

Put Yourself

Back in the Driver's Seat

of Your Day

By CARSON TATE

How often have you thought, “If I only had one more hour, another colleague to support me, or less email to process, I could take a deep breath, get caught up, and not work on the weekend”? Or if you only had a magic wand and could add a few more minutes—no, more hours—to your day, and then you would be able to get control.

In today's overwhelming, overstretched, overscheduled world, we feel like we are constantly reacting and are not really in control of our days.

So, how can you put yourself back in the driver's seat of your day? Stretch the hours that you do have and make those minutes work for you.

Batch or group like tasks.

Batching or grouping like tasks increases your efficiency without any extra effort on your part.

For example, make all of your phone calls at one time, process your email at one time, or review project proposals from vendors. Switching between disparate tasks is highly inefficient because it takes our brains so long to reengage with the task we switched from and to remember what we were actually doing.

Work on the same type of project or task and increase your output.

Work in vacation mode.

Have you ever noticed what happens before a vacation? Your inbox is magically cleaned out, projects are wrapped up, and your desk is cleared off. I call this the vacation phenomenon.

The vacation is a hard deadline. You are going to be on a sandy beach holding a drink with an umbrella in it on Saturday afternoon. As a result, you have to get the work done before you go.

Consider working in vacation mode even if you are not going on a vacation by creating hard stops to your workday. For example, schedule a fun activity after work that has a hard start time: a movie, a play, or a sporting event. Watch what happens to your productivity during the day.

Create a stop-doing list.

As your responsibilities continue to expand at work, you keep adding tasks and projects to your to-do list. But, you never take anything off of the list.

Take a hard, critical look at your projects and tasks and ask yourself if each project is still relevant, directly tied to the organization's strategic goals, and has a significant return on time investment.

There are probably a few tasks and projects lurking on your list that need to be moved to the stop-doing list. No one is going to miss them.

Decide what is good enough and stop.

Do you know what good-enough is for each of the projects on your list? This is good enough for the organization and good enough for you.



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Over-thinking, over-editing, and over-tweaking wastes valuable time and is not necessary. Do good work and then stop.

Multitask with caution.

Our brains cannot perform two tasks at the same time well. How often have you been on a conference call, and maybe it drags on a bit, so you decide to check email? You begin processing email and then you hear your name being called. Oh no! You have no idea what was just said.

If you must multitask, be very cognizant of the trade-off that you are making.

Stop fighting nature.

Our brains are hardwired to function in very specific ways. So, no matter how much you try or wish for your brain to function differently, it will not.

According to David Rock, a neuroscientist, your capacity to make decisions and solve problems is limited by your energy-hungry prefrontal cortex. There is a limit to how much information can be held in the mind and manipulated at any one time.

Don't ask your brain to remember the 15 items you need at the grocery store, your schedule for next week, and your ideas for your new project at work. It is not wired to function this way.

Use a task list. It is ultimately more efficient and it enables your brain to do what it does best: think about things, not of things.

Make your technology work for you, not against you.

Today's technology is powerful—very

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powerful. However, we often abdicate our own power when we are working with technology. We let it guide and direct us. It pings, dings, or rings, and we jump.

Turn off the technology so you can focus and complete work. Leverage all of the technology tools available to you in your email program by writing rules, color-coding incoming emails, and auto-filing messages. Take back control and make your technology do all of the heavy lifting.

Get back in the driver's seat of your day by making your time work for you, not against you.

Leverage the natural efficiencies that can be gained by completing work in groups. Set and adhere to hard stops in your workday.

Remove tasks and projects from your to-do list that are no longer aligned to your goals nor your organization's goals. Know what good-enough looks like for you, and then stop when you reach good enough. Multitask with caution.

Stop fighting nature. Make your technology work for you, not against you. Stretch your time today and enjoy your extra minutes!

What are you going to do today to take back control of your day?

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