



**Boosting Productivity in Times of Distraction**  
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You're midway through your day and stop to realize that you've not accomplished one significant task. Your day started great by coming in a little early to get a head start on a full day of meetings and deadlines.

You possessed a positive can-do attitude, armed with coffee, and laser-focused on a highly productive day. However, as the day progressed you encountered distraction after distraction. One coworker was upset about a referee's call in last night's game while another was thrilled with the final score.

The group next to your desk wouldn't stop debating last night's presidential debate while others discussed the latest coronavirus updates nonstop. Just when you put all that aside, your coworker, who should have called in sick, walked by your desk coughing and sneezing, potentially infecting everyone within six feet.

Given these distractions and more, which occur daily in workplaces (including home offices where the news is blaring in the background), one might wonder how anything gets done. Thus, the continual search for new ways to be more productive.

Amazon lists 70,000 resources for productivity, while Google lists 578,000,000 results. In the end, it's important to know that there is no magic bullet, no one-size-fits-all key to becoming more productive.

Heightening productivity depends on the person, task, environment, and others involved. Most tips on productivity are too general or inappropriate for your specific tasks and personal style.

Having worked closely with highly accomplished individuals in nearly every economic sector throughout my executive coaching and previous professional careers, I've found the following strategies to be effective. Not all will work for you. I urge you to select just one that resonates with you, to strengthen and boost your productivity.

**Leave your issues at the door.** You are human and you have many colliding and potentially distracting factors in your life. Before entering your place of work, visually imagine putting any weighty personal issues in a box and close the lid. Leave it on the street. This goes for both work and home productivity. As you enter your home at the end of your day, mentally leave your work issues outside. Don't drag them into your home and family.

**Know what's most important.** Others may want your time and expertise while putting their priorities ahead of yours. Only you can determine what's most important for you to concentrate on throughout your day. Create boundaries. Solidly focus on what's most important to you. Be

respectful of others who ask things of you, while not taking on tasks that will distract you from your goals.

**Set your 'top 6'.** Before leaving your place of work each day, list the *top six* tasks that you'll accomplish tomorrow. This accomplishes two goals: 1) limits you to the most vital tasks instead of having a to-do list of twenty items that never seem to get accomplished and 2) starts tomorrow off with a bang. You'll be mentally strategizing these six items as you get ready and drive to work. You'll hit the ground running.

**Create a flow.** While each day may be different in the demands placed upon you, you are likely more in control than you realize. Do your best to create a flow to your days. One that honors you and your style. For example, if you're a morning person, set time for your most crucial phone calls, tasks or meetings in the morning. Take time later in the day to respond to emails or others who need to meet with you. Create an opposite flow if you're more of a night owl. Block periods of time for lengthier projects needing your full attention. For example, a flow of Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9-11 for your quiet focus periods.

**Tidy your workspace.** I know, you may love a messy desk, as you know precisely where everything is. Whether you realize it or not, this is distracting to you and to others who may see you as being a chaotic individual. With a messy desk you'll spend hours each month searching for items that could otherwise be at your fingertips. Come in during off-hours with two wastebaskets in addition to your desk trash container—one for recycling and one for confidential materials that need to be shredded. Then set aside one or two times each year to do the same, clear out anything that does not support your current work priorities.

**Single-task.** You may have perfected the art of multitasking, however, please know how damaging this can be. The damaging effects of multitasking take their toll by not allowing you to recover from constant excessive stimulation. Multi-tasking has been proven to lead to a lack of focus, memory impairment, and increased levels of stress. Instead, create an environment to single-task—close your door, turn off email, silence your phone, avoid social media. In doing so, you've created space to produce at the height of your ability.

**Know what works and does not work for you.** There is no other you, what works for your associates may not work for you. Hindsight provides the best data. For example, looking back, does checking your email every two minutes work for you or would a schedule of checking it two or three times a day support you better? When someone approaches you, do you drop everything to focus on their needs or ask them to set an appointment if this will take more than a few minutes? Are you at your best working straight through the day or taking periodic sanity breaks? Coming in early or staying late? Doing your work at the office or periodically at home?

As you contemplate ways for you to boost your productivity during times of distraction and chaos, consider author Peter Drucker's wise words: "Nothing is less productive than to make more efficient what should not be done at all."

You are the best expert on you. When I meet prospective clients who are drained, burned out, discontent or just plain unmotivated it's typically because they've lived by what's best for others.

They've not paid attention to what's best for themselves. Take time to focus on you. How can you utilize one of the above strategies to boost your productivity, thus feeling happier and more fulfilled with your professional endeavors? Be the best version of you and start today.

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