step is place the remaining things in folders, specifically created based on your priorities.

When you're working, don't open ten apps. Open just the ones needed for the task at hand.

Once you finish, close off each app you have before you continue with the next task.

Same thing applies for open tabs in the browser.

Just imagine how much time you lose while trying to find the tab you need, when 25 tabs are open.

These things might seem small and insignificant, but they really add up.

Use Productivity Tools & Apps

Here, I like to keep it simple.

The reason for this is because starting to use any application is a habit you need to establish.

My suggestion is to use:

1. Calendar (any will do—my preference Google Calendar)
2. Notes (any will do—my preference Evernote)
3. Email (anything will do—my preference is Spark—only available for IOS)

Calendar is to schedule big projects, activities and meetings.

Evernote helps me keep track of my notes and my to-do list.

Spark is a fast and smart way to manage your email.

Eliminate, Delegate, Automate

We usually think that we need to do everything on our own.

However, often it happens that we don't need to keep everything on our plate.

Out of all of the activities that you have to do, look at the ones which are not your HIGH leverage ones.

Run them through these three filters:

1. Can any of these activities be eliminated?
2. Can any of the remaining activities be delegated?
3. Can the remaining ones be automated?

Ditch the Perfectionism

We lose much time because we want our thing to be just perfect.

In most cases, this is perfectionism talking.

In these moments, show it to a someone and see what they say. If they give you feedback to improve, then do it. If they say it's good enough - launch it and then improve.

I used to expect perfection out of the things I do, and it took me even up 15 days to write an article.

Now, I write until it's pretty good, publish it, and improve it based on the feedback.

My most viral article [“13 Things You Should Give Up If You Want To Be Successful”](#) was edited over 40 times after it was published.

Master the State of FLOW

Everybody has “THE ZONE!”. It’s the time when they are completely immersed in the task at hand.

I get into the flow when I am working on something challenging that is helping me reach my goals, but not above my current skill set.

Try to look back, and see what type of activities and environment gets you in the flow, and then try to replicate it.

Pro tip: Music can easily put you in the state of flow, just find the one that works for you.

Work in Bursts

Your time is best utilized when broken into bursts.

I find the “*Pomodoro Technique*” to be particularly useful.

This technique was developed in the late 1980’s as a mean for time management. It typically involves 25 minutes of work followed by 5 minutes of break.

This will keep you relaxed, but also highly effective in those 25 minutes.

Note: if you are in the flow, disregard 25-minute technique and work as long as you are focused.

The more you do it, the easier it will become to enter flow.

Take Breaks

When one block of your time finishes, stand up, stretch, drink water, interact with someone and take a walk.

This will give you time to get another perception of the task at hand, and it can spark much creativity, beside the fact that it will help you rest.

Have in mind not to do it too often, because each time you transfer from one activity to another, it takes several minutes to fully immerse yourself in that activity again.

Take Naps

I am a big believer in naps.

After you finish a big chunk of work, your energy will typically drop down.

If it happens to you, simply find a corner of the office or your home where it is quiet. Just close your eyes.

You do not actually need to fall asleep, but let your body relax.

When Stuck—Change Your Environment

Often, being in the same environment makes our imagination stale.

That is why it's important to take walks, or completely change your work environment, so it allows you to think things through.

This will drastically affect your creativity because it will enable you to have an entirely new approach to solving problems.

Implement Buffer Time

If you have an important meeting or a project, always schedule a certain amount of time that you can count on in case something does not go according to plan A.

If the meeting is scheduled for 3pm, you come at 2:45 pm. Just to be safe.

Alternatively, if the project official deadline is until 1.6.2018, yours can be 28.5.2018.

Like a fail-safe.

Say NO to Meetings That...

...do not have a specific outcome, structure and key stakeholders defined!

On average, I have three meetings a day, each 30–60 minutes.

I usually ask if they have these three elements, and if they don't, I ask to be excused, until they need me to discuss my area of expertise.

In the meantime, I focus on high leverage activities.

If I need to attend the meeting, I make sure that we strive to end the meeting efficiently and with a specific outcome.

DEVELOP AN EVENING ROUTINE

At this point, you have had the most productive day. All you need is a closure.

Most people think that waking up early begins in the morning, which is far from the truth.

First, you need to set yourself for success the night before. And there are several ways to do that.

Stop using technology before your sleep time

Exposing yourself to too much blue light (from your smartphone, tablet, or computer) before bed has a negative influence on the quality of your sleep.

That's why 1–2 hours before you go to bed, go into the so-called “Amish Hour,” turn off everything, and focus on yourself.

Prepare for the next day

Instead of having to decide on these things in the morning and lose precious willpower and decision-making ability, decide on it the night before.

Here are three things you should think about:

- What are your top priorities for the next day?
- What clothes you will wear?
- What meals you want to eat?

Also, since the time goes by fast, if you don't stop and reflect on things that are important to you, you will miss a lot of them.

That's why you should always ask yourself:

- What worked today?
- What kind of progress did I make?
- What am I grateful for?

And then picture your ideal day.

This alone will influence your motivation to wake up on time, and stick to your plan.

Read

With our busy schedules, it's challenging to find enough time to read.

But once you eliminate technology from your evening routine, you will easily find 30 minutes you can dedicate to reading.

Doesn't matter whether it's for personal or professional growth. Just read.

The Quality of Your Sleep

Most of us go through life without knowing what affects our sleep and what we can do to make it better.

To maximise your sleep quality, there are few things you should have in mind.

Stop the stimulants

At least six hours before you go to sleep, you should stop drinking coffee and alcohol, because it will mess with your sleep.

You can drink green tea and water, which are a much better substitutes.

Avoid eating big meals

They'll burden your digestive system and lower your sleep quality.

Instead, have a small snack, like nuts and a glass of milk, so you don't wake up hungry.

Drink water

Since you are about to sleep for 6–8 hours straight, your body will need a lot of hydration; that's why you should drink at least one glass of water.

Avoid exercising before sleep

Exercising less than 3 hours prior to bedtime can keep you awake. So try to do it earlier or in the morning.

Set the right conditions

Find a quality mattress and a pillow.

Sleep in a dark and silent room (you can wear a sleep mask and have Melatonin as a supplement).

And pay attention to the room temperature, preferably you would want to sleep in a colder room.

Go to bed at the same time

In the beginning, going to bed at the same time will be challenging because your body will operate on the old rhythm.

But after several days you will start to feel tired towards the end of the day, and then you can sleep more consistently.

Optimize Your Sleep

By optimizing sleep I mean that you should find the perfect time to go to bed each night, and discover the ideal time you should get up to maximize energy and health.

Try to hit sleep cycles, which lasts for 90 minutes:

1.5 hours > 3 hours > 4.5 hours > 6 hours > 7.5 hours

You know how sometimes you sleep for like 11 hours, and you wake up groggy?

That is because you woke up during the sleep cycle.

On the other hand, have you ever woken up after sleeping for 3 hours and you felt wide awake and energized?

Again, sleep cycle.

BONUS EDITION

Dealing With Stress & Distractions

When things do not go according to the plan, chill.

Always have in mind that there are some things you cannot control.

Even if you become an expert in productivity and time management, you will still have many inefficiencies.

This is usually because we often depend on external circumstances.

If I schedule a meeting and someone is late, I just take out my Kindle or listen to a podcast and make sure to use that time efficiently.

That is why you need to have a short-term strategy for things you cannot control, and a long-term one on how to remove them or learn how to manage them.

Start with the short-term:

What can you do at the moment when something goes wrong?

Breathe, play your favourite song, walk, go wash your face, drink water, calm down, call your “go to person,” or just take your phone out and read articles (these things can be specific for you, something of like an emergency plan).

On the other hand, long-term strategy is more important, because if you do it right, your short-term strategy will be needed less frequently.

So the question is:

How can you plan a bit in advance, to prevent or reduce the things you cannot control?

You can do it by planning ahead and having a clear strategy to execute on.

Parenting & Productivity

So, before anyone calls me a hypocrite, I do not have children.

However, I will address this from the perspective of pedagogy, the perspective of how activities can be optimized, and how I plan to do it when I have kids.

Before embarking on this journey, if you have a partner, you should talk with them to set the right expectations.

Communicate what you are trying to achieve and how much easier it will be for your relationship if you optimize these things.

You will have more time for each other and more time to spend it with your kids.

Define two things:

1. Things you cannot control
2. Things you can control

For the things you cannot control, such as kids getting sick or waking up in the middle of the night, develop a short-term strategy, so whenever something unexpected happens, you have a defined procedure.

For the ones you can control, develop a regular schedule, instead of adapting yourself to the existing one.

You need to work with your partner to create a scheme that works for everyone, so that everyone gets “me time”, but also much more time to spend together and bond.

Then evaluate (everything) based on new circumstances, and adapt your plan.

The main rule is that the quality of the time spent with your loved ones will always trump the quantity of the time where your attention was divided.

It is better to spend an hour with your kids while being fully immersed.

Because, they will remember those moments, but they will forget three hours where you were also on the phone, watching television or something else.

A couple of other tips:

- Outsource as much as you can (such as cleaning, grocery shopping, cooking)
- Use every minute of your time wisely, especially when the kids are asleep (if you know what I mean).

Know that all of these techniques in this long guide should be adapted to your schedule and situation, and that they depend on many factors, like whether or not you are divorced, single parent, have one or multiple kids, what age your kids are, if both you and partner have jobs, etc.

So, start simple and small, and go from there.

Final Thoughts

Testing these out took me several years and even today I am continually optimizing them to make sure that I am aware of how I spend time.

Yes, every once in a while I watch a movie or two, but I always find my way home, just like Lassie does.

Time is the only thing you can never get back, so be sure that you make the most out of this one crazy life you have.

The reality is that you will not be able to be perfect - and you should not strive to be.

The point is to get better, day in, day out.

Either one of these techniques can change your life, however if you mix them together, you will get compounded effect.

Also, if you are interested in a audio version of this, you can find it on Zero to Skill for free.

Plus, you will find other useful resources I prepared for you.

Good luck out there!

Warmly,

Z.

You can connect with me via:

[Facebook](#) | [Youtube](#) | [Medium](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Linkedin](#)

And don't forget to join Readdle family on social media for more productivity tips and updates:

[Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)