

**21 Ways Get Things Done:
Take Control of Your Time,
Tasks, and Priorities, and
Accomplish More Than
You Ever Thought
Possible!**



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Temptations, distractions and “make do” work spaces aren’t exactly conducive to getting things done, yet that’s exactly what those who work at home deal with every day. And don’t forget well-meaning friends and neighbors who don’t understand that you can’t just “drop” everything and give them “five minutes” of your time – or worse, watch their kids for the afternoon.

Of course, there are dozens of strategies and principles that claim to help you take control of your time and accomplish more than you realized was possible in a day. The question is, which one’s really work?

While everyone is different, there are a few techniques that can be incorporated into nearly every lifestyle to help you get more done in less time.

1. Do it now.

If a task is simple and quick, such as phoning to confirm an appointment, do it the moment you think of it. If you forgot to put it on your list, write it in – and tick it off, the moment it’s completed. (And this goes for household tasks, as well as work tasks.)



In “Getting Things Done,” productivity master David Allen recommends adopting a 2-minute rule: If a thing crosses your desk and can be done in two minutes or less, do it. Your time allotment might be a bit different (5 or 10 minutes rather than 2, for example) but the principle is sound, and will help keep minor tasks from clogging your to-do list.

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2. Before doing a single task – breathe.

When you sit down at your desk in the morning, don't immediately start opening programs and files. Press your lower back as far back into the seat as it will go, straighten your shoulders, and take a few deep, slow breaths. Inhale in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Then smile. Say something encouraging, complimentary or nice to yourself. Now you're ready to begin.

3. Make time for planning at the beginning and end of your day.



Get into the habit of taking ten minutes to go over your plans for the day (and make any necessary adjustments or add a task you've belatedly realized you still have to do) in the morning. (Make it part of sitting down at your desk with a cup of coffee.)

Last thing before signing off at night, create a simple to-do list (containing at least ***your top three priorities***) for the next day. (This is the list you review and add to in the mornings.)

4. Organize your office

If you chronically procrastinate or scramble to meet deadlines, it's quite likely your work area and surfaces have grown a little out of control. In fact, you may even have developed "blind spots" about chaos.



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Resist the urge to tell yourself you “work best in chaos”. Instead, take a break in the latter half of the morning or mid-afternoon and re-organize your physical work space. Hint: Do this every day and not only will it give your brain and body a refresher, your tidying will take only a few minutes.

When starting on a full-scale office overhaul, decide what to prioritize by answering the following questions.

- What are you always looking for on your desk?
- What never gets done? Why?
- What do you always forget? (e.g. where your tax file is)
- What do you need at hand, so you can grab it without getting up?
- What can be put in your “reference” section, across the room?
- What can be kicked out of your office altogether?
- What would make your office feel like a rewarding space to hang out in? (e.g. fresh flowers every week; a frame with multiple photo spots for all your kids’ individual photos – instead of those five awkward frames cluttering up your work area.)
- What do you need in your work space that you don’t have? (E.g. a more comfortable chair; a door; a Thesaurus; your own mug.)

Don’t get so carried away with this that it becomes your pet procrastination strategy – but do take at least two or three sessions to create your dream work space.

5. Get a door

If your “office” seems to be in the center of Grand Central Station, consider moving it – or renovating to give yourself a door (and a wall to put the latter in, if you need it).

If you can’t create or take over a separate room, invest in a nice, decorative screen (or an office cubicle screen you can pin notes on!) People psychologically are less likely to attempt to draw you into conversation if you’re out of their line of sight.

(And consider a “Do Not Disturb!” sign too.)

6. Set a timer

It’s true that work expands to fill the time allotted to it, so stop letting tasks fill your entire day. Buy a simple kitchen timer and set it to 30 or 45 minutes (or, if you follow the Pomodoro Technique, 25 minutes) and focus on a single task for that time. When the buzzer rings, take a short break, then set the timer again.

By training yourself to focus while the timer is running, you’ll find you get much more done and those tasks don’t expand quite so much.

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7. Set your work hours

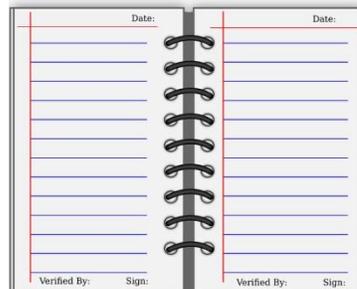
You're running a business right? Then you need business hours. Even if those hours change to allow for kids' activities and grocery shopping and laundry day, you should make it a point to have set working hours.

Here's why: If you set your work hours ahead of your day, you can plan to fit work-related activities (and breaks) into these hours. Knowing that you "have" to be finished by four p.m. (or whatever "closing" time you set) can sometimes help you stay focused on getting things done. (*Dressing for the office* can help too.)

A wonderful side effect: You'll get more done – while working less hours than you usually end up doing, because they will contain fewer tangents and distractions.

8. Keep a journal.

You can't improve that which you don't track, and the best way to track your productivity is to keep a journal. Keep a notebook beside you all through your work day. Open it in the morning and put the day's date in at the top of a fresh page.



Scribble down everything you do, along with any notes you want to make: (E.g. "Got interrupted by phone call from bank. 10 min.")

When you first purchase a notebook for journaling your workday, keep it simple. It doesn't have to be a fancy journal. (In fact, that can be so intimidating you can't bring yourself to write in it.) A simple school exercise book or calendar – one that opens and lies flat on your desk – will do nicely.

9. Start a "Book of Achievements"

We all feel out of sorts and non-productive from time to time. You can minimize this and get yourself back on track quickly by keeping a Book of Achievements. You can make this purely for work; or mix and match work, hobbies, exercise and life.

Whenever you hit a milestone – no matter how small – or achieve something you're proud of, write it in your Book of Achievements. When you are feeling frustrated, you can haul out your book and remind yourself of all the wonderful things you have accomplished.

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Hint: Make THIS journal your fancy one!

10. Get out of your chair

Sitting at your desk all day is conducive to “tunnel vision”. This is when you are so focused on a task, all else is excluded from your consciousness.

It’s also when you lose sight of the overview – of other tasks you have to do, and even of physical discomfort.

So get up out of your chair, stretch, go in another room, walk round the house and help yourself to a fresh glass of water. Notice the weather outside. Water your plants.

You’ll come back to your desk refreshed and ready to take on the next task on your list.

11. Eat sensibly

This is one of the most helpful actions you can take during the day to maximize mental alertness and physical well-being.

Don’t skip meals. You need the break, as well as the nutrients.

Don’t eat at your desk, either. Physically move yourself to a more relaxing environment. Set a place for yourself at the dining room table, even – and use the best china.



Pay attention to what you’re eating. Enjoy it.

And drink at least eight glasses of water a day. Dehydration is a common state for many people (especially office workers). And it affects mental alertness and clarity of thinking, as well as causing headaches.

(A dash of lemon juice, or substituting some of your water with mineral or soda water helps, if you’re not a water drinker.)

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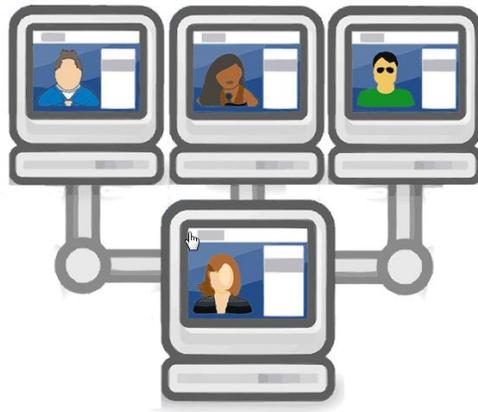
12. Make use of goals and rewards

You likely have a goal for your business or a project – but make sure your day contains goals and rewards too.

Your reward could be as simple as a cup of iced tea on the patio or a bubble bath – but make sure you acknowledge your achievements in this tangible way.

13. Hold Skype meetings

Need to talk to clients or contractors? Have weekly or twice-weekly Skype video conferencing check-ins, and train them to collect questions and issues to discuss. (For meetings you want recorded – ones that multiple participants can access – use Google+ Hangouts.)



For added efficiency, get them to send you a list of these issues and questions the day before, so you can email an agenda for your Skype meeting. (This can help eliminate call-backs, omissions and extra emails.)

Hold your Skype sessions at the same time on the same day(s), so it becomes a habit for both of you.

Not only is Skype video free, it's also a great way to create face-to-face interaction – always better than emails or even phone calls.

14. Allow twice as long for projects as you think it will take

If you are always beating yourself up for running over deadlines (or pulling all-nighters to actually make them), then get into the habit of automatically asking for twice the time you need.

That way, you'll get your project done on time (or before) – and your client will think you are a miracle worker.

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15. Realize the “final details” at the end of a project can be unexpectedly time-consuming

“It will just take me an hour or so to tweak these graphics to my client’s specs,” you tell yourself. But do make a note of just how long this process and other, similar end-of-project tasks you routinely perform actually take. (You should be doing this anyway, for project estimating purposes.)

Just remember that nothing is ever simple, when it comes to finishing projects (especially when technology is involved!) Estimate twice as long as you think you’ll need for the “finishing touches”.

16. Learn to ignore things

What’s the most distracting thing going on in your office right now? As surprising as it might seem, it’s very likely instant messaging and email.

Those little “unread” counts can spell disaster when you’re trying to get things done, and constantly stopping to read an email or three is a good way to turn a 30-minute task into an all day affair.

Instead, schedule your email and IM time, and when you’re working, turn them off. While you’re at it, turn off any other desktop notifications that pull your attention away from the task at hand as well, such as Dropbox and calendar items.

17. Make Cooking Easier



Whether you work at home or for someone else, it’s hard to spend all day in the office, then have to come up with a nutritious, tasty meal, too.

While fast foods and frozen dinners do have their place, remember that eating fresh, home-cooked foods not only provides extra nutrients, they also taste better and help make life feel less rushed and stressed.

Cook meals that will freeze well – and ***cook twice as much as you need***. Cool and freeze the leftover portions in individual freezer containers or heavy freezer bags. Be sure to put the date on the container or package so you remember to use it before it gets old.

Also, buy and learn to use a slow cooker. You can prepare your dinner while you’re making breakfast, and by the time the workday ends, it will be ready to serve.

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Both of these tactics will allow you to concentrate on work without worrying about what you're going to make for dinner.

18. Limit social media and other distractions

Even if you "hate" timers and don't work well with them, do use the timer on your kitchen stove to limit social media interaction, if you use the latter as a break. It's easy for time to slip away if people are asking you questions or making comments on your wall that need an answer.

If you're a big social media addict, you can even use timed social media sessions as a reward. (E.g. "For every hour I work, I'll allow myself five minutes on Facebook".)

You can also find applications that will prevent you from visiting known time wasting sites during certain hours of the day. LeechBlock for FireFox and Nanny for Chrome allow you to set filters for any website that keeps you from your work, whether it's Facebook, YouTube, or your favorite news channel.

19. Exercise.

It is the quickest way to recharge your mind and body and increase your energy level. Exercise oxygenates the blood cells, burns fat, limbers the body and helps you excrete toxins. All important when you're trying to get more done.

Even if you are a self-declared couch potato, do your best to take a break and indulge in a type of exercise you like, such as yoga or tai chi. Go swimming! Cross-country ski. And if you have a pet, it's time to improve your pet's quality of life: Pay attention to him and go for a short walk (you'll both benefit!)



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Also try out exercise machines, and find ones that you actually like. (A friend who hated treadmills and exercise bikes was actually shocked and elated to find out that her body loved the rowing machine.)

If you don't "know how" to exercise, join a gym. Most gyms provide free initial consultations with a personal trainer – and this can make all the difference between loving your daily exercise routine and loathing it.

20. Use a password manager

This unlikely tip is one of the best time-savers, report new entrepreneurs who find themselves forever hunting for forgotten passwords and emailing websites, asking for their passwords to be reset. Reports VA Isobel H.: "In one morning where I had to access little-used social networks for a client, I estimate I lost over an hour hunting for the passwords, re-setting them, looking for confirmation emails and troubleshooting why some of the re-sets didn't work. And that sort of password chaos used to be a regular thing for me."

Solution: Use [Roboform](#) or [LastPass](#) to manage all your passwords in one go. (Upgrade to LastPass Premium for \$12.00 per year for "unlimited mobile access".)



Not remembering passwords and having to hunt for them or request resets is not only a time loss, it's distracting, scattering focus away from the key task at hand.

21. Realize that working more hours does not equal more productivity

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence through multiple studies that drastically demonstrates the counter-productivity of overwork.

The Japanese, well-known for their dedication – and long hours – in the workplace know this so well they have a specific name for overwork-related deaths.

Working incredibly long hours can cause:

- High blood pressure

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- Chronic stress
- Chronic body pain (particularly back)
- Deep vein thrombosis
- Edema
- Fatigue
- Depression
- “Burnout”

Furthermore, “MRI scans of fatigued brains look exactly like ones that are sound asleep”, according to [Entrepreneur.com](https://www.entrepreneur.com), which cites a sobering number of these studies.

Not getting enough sleep will not only tire you and put you at greater risk of accidents and mistakes, it will prematurely age you and lead to health problems, too. You will actually lose productivity, on top of all this.

There is no virtue in overwork.

And there is ***serious risk to your health.***

Put your time into better organization, better work habits and beating procrastination.

Save time, enjoy life more – and get things done.