

The Property Direct

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Sponsor me on the Virgin London marathon to help The children's Trust

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The 8 Habits of Highly Productive People

When we make withdrawals from the emotional bank account, we need to apologize and we need to do it sincerely. Great deposits come in the sincere words..

What makes a productive person? Is it the ability to robotically churn out work, hour after hour? Is it the amount of discipline one has? Is it the speed at which one works?

Before we can discuss what makes a productive person, we should first define what productivity is. The common notion of productivity is the ability to churn out a lot of work in a short span of time. True, but not complete. IMO, true productivity is the ability to create a lot of *high impact* work in a short span of time. This is the kind of productivity we should concern ourselves with, not other kinds of productivity which are more empty / busy work that create no impact in the long term. For example, let's say Sam types very fast and can reply 1000 emails a day. That doesn't make him/her productive, because there's little output (product) to speak of (unless the emails contribute to tangible, high impact outcomes). However, if John completes just one task in a day that has more impact than the 1000 emails put together, then he's more productive than Sam is.



Focus on your strengths and eliminate everything that is holding you back

“I NEVER COULD HAVE DONE WITHOUT THE HABITS OF PUNCTUALITY, ORDER AND DILIGENCE..”

THE DETERMINATION TO CONCENTRATE MYSELF ON ONE SUBJECT AT A TIME.”

-- Charles Dickens



The past few months have been my most productive months for the year. I ran/read a lot and met a lot of like minded people in the networking events. The company sponsored a competition in a local event. My latest marketing have drawn in the highest number of participants to date. I created and ran 10miles, the first ever 30-day personal development challenge of its kind, and have the honor of running the Virgin London marathon where over 5,000 participants will join in this special journey. This year I have really raised my bar to raise £5000 towards The Children's Trust. I wrote, did the design and launched the Winter newsletter which has been distributed over 600 copies to date. At the same time, I've also been managing other work, such as sourcing properties to clients (I'm handling about 3-4 clients on average at each time), administrative aspects of the business, writing articles/guest posts, maintaining the site, etc.

A few days ago I finished designing my line-up of newsletters next year, and earlier this week I conceptualized the idea for my project for next year (I noticed many of you are in the stage where you're thinking of pursuing your passion or turning it into a viable, full-time career. I want you to join me and pursue your passion as a full-time career. I'll be sharing how I turned my passion from nothing into a monthly income career today and how you can do so too. That's all while maximizing other aspects of my

life, such as keeping to my exercise regime (I exercise daily now), having a positive social life, keeping in touch with old friends, all at the same time.

I think productivity is really how you manage yourself, and the habits you practice. By selectively practicing certain habits over others, you can get a lot more output for your time. Here, I'll share with you my top 8 habits in productivity. Practice them and compare how your productivity changes afterward



We are what we repeatedly do.

Excellence, then, is not an act, but a HABIT... -ARISTOTLE

Habit 1: Ruthlessly cut away the unimportant (and focus on the important)

The first thing is to slice and dice everything that's unimportant. Whenever I go to my work desk, I write down a list of things to do for the day. I then evaluate which are the most important things out of the list, first circling them, then ranking the items. After which I'll challenge these items to see if they're the best use of my time. What impact does doing these make? Can I be doing more high value tasks? Doing so helps me ensure I'm working on the absolute most important things for the day. Then, for the non-important ones, I either push them to a later date or find a way to take them off the list. (Learning how to say no to others is very important here.) Those who have read 7 habits of highly effective people might recognize this as the 20/80 List in a Day. It's my favorite daily self-management tool.

For everything you're doing now, ask yourself how important this is. *Does this bring you dramatically closer to your dreams? Does this create any real impact in your life in the long-term? Is it the absolute best way to spend your time or can you be doing more high value tasks?* If not, perhaps it's time to ditch it. No point doing something unimportant! Say you're handling a project that makes no difference to your business after it's completed. It wouldn't matter whether you take 1 hour, 3 hours, 1 week or never to do it! It'd still make no difference! Many people tend to wrongly classify regular tasks as high value tasks. A good tool to set them apart is the Time Management Matrix that classifies our daily activities into 4 different quadrants. Your most important tasks fall under Quadrant 2. I've written about it extensively complete with diagrams and recommendations on how to deal with tasks in each quadrant, so read them here: Put First Things First.

[Continued...](#)

The 4-D Solution

1. Dump it

Learn to say "No, I choose not to do this". Be firm

2. Delegate it

Simply ask "Who else could do this?"

3. Defer it

Schedule a specific time at a later date to handle this type of work

4. Do it

Do it now. Important projects need your attention right away, so get started today. Move forward. Give yourself a reward for completing these projects.



Going by the questions I raised above, my most important tasks are the ones that bring me closest to my dreams when I do them. For example, working on my website allows me to reach out to more people out there, which lets me achieve my end vision of enabling others to achieve their highest potential and live their best life. For you reading this now, I'd like to think that you found this newsletter partially through my efforts in reaching out to people out there, and partially thanks to the universe. Thank you for being here at the website.

It doesn't end with correctly identifying the high value tasks. Often times, we'll be imbued with a stream of random, miscellaneous requests throughout the day. I used to give immediate attention to these things. Say random request # 1 comes in and I'll do it immediately since it takes just 5-10 minutes, max. This is the same for random request # 2, #3.... all the way to #20. After a while, I realized these things take a lot of my time and I don't even get any meaningful result out of them. Not only that, I never finish my high value tasks. I may think I'm being very productive when I finish the random things, but truth is it's just fake productivity.

So nowadays, I use a separate "will-to" list for these urgent tasks. I dump all the incoming tasks here and work on my 20% tasks. At the end of the day, I allocate a time slot to clear these tasks. I batch the similar urgent tasks, then clear them at one go. Turns out I'm always able to get them cleared in an hour or less, compared to the few hours I'd have taken if I attended to them in the day.

Learning now to say
no to others is very
important in
managing your non-
important tasks

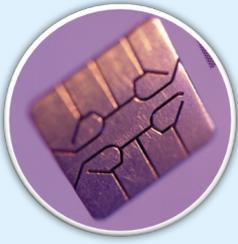
Franklin Covey

Habit2: Allocate breaks strategically

I don't think being productive requires you to work non-stop like a robot. On the contrary, it's when you try to do that that you become less productive. While the number of hours spent on work increases and the amount of work accomplished seems marginally higher, the work done per unit time is lower than your average. Not only that, the work done per extra unit time actually decreases.

If you think the above sounds confusing, not to worry! Here's a simple example to illustrate my point. Say you want to write a book. You can usually type 1,000 words in an hour working on your book. This goes well for the first 2 hours, and you clock 1,000 words per hour. However, at the third hour, you feel tired, and you type 500 words in the 3rd hour instead. That's -500 words less than your usual output! This is known as the Law of Diminishing Returns in economics.

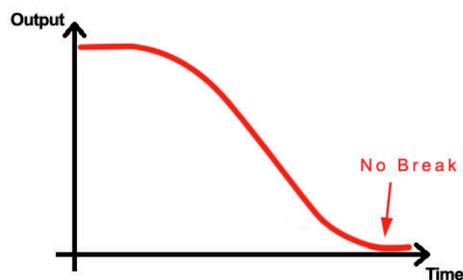
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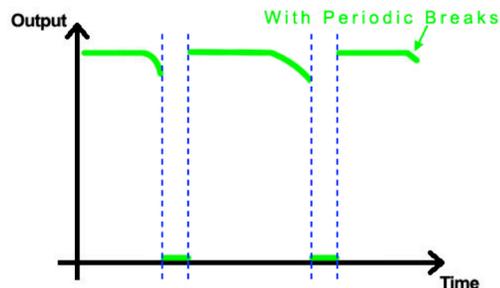
EVERYTHING YOU WANT IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF FEAR

Rest is important. No matter how much you want to work, there are areas of your life that it can't fulfill. Such as love, family, health. That's why our life wheel is made up of different segments, vs. just 1 big segment. Each segment is distinct and unreplaceable by others. By "rest", I'm referring to any segment of your life that's outside of Business/Career/Studies. Taking time off charges your batteries so you can sprint forward when you return to it.

Earlier this year, I did an experiment. I went for a period where I continuously worked without stopping (save for necessary breaks like sleeping, eating, etc). I also went for a separate period where I would work, then space in break times in between work, such as catching up on emails, exercising, walking around the house, reading books, going for a walk, catching up with friends, a short nap, and so on. What I found was this:



Output decreases over time when there are no breaks (despite reaching the point of diminishing returns)



With breaks, the output can be maintained at a consistent high

**Drawings are very empirical, but you get the idea!*

What this means is when I work non-stop without any breaks, my productivity keeps slipping until it's near 0. However, when I take breaks, they help me start on a high note when I get back. Even though there are "down-times" away during the breaks, the high output more than makes up for that. Hence, by strategically placing my break times, I'm able to maximize my output. Rest, hence, does not prevent me from getting more done – it **enables me to get more done**. More time spent on work does not necessarily lead to more work done, but applying the above strategy AND combining it with increased time spent on work *will* maximize your output.

If you're self-employed or on a flexible work schedule, you can put this into practice easily. Even if you're in a 9-5 job, you can still do it all the time. Whenever you feel unproductive, throw in a quick break. Walk away from the desk, get a drink from the pantry, go for a toilet break, talk to a colleague about work. You'll be more perked up when you return.

Habit3: Tap into your inspiration

I can't stress how important this is to maximizing your output. No matter what field you're in, your inspiration is the key to your output. For example, an inspired programmer creates programs that changes people's lives for the better. An inspired structural engineer designs effective building structures.

I fully grasped the impact of inspiration when I started my business and was in charge of my full schedule. I realized during the times when I'm inspired, work is simply effortless.

What do you do then? Do you just idle, waiting for inspiration to strike before you do any work? That's allocating your control to your external world, which really isn't what this blog is about. I often hear people say they're not planning because they're not inspired. I think it's not about waiting for inspiration to strike but about learning to channel into your inspiration.

How do you do that? It's simple - think about what inspires you in life. Is it helping others grow? Connecting with people? Being recognized for your work? Working with the poverty? Helping the unfortunate? Being #1 in your field? How can you achieve them? Find out your motivators, then use them to drive you. My biggest inspiration is to see others achieving their highest potential and living their best lives. I love seeing everyone living to their highest being, and if there are ever anything blocking them I'll feel all ready to rip it away, so I use this to drive me in everything I create. The property direct was created because I noticed while many people pursue self-help, not many know how to translate what they read into practice. This program would consist of a series of tasks, at a manageable pace of one task a day, which would both trigger immediate action and create tangible results.



“I’M NOT HERE TO JUST
TO MAKE A LIVING,
I’M HERE TO MAKE A
DIFFERENCE”

- Helice Bridges

Habit4: Remove productivity pitstops (Distractions)

Productivity pitstops are things that limit your productivity. They can be the music you listen to when you work, your slow computer, unwanted phone calls, alerts from your inbox on incoming mail, the internet, You Tube, Facebook, Twitter, etc. These things trap you and prevent you from getting things done.

What should you do then? Well, remove these pitstops! Or go to a place where they're no longer an issue. For example, a big productivity pitstop for me is the internet. I have the tendency to click to other sites. I'd check my mail, after which I become distracted by the new mails. The mails would lead to follow-up work and replies, which take time. By the time I'm done, a good 15-20 minutes has passed. Then within minutes of working, the same cycle repeats. So instead, when I'm working, I switch off my wifi.

Go about your daily routine and observe when your output slows down. What's distracting you? How can you remove it? Experiment and try working in different places. Adjust your environment. Make tweaks here and there. The more productivity pitstops you find and remove, the more productive you'll be.

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Habit 5: Create barriers to entry

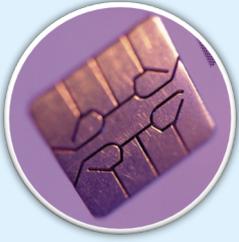
A great thing about our world today is that it's easier than ever to reach out to someone. Everyone is just a sms/phone call/email/Facebook message away. At the same time it has become a highly distracting place to live in. Every few minutes, there's a new request coming in. Your phone rings and it's a telemarketer; You get an sms from a friend who's bored at work; You get a new email and it's some unrelated, unimportant mail; You get a Facebook mass events invite from someone you don't know; Your calendar sends an alert about an appointment you already know... the list goes on. There are constantly messages coming from all different directions, shouting for your attention. Each one of them serves an agenda that's not yours. And every time you pay attention to them, you're distracted from doing what matters... to you. What do you do then? To get real work done, I recommend you put up barriers, so it's hard(er) to reach you. Unplug your phone, switch off your phone, close off your inbox, set a personal rule where you only reply to emails after X days. I'm not saying disappear from the face of the earth, but do that during your work hours at least, especially when you're working on an intense project. After a while, people will get used to it and adhere to the rule in order to reach you.

It's not about being difficult or putting yourself above others (nothing of this sort) - it's about focusing on what matters to you and creating real value you want in your life so you can then do the same for others

Habit 6: Optimize time pockets

Time pockets refer to pockets of time you have in between events. You usually get time pockets when waiting for people, commuting, walking from one place to another, etc. Look at your schedule. What are the time pockets that can be better utilized? How can you maximize them? Have some ready activities to do during these pockets, such as listening to podcasts, reading books, planning, etc. You will be amazed at how much can be done in just a short amount of time!

For example, I spend a lot of time commuting. Even though I largely work from my home office now, I still commute a fair bit, say when heading out to meet friends, networking, business/lunch/personal appointments, giving workshops, and so on. While I try to schedule them at convenient places, there's still downtime from walking from one location to the next, waiting for transport, traveling, etc. So rather than let the time go to waste, I use it to do some work. Amazingly, I'm highly productive during these time pockets. Because there's nothing else I can do in this 15, 30, 45 minutes, I concentrate fully on what I'm doing. That's a lot of progress compared to if I had just spaced out, slept or idled away the time pockets.



My time is NOW

Habit 7: Set timelines

A fundamental productivity habit. By Parkinson's Law, work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion. This means if you don't set a timeline, you can take forever to complete what you're doing. If you set a timeline of 2 weeks, you'll take 2 weeks. If you set 1 week, you'll take 1 week. And interestingly enough, if you set 1 hour, you actually can complete it by one hour too, if you truly want to. So set timelines. When you set timelines, you set the intention to complete the work by this time, hence paving the way for the reality to manifest.

Be clear on what you want to achieve (Habit 1), then set your timelines for them. What do you want to finish this month? What will make you look back and think that this is the best way you've spent today, and there's no better way you could have spent it? Set that as your targets. From there, set your weekly goals. Finally, you can set your daily goals which will become your day-to-day targets.

Habit 8: Automate everything possible

Technology today has made automation possible for a lot of things we do. Even when it's impossible to fully automate the task, we can still use the systems to get a lot of the work done for us.

Keep a record of the things you do today, and see how you can automate them. Some of the not-so-productive tasks that we do on a regular basis are:

1. Delete, archive, sort our mails
2. Delete spam mail
3. Paying our bills
4. Appointment scheduling
5. Planning our days/weeks/months (unproductive because it's still planning vs. acting)

Here is a partial list of things I automate:

- **Site mails:** I set up a filter where all site requests and reader mails automatically go into my 'Reply later' folder. I don't see them when I check my inbox - Only when I'm ready to reply to mails
- **Scheduling:** My schedules are somewhat automated. I set recurring items for things I've to do daily, weekly or monthly like paying the bills, exercising (daily), so I don't have to worry about them later. It's not exactly automatic in that I have to first create the entry, but once it's set I don't need to do anything about it anymore.
- **Tweeting/Facebook:** I automate the tweeting and posting of my new posts. Every time a new post goes live, my twitter will have an announcement, which automatically feeds into my facebook as well

- **Site maintenance:** I've set up the blog and forums to be as low maintenance as possible, to the extent where my only involvement is to write/post new content and reply comments. Many things such as the statistics, category count (in the sidebar), etc are automatically generated by wordpress.
- **Email filters:** I set up filters for newsletters and subscriptions that go into different folders depending on the category. That way my only job is to read and get the value, not to sort.

I'm continuously looking for ways to automate my process, so I can spend more time on creating value for others rather than being stuck in busy work. By automating your to-do list as much as possible, you reserve your time for the absolute important things. If you get a deja vu feeling when doing something on your



“For the happiest life, days should be rigorously planned, nights left open to chance”
-McLaughlin

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