

FOCUS

VISTA PSYCHOLOGICAL & COUNSELING CENTRE

SPRING 2010

Accomplish More By Doing Less

We all have the same 24 hours in a day, yet some people accomplish so much more than others. What are their secrets? Here are the best ways to boost productivity from some of the brightest minds on the subjects...

SMARTER STRATEGIES

Apply the 80/20 rule to everything. Roughly 20% of your daily activities are responsible for 80% of your success, income and personal happiness. These are your “big-payoff” activities. Conversely, 20% of your activities are causing 80% of your wasted time. These are your “low-payoff” activities. The best way to multiply your productivity is fairly simple—always be looking to free up more time for your big-payoff activities by ruthlessly eliminating the dozens of low-payoff ones that you unwittingly tolerate. **Example:** One of the most successful executives I know keeps a framed sign over his desk and carries an index card in his shirt pocket with the same message—*Is this leading me to my main goal?* He checks that reminder numerous times a day and saves countless hours each week by staying on track—

cutting off quickly from time wasting phone calls, meetings, gossip, etc., and relentlessly getting back to the big-payoff activities for himself and his company.

Harness your “hour of power.”

Whatever your highest-payoff activity, rise early and give it the first hour of your day—what I call your “hour of power.” This gets your day off to a highly productive start. The late Earl Nightingale, a management guru, explained that if you spend this early morning hour in the study of your chosen field, you’ll be a national expert in five years or less.

Gain six to eight extra hour of productivity every day.

Your second-most-productive hour is right before you go to sleep. This is a great time to leverage your productivity by arranging for your mighty subconscious mind to solve a problem while you sleep peacefully. **How to do it:** Just before going to bed, think about a problem or question that you’re working on. Then say to yourself, *Great subconscious mind, I don’t want to work on this matter too hard, so please just figure this out for me by the morning while I*



sleep peacefully. Then completely forget about the matter and drift off to sleep. You’ll likely find that during your hour of power the next morning, you will be brimming over with ideas that are perfect for your project. Be aware that your morning ideas are slippery fish. If you don’t catch them immediately on getting up, they’ll swim away forever. Keep a pad and pen at your bedside to capture your ideas.

Don’t carry your “to-do” list in your head. You not only will forget things that are on the list, but an inner voice will perpetually

Family dinners encourage responsible behavior among teens. *Recent findings:* Teens who have dinner with their families at least five times a week are less likely to abuse alcohol and/or drugs than teens who have dinner with their families three or fewer times a week. Teens who are less involved with their families are twice as likely to use tobacco or marijuana...more than one-and-a-half times more likely to use alcohol...and twice as likely to try drugs.

“The importance of Family Dinners, V,” a report by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, New York City. www.casacolumbia.org

Accomplish More By Doing Less (continued)

nag that you must be dropping balls somewhere. Use a written to-do list to capture everything you must remember—every phone call, task and follow-up action. Review the most urgent and important items daily, and all items weekly.

Don't multitask. As Confucius said, "A man who chases two rabbits catches neither." Modern studies show that when you try to accomplish two activities that require focused attention at the same time, both suffer significantly.

Slow down. When focusing on one high-priority item at a time, don't rush through it. You do your best thinking when you are focused and relaxed. As Mae West advised with a wink, "Anything worth doing is worth doing slowly."

"If you don't manage your time, it will be taken from you."

Get enough sleep. Research shows that your productivity, clarity, alertness, judgment, creativity, memory, motivation, relaxation, cheerfulness and lots of other wonderful qualities all thrive on adequate sleep and suffer without it. Also consider an afternoon nap—one of life's most rejuvenating luxuries.

Do what you love. It's much easier to be productive when your work is your play. You will want to give it your full attention and every minute you can—and you easily will brush off countless distractions that seduce others. So in all of your activities and goals, and especially when deciding which to choose as your highest priorities, remember the words of editor and author Christopher Morley, "There is only one success—to be able to spend your life in your own way."

YOUR "NOT-TO-DO LIST"

Your not-to-do list is even more important than your to-do list. You must work every day to minimize or get rid of those 20% of activities that are wasting 80% of your time—by maintaining a not-to-do list. *Helpful...*

Never answer e-mail in the morning. Reserve your precious morning time for your highest-payoff activities. Also, shut off your e-mail program for most of the day so that you won't be interrupted by each new incoming message.

Limit reviewing your e-mail to specific periods, perhaps once around noon and again later in the day. Keep replies short with answers such as, "Thanks"... "Look forward to it"... "Will do"... or "I agree."

Don't answer phones just because they ring.

Too often, it is a salesperson, fund-raiser or other pesky soul out to waste your time and ruin your focus. Have an assistant or answering machine screen your calls, or let them go to voice mail. As psychiatrist Edward M. Hallowell, MD author of *Crazy Busy*, says, "If you don't manage your time, it will be taken from you."

Flex your no muscle.

Whenever someone asks you to do something that you would rather not do, remember this simple two part formula—(1) "Thanks for asking" (for having confidence that I could do this, etc.), (2) "I can't, because..." (you've just been given a major new assignment or whatever) "so I wouldn't be able to give it the time that it deserves." If the petitioner persists, don't debate the issue. Just keep robotically repeating your reason for declining, and the person soon will let you alone. Of course, if the person making the request is your boss, remember that he/she is your number-one customer and that it's important to be on the same page about what's important. Sound out whether this new request supercedes your current tasks. In other words, know what is most important at all times, and put your focus there.

Ask two questions of every task: (1) Does this have to be done? (2) If so, does it have to be done by me? In all matters, strive to be not just efficient but effective. *Efficient* means doing things right, but *effective* means doing the right things—which is far more important.

Delegate the kaizen way. If you're a control freak and can't delegate easily, do it the kaizen way. Kaizen is the Japanese approach of continuous improvement with small, nonthreatening, easy-to-take baby steps. Ask someone to do a small task for you. As soon as you're comfortable with one delegation baby-step, take another, and so on. It's easier to get 10 people to work for you than to do the work of 10.

Source: Gary Ben-civenga, a renowned direct-marketing advertising copywriter based in Barden City, New York. He also is editor of the e-zine *Success Bullets* and author of *12 Life-Changing Quotations*, both available free at his *Web site*, www.successbullets.com



Rituals Useful To Mark Transitions

With the coming of Spring, we are given the opportunity to refresh and recommit ourselves to the New Year's resolutions that we vowed several months ago. According to Barbara Fiese, PhD, rituals can be a good way to mark transitions as well as to symbolically clear the mind and move forward.

WHAT TO DO?

Many people like to choose rituals that are cultural in nature. "If you practice a ritual that's been passed down through family generations, it connects you to your ancestors and preserves your identity for the future," Dr. Fiese points out. Other consideration may include whether you want to mark the end of a period that was particularly difficult... or joyous...or both. You may want to focus on being "in the moment" of transition from old to new...or it may be that you want to celebrate the possibilities that lie ahead, whether you have specific hopes and dreams for the immediate future or just want it to be wonderful in its own, yet-to-be -revealed way. There are rituals for all these purposes, and more. Here are a few to consider:

CLEANSING RITUALS

IN THE Thai culture, water represents both cleansing and renewal, and the a transition is celebrated with splashing water. Water is tossed out of doors, windows, or public fountains, and, more personal, young people tenderly

pour scented water over the shoulders of their elders as a sign of respect and an act of blessing. In Japan, people spend time cleaning their homes to welcome the harvest god. Clearing away clutter and creating a clean, peaceful environment can be a tangible and meaningful way to symbolize the clearing out of old energy in order to create a welcoming space for new positive events and opportunities to move into your life.

RITUALS OF CLOSURE

A Native American tradition can easily be adapted even to urban environments. Go to a park, hiking trail, your garden or some other place in nature that's significant to you. Dig a small hole in the ground, and place your regrets, fears or worries (represented by a slip of paper on which you have written them, a photograph or some other symbol) from the past year into the hole. Replace the dirt and cover the spot with leaves or stones so that the earth can absorb the past and leave you unburdened for the future. Physically releasing something tangible into the world—such as balloons, butterflies, doves or bubbles—can represent the release of the past. An easy, elegant and environmentally correct way to do this is by blowing bubbles—perhaps twice: First at sunrise, to release regrets, worries or cares...then at dusk to release your hopes, consciously sending out a

wish to the universe each time you blow a new set of bubbles. The Jewish religion practices atoning for past transgressions in order to enter the future spiritually cleansed. This can be accomplished by making a list of all the hurts, injustices and regrets you have faced or created. Contemplate each as you write them down, bringing them to mind or one last review. Next, build a fire in a fireplace (indoors or outdoors) and burn the list. Take the ashes outside, and scatter them or sprinkle them into the wind or over moving water to carry them away. Another ritual of repentance is part of the annual celebration in Buddhist temples in Japan, where bells are rung 108 times in order to dispel the 108 worldly desires. Consider engaging in a personal bell-ringing ceremony, with each toll representing something you wish to let go of or something you hope to call into your life.

RITUALS FOR NEW BEGINNINGS

Plant seeds in an indoor pot, each seed representing a particular hope or desire that you can bring into being. Nurturing the plant as it pushes through the earth and grows toward the sun can be symbolic of your dreams coming to fruition. In many parts of South America, people take a traditional walk around the block carrying a suitcase or backpack, which is said to ensure that your dream journey will manifest.

A MEDITATIVE RITUAL

Some churches and communities sponsor labyrinth walks, which are a form of moving meditation that allows the walker to reflect on life while moving slowly and mindfully, one step at a time, along a prescribed path. This can represent moving away from the past and toward the future. The World-Wide Labyrinth Locator's site at <http://labyrinthlocator.com> can help you find a labyrinth near you.

WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Rituals can be as simple as a moment of silence, a letter to yourself or someone else, or even a prayer, religious or otherwise. Or you may prefer to go all out, planning something elaborate, extravagant and even expensive such as a trip to a special place. Rituals can be solitary or a celebration with your partner, family or friends. It's the deliberation and focus on what matters to you that is most important and that ultimately gives your choice meaning.

Source(s): Barbara H. Fiese, PhD, clinical and developmental psychologist and author of *Family Routines and Rituals* (Yale University Press).

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Simple Steps to Learn Meditation

Whether you need to lower your blood pressure, decrease tension and anxiety, enhance your immune system or build your self-confidence, a simple daily mediation routine may be your ticket. Practiced for years as part of spiritual study, its numerous physiological benefits add another compelling reason to set aside a few minutes each day. Start now, following these steps.



- Sit comfortably upright, close your eyes and bring your attention to your nostrils.
- While breathing, focus on the sensation of air passing into and out of your nose.
- While staying attentive to your breathing, become curious about each breath.
- If your attention wanders, notice the distraction and then return to focusing on your breathing.
- Stay focused on your breaths for 10 minutes once or twice a day—then gradually extend sessions to 20 to 30 minutes each.

Source: Mark Coleman, meditation teacher in Marion County, California, and author of *Awake in the Wild* (New World Library). He runs meditation retreats and wilderness events nationally. www.awakeinthewild.com.