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How to Get 2x Done

In Half the Time

By Shashank Shekhar

Proven techniques to help you become more productive than you ever thought possible.



An Intro To
Time Management

Adam Smith, the father of economics, turned the concept of time management on its head by introducing division of labor and avant-garde means of goods production. In no time, the United States and Europe started looking at assembly lines, steam power, a large stock of machine tools (for making glass, paper, cement, chemical items), improved waterways, and advanced electrical grids.

Assembly lines dealing with mass production saw the introduction of the Division of Labor. The process of production was divided in a way that each worker got a specific task to do. The concept ushered us into the age of specialization.

The industrial revolution was coming alive - and Smith had just opened a new way of looking.

All this was great!



And yet, it was Benjamin Franklin who connected us to what is perhaps our most abided-by modern-age principle: Time is Money. In his book *Way to Wealth*, he introduced concepts of modern time management: the importance of efficiency, planning, and hustling. It's no surprise that he anticipated the needs of the 21st century by nearly 260 years! “Don’t leave till tomorrow what you can do today” or “You may delay, but time will not.” were pretty futuristic concepts. Back then, there was all the time in the world, you see.

It is a different age now, but what Franklin and Smith were able to perceive all those years ago still rings as relevant.

People usually have **two** time-related complaints:



It takes me a lot of time to get things done.

I never have enough time to get things done.



"It takes me a lot of time to get things done."

Parkinson’s Law says that work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion. If we have 2 hours in hand to finish a 30-minute job, the job will psychologically expand to look like a 2-hour job. Put differently, if we have a project deadline in 24 hours, we will finish it within 24 hours. However, if the deadline is in the next 7 days, we could take as many as 7 days to finish it.

Time dilation is good for the physics of spacetime, but not so much for business professionals. We spend 7 days (168 hours) over a project that needs a maximum of 24 hours and make it look as if it was a 7-day job (that’s what Parkinson's law is, right)? This way, we waste 144 hours of a non-renewable resource. By committing the same mistake over and over again with hundreds of deadlines, we erect a mountain of such “144 hours” or “lost times”. Instead of looking to complete 2x in half the time, we end up finishing X or less in quadrupled time.



So, how do we fix this?

➜ Let's apply a mental drill prescribed by Kevin Kruse in his book, *15 Secrets Successful People Know About Time Management*. Imagine:

1) What pleasure will I get by doing this thing?

For example, let's say the goal is to learn French for an internship at the Louvre. Learning French may help you understand Van Gogh's or da Vinci's work better (the pleasure).

2) What pain will I feel if I don't do it?

Contrarily, by being French-illiterate, nothing in the Louvre may interest you. All your knowledge and interest in art could amount to nothing if you fail in communicating about the art with French experts (the pain).

"I never have enough time to get things done"



In *168 Hours – You Have More Time Than You Think,* Laura Vanderkam argues how we are never truly starved for time and that we actually have plenty of it, whether we realize it or not. Do successful people get 25-hour or 26-hour packs of days? Did Einstein or Gandhi have more time in which to do their life's monumental work? No. It's just that they knew how to use their time more productively. Our sense of lack of time can be put down to our constant underuse of it.

Vanderkam made a habit of writing down what she did every 30 minutes. She wanted to understand if she was fruitfully using her small packets of time. After the first year, she traced that she had spent 327 hours reading, just short of 1 hour a day. However, she found that most of her reading hours were sacrificed to celebrity gossip magazines and online articles. She started buying meaningful books and, in the process, converted these 327 hours into a productive routine.

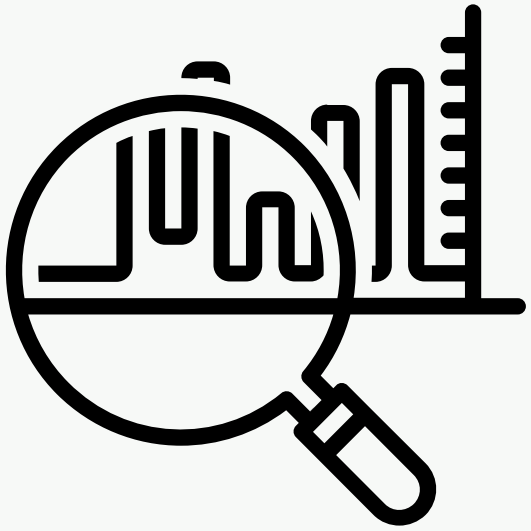




So why don't we put our small packets of time to better use? The answer: most of us feel we don't have any say in the way we spend our 24 hours; it's dictated by our job, family, religion, and friends. But, as Vanderkam puts it, "It's very seldom that someone would have all 168 hours (of the week) dictated." Those who feel they don't have much choice in their workplaces may still be free to use at least one home-hour the way they want. It can be vice-versa.

We waste a lot of time figuring out what things we want to spend time doing. Every small packet of time asks us to discover something about it. All we need to do is wipe off the unproductive use and visit it from fresh angles.

The 168 Hours Spreadsheet



Note down what you do every 15 minutes, all week.

The 168 hours spreadsheet helps you see how seemingly innocuous 15-minute blocks can, when wasted, add up to cause substantial harm.

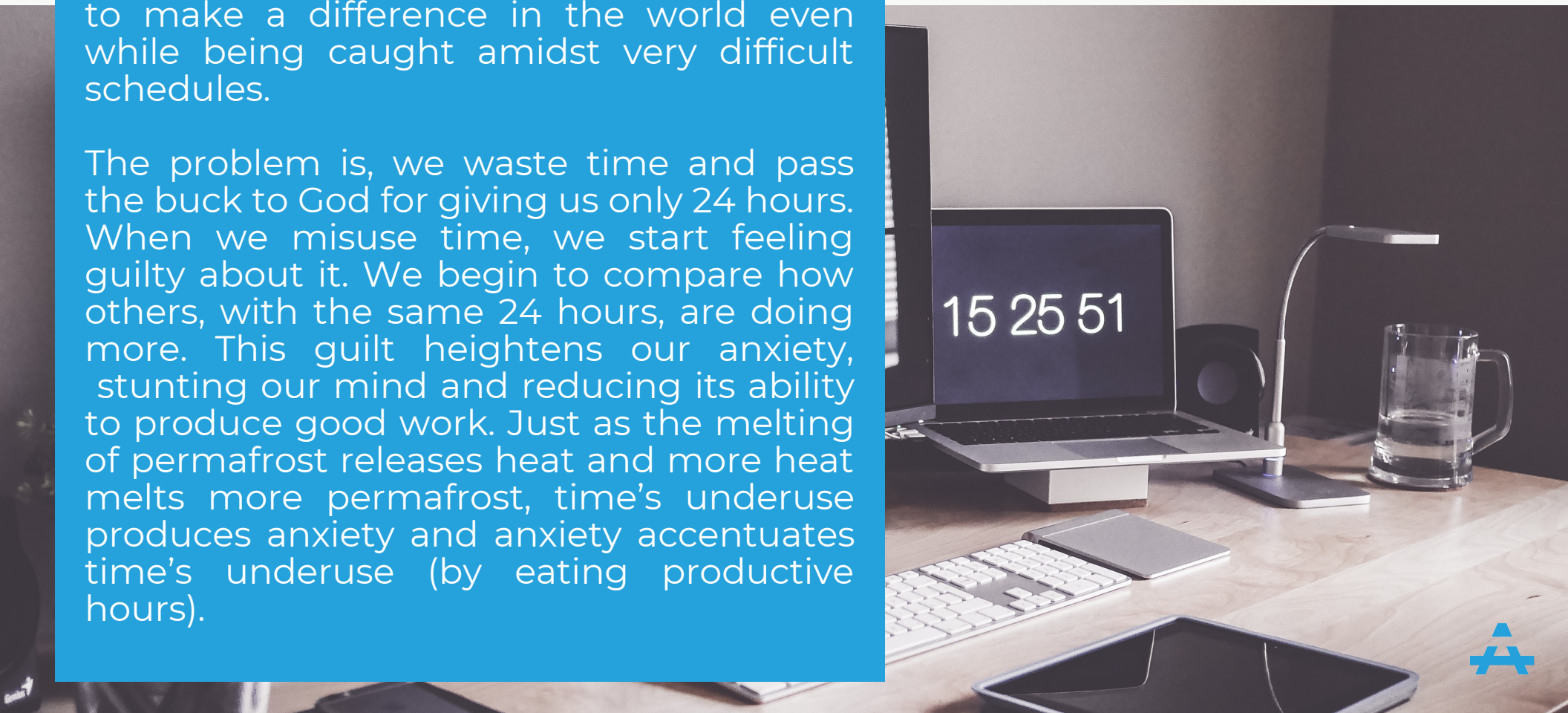
By tracking your time packets, you'll see patterns, and will eventually be able to eliminate your "nothing" minutes.

The misuse of time, and the guilt that comes with it

Think of workplace meetings. Most of the time, they don't need as many people or need to run for so long. Yet, in what is perhaps the greatest underuse of staff and management hours, workplaces are stuffed with meetings, any hour of the day.

Time is largely a matter of perception. Nobody gets 25 hours in a day but thankfully, 24 hours is long enough for us to make a difference in the world even while being caught amidst very difficult schedules.

The problem is, we waste time and pass the buck to God for giving us only 24 hours. When we misuse time, we start feeling guilty about it. We begin to compare how others, with the same 24 hours, are doing more. This guilt heightens our anxiety, stunting our mind and reducing its ability to produce good work. Just as the melting of permafrost releases heat and more heat melts more permafrost, time's underuse produces anxiety and anxiety accentuates time's underuse (by eating productive hours).



Time management is not an impossible art

Da Vinci used to write with one hand and draw with the other. He was also the guy (at least on record) who first tried polyphasic sleeping: he used to sleep for 30 minutes about 7 to 8 times a day. This way, in just 4 hours combined, da Vinci substituted the traditional sleep cycle of 8 hours. Yes, this is completely impractical for our modern lifestyle, but the good news: polyphasic sleeping is optional for effective time management.

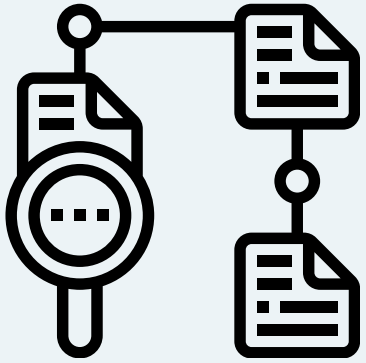
Time management is not an impossible art. Starting with practically nothing in 2008, I have become a Top 15 Loan Officer in the country (out of ~400,000 Loan Officers), led my company to the Inc 500 list, opened locations in 8 states, published 500+ blog posts and 3 books, hosted my own TV and radio shows, and spoken at dozens of leading conferences across the country. And if you think that I am that workaholic who is all work and no play, picture this. I have made it to all the school and sports events for my two daughters. I cook dinner for the family most nights and come back from work on time every day to spend my evenings with them. And did I mention I work out 4 times a week and get a decent amount of sleep every night to stay physically and mentally strong?

Time management is realizable with moderate (but honest) effort. Various things can work for us.



For example: don’t make really big to-do lists. If the first or the second task gets stuck, the remaining workload intensifies in our perception, forcing us to avoid it or forcing us to do suboptimal work. Long lists can overwhelm us and induce a sense of paralysis where we take no action at all and while away our time in something unproductive and useless.

Instead, compartmentalize your work into small packets. While working on a specific task, don’t get distracted no matter the temptation. These days, nothing distracts us more than the constant chimes of our smartphones. That’s why other than phone calls and texts, I have disabled notification alerts from all my social media, news, and email apps. If I’m working on an important task, I put my phones on silent to avoid getting distracted at all.



Mastering time management comes down to three components

Priority Management

Putting the items that are of high value and add maximum value above the rest.

Energy Management

Learning how to effectively focus your energy - without just being "on" all the time.

Attention Management

Combating a short attention span through methods that encourage efficacy.

Priority Management

"It's surprising how much free time and productivity you gain when you lose the busyness in your mind." - Brittany Burgunder

In the end, the crux of priority management comes down to being able to consciously weave routines around your high-value tasks. The multiple other half-baked projects can, at times, be the best distractions. Therefore, learning how to eliminate them and prioritize is crucial.

Once we have a routine in place, we are more likely to do our high-value tasks more frequently, and with time, more effectively, too.



Each day, put aside 30 minutes to plan the next day. As Victor Hugo put it, "He who every morning plans the transactions of that day and follows that plan carries the thread that will guide him through the labyrinth of the most busy life."



Kaizen (k-eye-zin)

Japanese philosophy; literally translates to "continuous improvement"

According to Kaizen philosophy, a series of small improvements made continuously over a long period of time can result in drastic improvements in business processes. It's people-oriented – Kaizen looks for small tokens of continuous refinement by involving employees. It does not overburden employees with tasks. It does not encourage workers to hide faults but motivates them instead to disclose the faults and work with the management next to seek a solution.

In the conducive work environment that Kaizen creates, token improvements offered by thousands of employees from time to time end up in creating a substantial difference.

The Pareto Principle

Vilfredo Pareto observed that 80% of the land in his native Italy was owned by about 20% of the people. He then formulated the 80/20 theory, which states that 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. Put differently, a minority of causes can yield a majority of effects. Team leaders in a sales setup motivate the entire team but deep down they know that 80% of the sales will eventually come from 20% of the agents.

Similarly, management leaders will understand that about 80% of the roadblocks develop with 20% of the projects, just as software people know that 80% of the software issues can be put down to 20% of the bugs.

So how is the Pareto Principle relevant to priority management? Once we learn to prioritize these specific tasks – roughly 4%-20% of the whole bunch, according to Mr. Pareto, – we will not lose our energy over low-impact tasks.

Elementally, this is how the 80/20 principle can help us prioritize tasks.

High-value vs. low-value tasks

Do LESS low-value tasks that take a lot of time.

Think of app notifications. They add nearly no value to our lives but distract us nonetheless. Call me a traditionalist but I still prefer only calls and text messages to interrupt me. App notifications are all good but only if I solicit them. Interruptive notifications are productivity-bashers. Let no one tell you differently!

IGNORE low-value tasks that take little time.

Making travel reservations is a perfect example. True, it is a necessary task but can always be delegated.

Do high-value, time-consuming tasks BETTER

Time management skills are non-negotiable for meaty tasks like, say, data gathering. Learn to do these tasks better.

Do MORE high-value tasks that take little time

For example, deep breathing. It looks like an everyday task and it really is. And yet, most successful people swear by it. Deep breathing is a stressbuster, encourages productivity, enhances decision-making power, boosts focus, and empowers the frame of mind and body. Just the kind of high-value task that takes very little time.

Energy Management

In 2019, Microsoft Japan experimented with a 4-day workweek. Employees were asked to work for 4 days and relish 3-day weekends. All for the same 5-day paycheck. The experiment essentially came with triple bonuses: productivity shot up, work-life balance improved, and meetings wasted lesser resources.

Perpetual Guardian, reported 20% productivity gains and 45% improvement in employee work-life balance in its 2018 4-day workweek trial, which became permanent policy. In fact, as early as 1926, Henry Ford had tested a 5-day workweek in place of 6 and 8-hour shifts in place of 10. How did he fare? Well, as should have happened, his workers became more productive.

Interestingly, in a survey conducted by acclaimed workplace analyst Dan Schawbel, when asked, “how many days a week would you like to work if pay remained constant?”, only 4% answered, “None.” Also, very few chose “one day” or “2 days.”

So, people are not averse to work. It’s just that a 4-day instead of a 5-day workweek gives them a better frame of body and mind to do productive work.

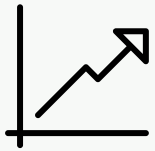
High-quality work or high-value work is only possible if we remain unerringly alert at all our working hours. The Holy Grail to seek is alertness. Think this one out – working for *6 super-alert hours* versus working 10 hours that include periods of daydreaming, lackadaisical approach, and dozens of distractions. Which do we think will end up adding more value?



Alertness increases throughout the morning, peaking at lunch.

We hit the trough at around 3 pm, after the lunch hour.





We start catching up and enter the next peak close to 6 pm.

From there, it's all downhill.



Why should any of us be available any more than our peak hours? When we say we're available 24x7, we are inviting our clients into our recess hours when we are certainly a long way away from peak alertness. In a sense, aren't we betraying their trust in us by giving them our second-grade hours?

We have got to figure out which hours we are most active and most laid back at and allocate our mental resources accordingly.

Being Self-Aware

What are our personal crest and trough hours? If we are set at 180 degrees to modern society, we must train ourselves to get closer to it in terms of our biological clock. It may take time, but slowly, we will start becoming more aligned with society.

Being Smart

Next, work on segregating low-value and high-value tasks based on your alertness quotient. Boundless energy alone isn't enough. To work at express speed and to feel joy in the accomplishment, we need two more cogs in the energy wheel: stability and direction. If there is low stability but a sense of direction, the high energy can still be used with "short and intense focus" for very productive results.

If a quick nap helps in the afternoon, it is still much more profitable than carrying our leaden bodies to our work cubicles. For, in such an event, all work that we produce will only be worthy of the waste paper basket. Napoleon believed in such naps. Churchill took them every day. Kennedy used to have his lunch in bed so that he could grab a quick nap post-lunch.

The much-coveted idea of organizational energy boils down to the energy of the key people of an organization. No leader who pays only lip service to energy management can become a transformational leader. Transformational leaders are energizers (and not de-energizers).

Attention Management

"To do two things at once is to do neither." - Publius Syrus

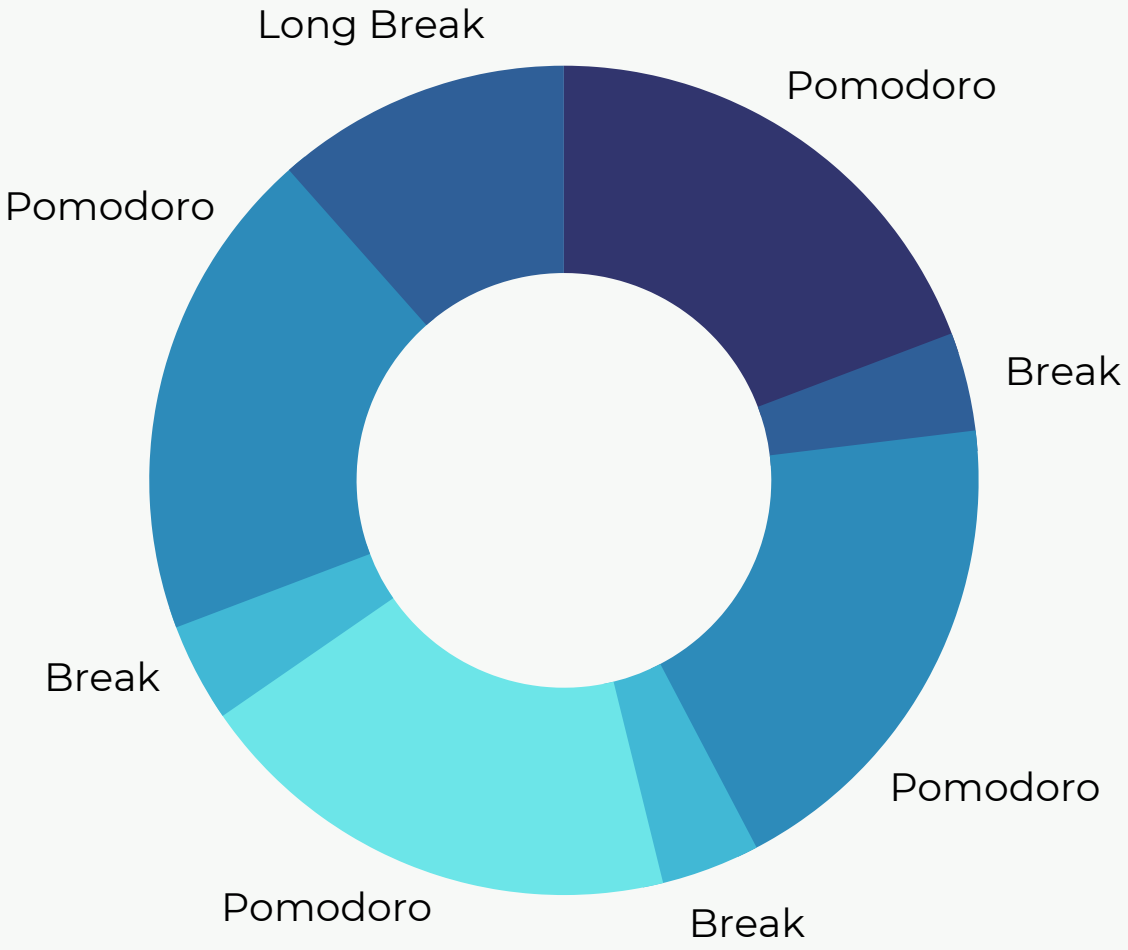
Our productivity goes down by 40% while multitasking. The attention deficit also causes stress and short-term memory loss. Our attention span is already shrinking. This can perhaps be traced to our propensity towards instant gratification. This is one big reason why we are growing less fond of books and are more inclined towards social media. Whichever way the attention cookie might have crumbled: we suffer from an attention deficit today. And if we are somewhere and not attentive, it's as good as not being there.



The greatest genius of the last many, many years, Albert Einstein, felt, "it's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." And we think focusing on something for 10 minutes is way above par. Appalling!

The Pomodoro Technique

Francesco Cirillo's brainchild has passed the test of time and for over 4 decades, has helped professionals triumph over attention-related shortcomings.



In its essence, Pomodoro breaks up work into tasks of 25 minutes ("Pomodoros"), with each task being followed by a 5-minute break.

After finishing 4 Pomodoros, you can take a 15-30 minute break. The trick lies in not changing a 25-minute task into a 24-minute task or jumping for even 30 seconds to another task simultaneously running along in our heads.

Follow Pomodoro to a fault

What's the science behind it?

Simply put, this way, our brain gets its release during the break and refocuses much more strongly when we are back to work. By breaking a big task into small chunks, the Pomodoro technique makes all those chunks meaningful. When we sit for 25 minutes on a given part of the project, we are likely to devote our full focus to the task and not waver from it whatever be the temptation.

What happens if I finish a 25-minute job in 20 minutes? Do I get the 5 minutes off?

No! The Pomodoro technique asks us to stick to the 25-minute timer. There are no let-offs. If you are done in 20 minutes, you can review the work or look at it from different angles. Believe me; 5 minutes will pass this way. And come to think of it, the extra analysis might give our work a new encouraging spin.



Pomodoro is so successful because it creates a complete change of attitude. From being people who fritter away time as if it were an inexhaustible product, we become time-hoarders; respecting each minute of the 25. Isn't this what time management is all about, the precursor to getting 2x done in half the time?

Delete

Just as several tasks that can't be avoided, there are those tasks that can be safely put in the bin; either because they may take an infinite amount of time or because they are just not important at all. It is these tasks that need to be DELETED from our to-do list.

Defer

There are a set of tasks that cannot be deleted but don't need our immediate attention either. We just need to ask ourselves, "Can I come back to it later?" There are tasks that resolve on their own if they are left the way they are. We might not have the bandwidth to pursue them immediately. These are the times when I DEFER and let the issue rest for a while.

Digitize

When I say DIGITIZE, there is a horde of processes that can be digitally automated. In all my in the mortgage business, I have never taken a loan application in person. Not only do we save the time we usually give to such tasks, but we also save the mental energy that we accord to remembering such tasks.

The 6Ds of Time Management

Delegate

To DELEGATE is to hand over a task to someone else. By passing on some tasks to my in-house team or outsourcing them, I have been able to assign many non-value tasks related to licensing, accounting, and creative designing pretty effectively. This has allowed me to focus more on high-value stuff that needs my personal attention.

Downgrade

DOWNGRADE certain tasks to prevent misuse of time. For example, when I'm requested for a phone meeting, I ask the client to email me questions in advance/ Most of the time, my email response answers all their questions thus making the phone call redundant. The goal is not to be rude or sound less customer-centric. The goal is to minimize time commitment while still providing 5-star service and 100% client satisfaction.

Duplicate

We don't need to do everything originally. Remember, when we DUPLICATE people's systems to make them work for us, we put faith in a method that has already solved such a problem. How would you feel if for $5,000 Picasso gave you a crash course that helped you paint like him? Wouldn't it be the bargain of the century?

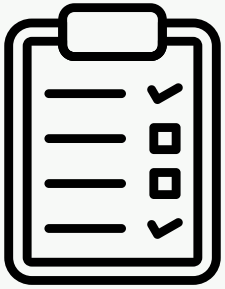
The Importance of a Checklist

In times of Socrates and Aristotle, thinking was a full-time job. We could spend days after days immersed in thought. A lot of good work came out of those thinking sessions, but let's face it. We cannot work that way. A classic byproduct of the lives we have chosen for ourselves is the perception of busyness attached to it.

Such hectic schedules can become very messy unless we have a sorting mechanism at work. Something that tells us exactly what kind of workload is pending, how efficiently the 'completed' part of the schedule has been completed, and if there is some kind of a pattern developing with our **Work Accomplished versus Work Pending each day.**

By using checklists, we break the jobs lined up ahead into bite-sized chunks. This immediately brings in a sense of organization. The more sorted we feel, the more effectively we clean up the plate.

Even when they are not critically important, checklists can be of great assistance. It is not hard to decode what ticking off the items in the checklist can do for our mental make-up. Each time we tick against an item, we feel an endorphin rush – it's a mood enhancer. This heightened mood translates into higher self-evaluation and prepares us for a more competent attack on the remaining tasks. Contrarily, when we fail to tick off the preliminary tasks of a day, the failure to build momentum affects the tasks lined up later in the day.



Hundreds of thoughts reside together in the brain, jostling for the prime position. Unless we note down all these items separately, we cannot deal with them constructively. It is not necessary that each item we note down should seem important to us. What is important is that we note it down nonetheless, and at a place where it can be brought to recall in one second. It can be our electricity bill, our friend's birthday, or a crucial project. Our job is to jot it down first. And then prioritize (giving priority based on a task's importance).

With checklists, you can track patterns

Let's say, we make a checklist of 8 jobs and are able to finish only 6. The next day, we have 9 jobs at the beginning of the day and end up finishing only 7. Say, the same story continues. In time, we will be able to track two patterns:

1) a pattern with the kind of jobs that ends up as 'pending', and 2) we will be able to decipher the time of the day we start slacking.



Hot tip! By marrying a task calendar with a to-do list, we are likely to find a lot more tasks in the completed section. Once we know the tentative time frame within which a task has to be boxed in, we can pull up a better strategy to dig into it.