Productivity & Workflow: Three tools that really work

By [Daphne Stanford](#)   8 Oct 2015

Do you ever feel like you're not performing as efficiently as you could be? Do you need an injection of productivity juice into your veins? Well, here are three tools that may do just that!

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1. Establish Boundaries

According to [a study by Andrew Carton and John Aiello](#), professors from Duke and Rutgers University, respectively, social networking has gotten to the point that it is stifling worker productivity levels.

Although the internet and social connectivity tools such as Google Messenger and other intra-office email is supposed to increase productivity by cutting down on needless scouring of the office for coworkers, many of these social tools communication tools are becoming harder to separate from procrastination and segues, making them more of a distraction than a tool to increase efficiency.

The work interruptions include not only online networking and communication tools, but face-to-face interaction, as well. Therefore, it may make sense to turn off your phone, temporarily minimize or turn off your email notifications, and put a sign on your door indicating that you are in 'do not disturb' mode. You can always break intermittently to return emails and phone calls or to attend meetings.

However, if you are able to control the timing of breaks in workflow, you're less likely to be surprised or interrupted in a way that causes you to lose your train of thought.

The study also showed that perceived control or lack-of-control is also inherently connected to worker stress and productivity, so (as you might imagine) the more control you can have over your daily schedule, the better.

2. Make goals for the day, week, month

You know what they say about the best laid plans of mice and men? Well, the same holds true for goals: no matter how clear and wonderful your intentions, sometimes they change, despite yourself.

This could be because circumstances have changed, or it could be because not all of us think in a linear fashion. Some of us tend to instead accomplish our work in a more creative, haphazard, non-linear manner. As a result, goals are accomplished; it's just that they may be accomplished in a different order or with a different outcome than you'd at first envisioned.

Just because the path to the proverbial finish line is crooked rather than straight doesn't mean that less gets accomplished. It's just that the plans were deviated from and slightly altered. This might mean that it's easier for you, personally, to plan your work around weekly goals rather than daily or hourly goals.

To this end, it may benefit you to keep track of your progress by doing a bit of concerted planning ahead, each day: begin your day with a to-do list, or to end your day by putting together the next day's most important tasks. That way, if you get distracted from a task you'd planned to work on today, you'll know it's even more urgent tomorrow since it will be closer to the end of the week.

3. Let shared knowledge and creativity guide you

Ironically, while you might think that you can get more accomplished while off brainstorming and planning by yourself, sometimes it helps to do the opposite and collaborate with your teammates.

Group collaboration and dialogue can help increase the efficiency of individual efforts. At times, two proverbial heads really are better than one! Of course, this collaboration and teamwork is most effective when tackled according to everyone's individual schedules, as opposed to in the form of an interruption or unwanted interjection into a high-priority task.

Not unrelated to all this increased collaboration is the changing nature of office design and configuration. The old model involved cubicles, private offices, and a large number of walls and private spaces. The new model is much more open, in terms of floor plan, with numerous shared spaces, clusters of desks and chairs, and portable workspaces that can be moved around the office for spontaneous ideation and brainstorming sessions. The more you can do to help ensure that your place of work favors a high level of teamwork and collaboration, the better.

Establishing boundaries, flexible goal-setting, and creative collaboration won't necessarily put you on a rocket ship at warp-speed, but they are likely to help you out of the turtle doldrums and bestow a dose of fresh energy and enthusiasm to your daily task list.

Try one of these techniques and see how it goes.

ABOUT DAPHNE STANFORD

Daphne Stanford is a writer of many things: poetry, creative nonfiction, and songs for vox & piano. On her off time, she writes, hikes, sings, and reads poems over the FM airwaves at Radio Boise. You can find her on Twitter, now, as well: @TPS_on_KRBX.
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