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Chapter 1

Productivity methods

Much has been written on productivity. In fact hundreds if not thousands of books, let alone blog posts or articles. Tying productivity to the old doer Sir Isaac Newton just seems to make sense given how productive he was in life and death. This is a man that by all accounts got shit done. Besides being a starter, finisher, writer, astronomer, and experimenter, he is most famously known for his work Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy a.k.a Newton's Laws of Motion. So what can Newton's Laws teach us about being productive? There are two keys: things in motion stay in motion and things at rest stay at rest.





Getting started on any new project is a challenge, just ask the author who procrastinated an article about productivity (yeah, that really happened). You will probably build it up in your mind for some time before you actually sit down to tackle it. Constructing a new approach to getting things done (i.e. personal productivity method) is even more daunting given the wide reaching impact of this decision. If you're serious about reconstructing how you go about getting things done in your life, it should be a meaningful investment of time and headspace.

There are innumerable ways to go about getting things done and being productive. If there was a single path, you would know by now and there wouldn't be a bagillion things written about it. The secret reality is that there is one path. I know, I just said there wasn't one path and immediately contradicted myself. Here's the deal, there is one path, but it's just for you and it has an expiry date. It doesn't come labeled with your name on it and packaged all pretty like a new Macbook Air. It only comes to those who invest the time to come up with an idea, build it, measure the outcome, and learn from it. Worse still, this means you have to discover it and that it's likely to change throughout your life as you tackle new things, grow, and change. This article is intended to be a series of guideposts that will help direct you along your journey.

Seeking to Understand the Royal We

If want to rebuild your personal productivity method you need to know what you hate about the current method and what you want in the new. Being productive isn't just about getting shit done; it's also about separating the wheat from the chaff and avoiding distractions. In short, finding ways to stay in motion rather than constantly stopping and starting (inertia's a bitch!).

What distracts you from accomplishing what you want? Are you habituated to your phone's notifications like Pavlov's dog? Do you have ideas, but can just never get started? Are you an uncontrolled extrovert that can't help but start up a conversation with anyone that sends even the tiniest of signals that they want



to chat? Are you addicted to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, or all of the above? Maybe you're old school and you love the little spike in serotonin you get whenever an email notification pops up reminding you someone's thinking about you. Maybe you're the gal that's great at starting projects, but leaves a trail of almost done projects in your wake. Or maybe, just maybe, you're the guy who accomplishes a ton of things everyday and is always so busy, but later realizes that all the little things that got done don't really matter compared to the one thing that didn't get done.

Taking the time to honestly reflect on who you are, what you're good at, and where you struggle is essential to building your personal productivity method. Each of us has our weaknesses and fundamental flaws that are the hardest for us to overcome. Take time to dissect your successes and failures, ask others where they see you struggle, or just look in the mirror and ask yourself three questions: (1) Do I start? (2) Do I finish? (3) Do I focus on the right things? Your answers to those questions should color your decision-making and plan building throughout the following sections.

1.1. Prioritisation

What's next? Peering into prioritization.



Some of the most productive people in the world like presidents, CEOs, movie stars, and freelance writers (I wish) have a team dedicated to ensuring that every moment of life is spent on the most important matter. For the rest of us, we need to be constantly sorting, sifting, and striving to decide...what's next.

Let's explore a couple of the productivity methods focused specifically on prioritization. If you've been looking at one thing on your to do list for days, and know it's important, but have chosen to pursue other, easier endeavors, than this section is for you. If you're constantly feeling busy, than be sure to dive in and pay close attention. These tools will help keep things moving (remember Newton's Laws!) by providing a framework and methodology. Rather than spending valuable focus trying to decide what you to do next, you're just following the plan. This is the first step to building your personal productivity method. You need to be able to distinguish the important from the busy work. Hone your ability to focus on what matters most to you.

“I’m too busy to tell people how busy I am”



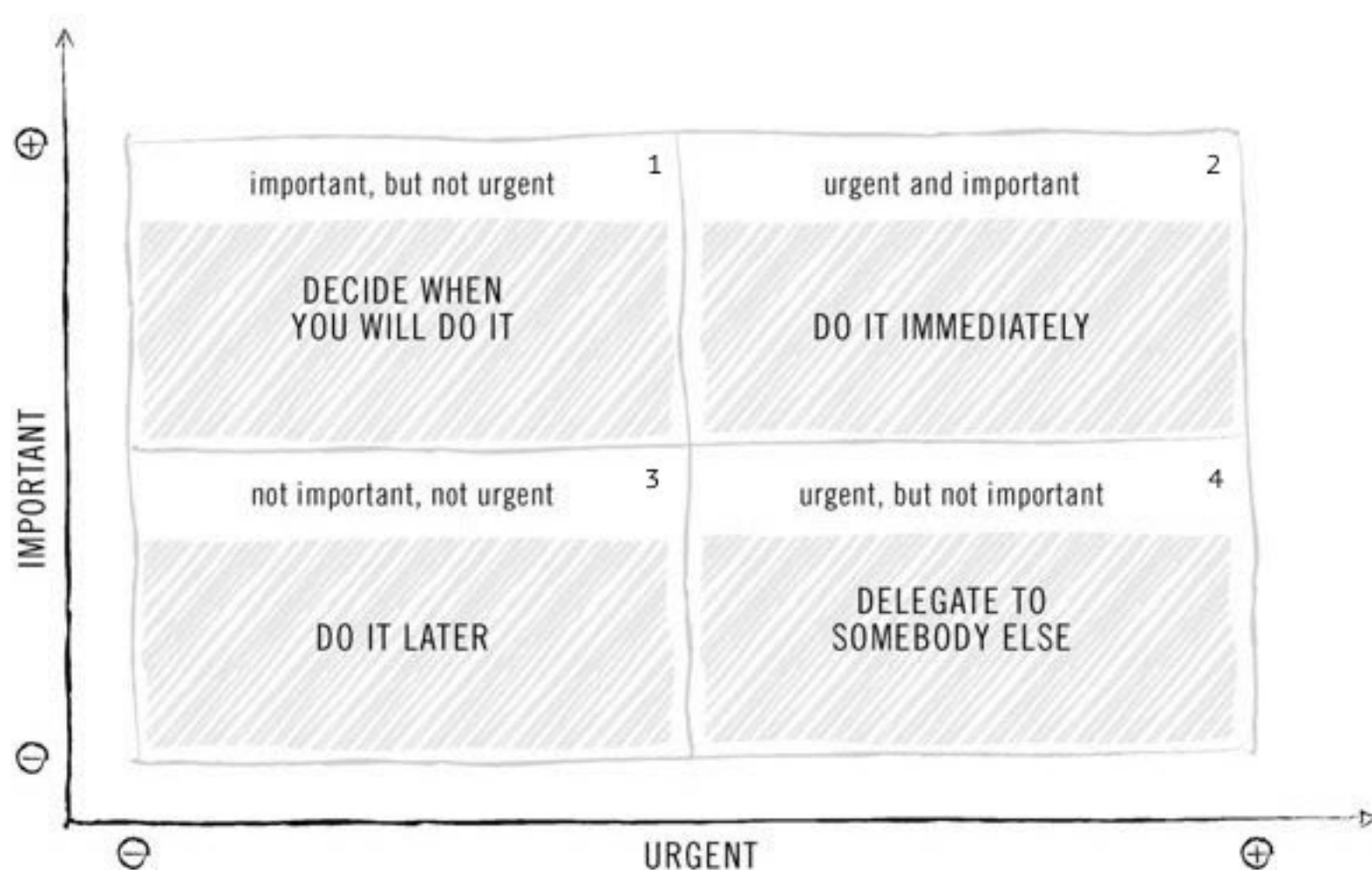
Eisenhower Decision Matrix

The man won a war, two presidential elections, and added two states increasing the size of the US by nearly 20% in addition to coming up with a pretty cool way of looking at his to do list. The Eisenhower Decision Matrix requires you to define every discreet task as Urgent, Important, Both, or Neither.

Now this may sound easy, but as every lawyer will tell you “definitions matter”. Let’s start by defining “important”; in this context it means that the task is a part of your long term goals, desires, and values. “Urgent” means that it needs to be handled right now; think burning buildings, exclamation points, and the blood pouring from the wound on your foot.

Urgent matters are those that require you to immediately react, usually to some external force such as nature (it's raining, I urgently need an umbrella), your boss (she's yelling my name in the direction of my desk, I urgently need to respond), or your spouse (she's calling and messaging you again and again, I urgently need to understand what's wrong). Reactionary tasks are easy, they have immediate demands, and there is no need to think, you just do.

Important matters, by comparison, can sit quietly on the shelf for days, weeks, or years; think of saving for retirement, going to the gym, or taking your spouse on a date. There is no burning building and nothing apparent to spur you to action, yet if you looked at a list of tasks those would be the ones you would identify as critical to your long-term happiness.



This graph from www.gsdfaster.com does an exemplary job of highlighting the concept and reorganizes it slightly from the typical to help you focus on where you should be directing your efforts.

The Important but Not Urgent, Box 1, is the ideal place to spend your focus and energy. These are the things that matter to you, they are crucial to your true happiness and you want to direct your efforts there in an intentional and thoughtful way rather than simply reacting to some actual or perceived urgency. By placing it in the top left hand corner we naturally go there first.

“What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

The Important and Urgent, Box 2, is where we must spend time, but we must also expend effort planning in an attempt to avoid it. This is ground zero for reactionary energy expenditure and if left unchecked can completely dominate your life.

In Box 3 we find the Urgent but Not Important tasks. This could be a favor for your brother or mother, remember our definition of “important” is tied specifically to you. If a friend urgently needs help getting home from work because their car broke down, you could drop everything and go pick them up, but that’s not a good use of your time. Instead, outsource it, send an Uber or a Lyft. It still accomplishes the Urgent task, but frees you to keep focused on what’s important to you.

Those tasks deemed Not Important and Not Urgent, Box 4, seem like they should

be discarded. However we all undertake activities that are neither important nor urgent, such as House of Cards, crossword puzzles, and whittling (try it, it's a blast). There are a handful of people who this is actually important for because of work, but for the rest of us it is pure blissful relaxation. It's okay, just own it and don't let it take on an importance greater than it should.

Some links to more content on the Eisenhower Decision Matrix:



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1.2. OMTM concept



OMTM

The One Metric that Matters (“OMTM”) seems to float around Silicon Valley like so many of these management maxims but finding someone to attribute it to is nearly impossible. The basic premise flows from the 80/20 principle, also known as Pareto’s Principle, that proposes that 80% of the benefit is gained from only 20% of the work.

“Management is doing things right, leadership is doing the right things.”

Peter Drucker

OMTM is about focusing on that one metric that represents the 20% and ignoring all the other metrics. Some famous business examples of this include Facebook's "grow faster than yesterday" or Y Combinator's "Grow 7% every week" or AppSumo's "Get 1,000,000 page views in one year". All of these metrics are identifiable, measurable, and really easy. That's the idea; you pick one metric and focus on it relentlessly.

There's no reason that this can't be applied to your personal productivity method. What are the metrics that truly drive happiness in your life? Is it saving 10% of your monthly paycheck? Spending 3 hours a day with your kids? Playing 54 holes of golf each month? Getting down to 199 pounds by the end of the quarter? Getting your business to 10,000 users by year's end? Whatever your OMTM is, make sure it is specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, and timed dependent (also known as the SMART criteria).

Some links to more content on the OMTM:



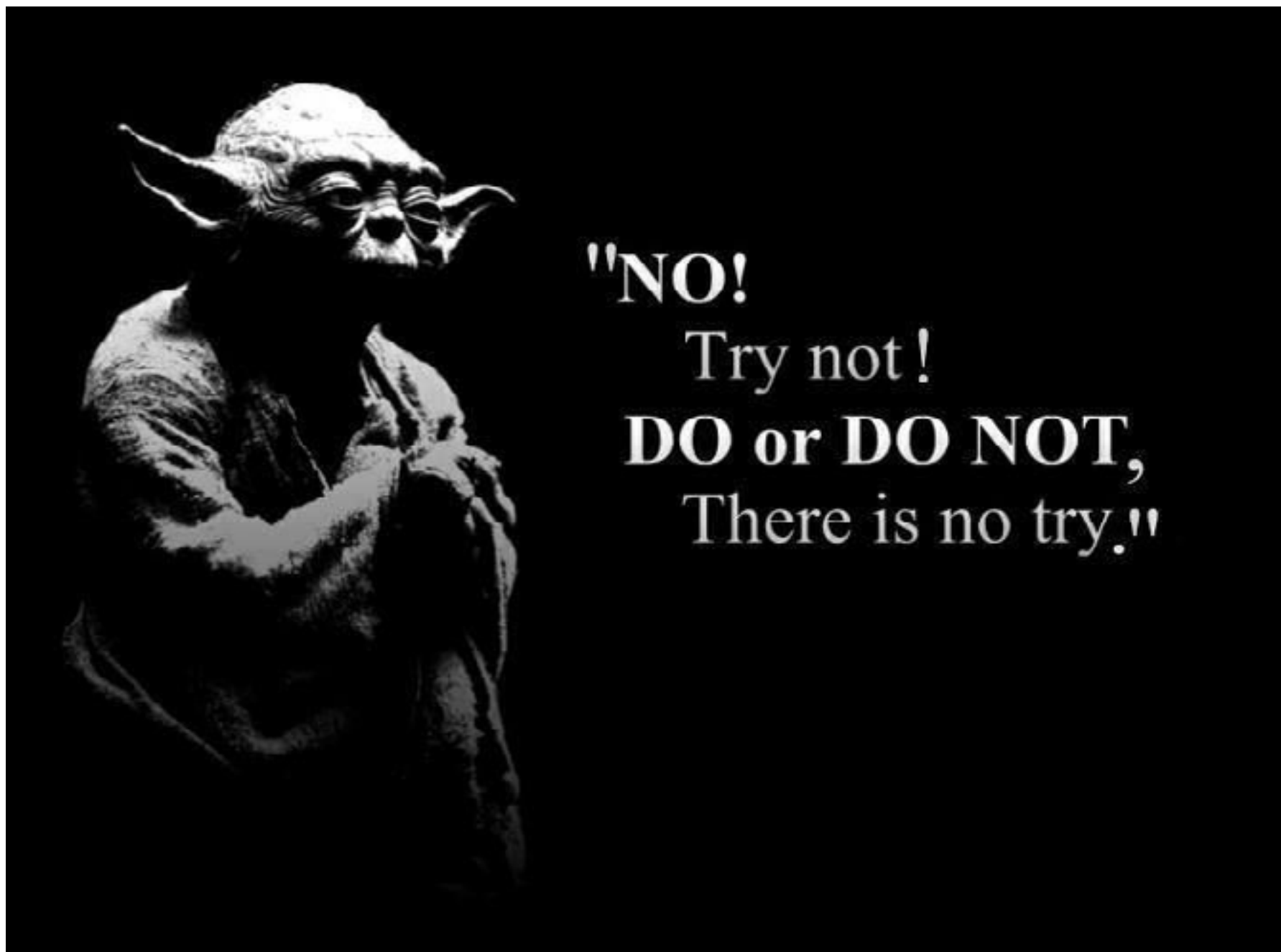
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But How Do I Develop a Personal Productivity Method?

Congratulations! You've stripped away the extraneous, the distracting, and that which doesn't truly matter. Now it's time to get on to doing what needs to get done. You're building the habits and practices that will keep you moving towards your goals and steer you away from powerful grip of inertia.

The different strategies to direct your time and effort are boundless, but remember the goal here is to find a tool or tools that will help you accomplish more. As you read about each one, think about whether or not this ties back to your strengths and weaknesses. We're trying to find methodologies that counterbalance our weaknesses and leverage our strengths.

Don't feel the need to be a purist. A mismatched hodgepodge of methods that works for you is far better than an unadulterated adoption of any of the following approaches. Our goal is effectiveness, pure and simple, and if that means that your approach pulls from every productivity method known to man, so be it.

1.3. Don't break the chain



Don't Break the Chain

What do Isaac Newton and Jerry Seinfeld have in common? An appreciation for inertia. No that's not intended to be a joke, but it's definitely true. Jerry is attributed with giving two pieces of advice to a young comedian who was going on stage before him. Jerry was asked "How do I become a better comedian?", he replied "Tell better jokes".

That bit alone would not have been all that helpful, however the follow up is a fantastic piece of advice that we can all heed. Jerry's next comment was that telling better jokes required writing them everyday, no matter what. He further

suggested getting a calendar and crossing off the days when you write. Eventually after a couple of false starts you'll get on a roll. When you're on a roll, you just don't want to break the chain.

“Chains of habit are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to be broken.”

Warren Buffett

Pair this with your OMTM and you've got a streamlined method to picking up new habits, dropping old ones, and getting more things done.

Some links to more content on Don't Break the Chain:



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1.4. Pomodoro technique



Pomodoro

Italian, tomato, timer. Huh? Yup, we may not think of the Italians as the most productive people in the world, but we do have Francesco Cirillo to thank for this blissfully simple yet effective time productivity method. We should also remember that the Romans, back in the day, were pretty darn productive in their conquering of the world...so maybe this is a flashback to the Caesar's methods.

Simplistic in description yet powerful in application; the Pomodoro Method calls for uninterrupted focus for a block of time (usually 25 minutes), followed by a short break (3-5 minutes) and repeat. Back in the 80's Francesco came up with the method, he was using a timer that looked like a tomato, he is Italian, and there you have it (pomodoro means tomato in Italian).

“Focus is more important than intelligence.”

A deeper framework of structuring work into discreet 25 minute tasks and certifications have grown out of this productivity method, as well as a book, but at its core, it's about bursts of focus. Sprints of productivity and unadulterated focus.

In today's day and age there are a few requirements to truly adopting the Pomodoro. The first, and most painful for many, is to remove your distractions. Coming back to our self-assessment, if you're a notification junkie this is for you.

Implementation mini-guide

Step 1 – Turn off notifications on your computer. That's right, no social media notifications, no email notifications, etc.

Step 2 – Turn off your ringer on your phone. Even better, turn it face down or put it in a bag.

Step 3 – Decide what you’re going to work on for the next 25 minutes. You don’t need to be able to complete it in 25 minutes, just try for something that it’s big enough to fill the time.

Step 4 (optional) – Get some headphones out, find some music that doesn’t have any lyrics (Try the Brain Food playlist on Spotify) and plug those ears. It’s a very visual way of letting those around you know “Do Not Disturb” and helps remove auditory distractions.

Step 5 – Set your timer; if you don’t have one, there are free Pomodoro timers for your Mac and PC. Download one, it’s absolutely worth it.

Step 6 – Get after it and be amazed at how much you can accomplish in 25 minutes of distraction free work.

When using the Pomodoro you might have important things pop into your head; keep a notebook nearby where you can quickly jot down a reminder, but don’t open that web browser to start searching! You will be shocked at how hard it is to accomplish more than 10 Pomodoros (each 25 minute block is called a Pomodoro) in an entire day. You can set a Pomodoro for anything: checking email, writing, budgeting, research, or even relaxing. The simplicity is deceiving given the impact it can have on output. Very few of us have demands that cannot wait 25 minutes before we respond so don’t be afraid of turning off your notifications and

ringer, but don't feel guilty if looking at your phone is the first thing you do when your timer goes off either!

Some links to more content on Pomodoro:



[Read](#)

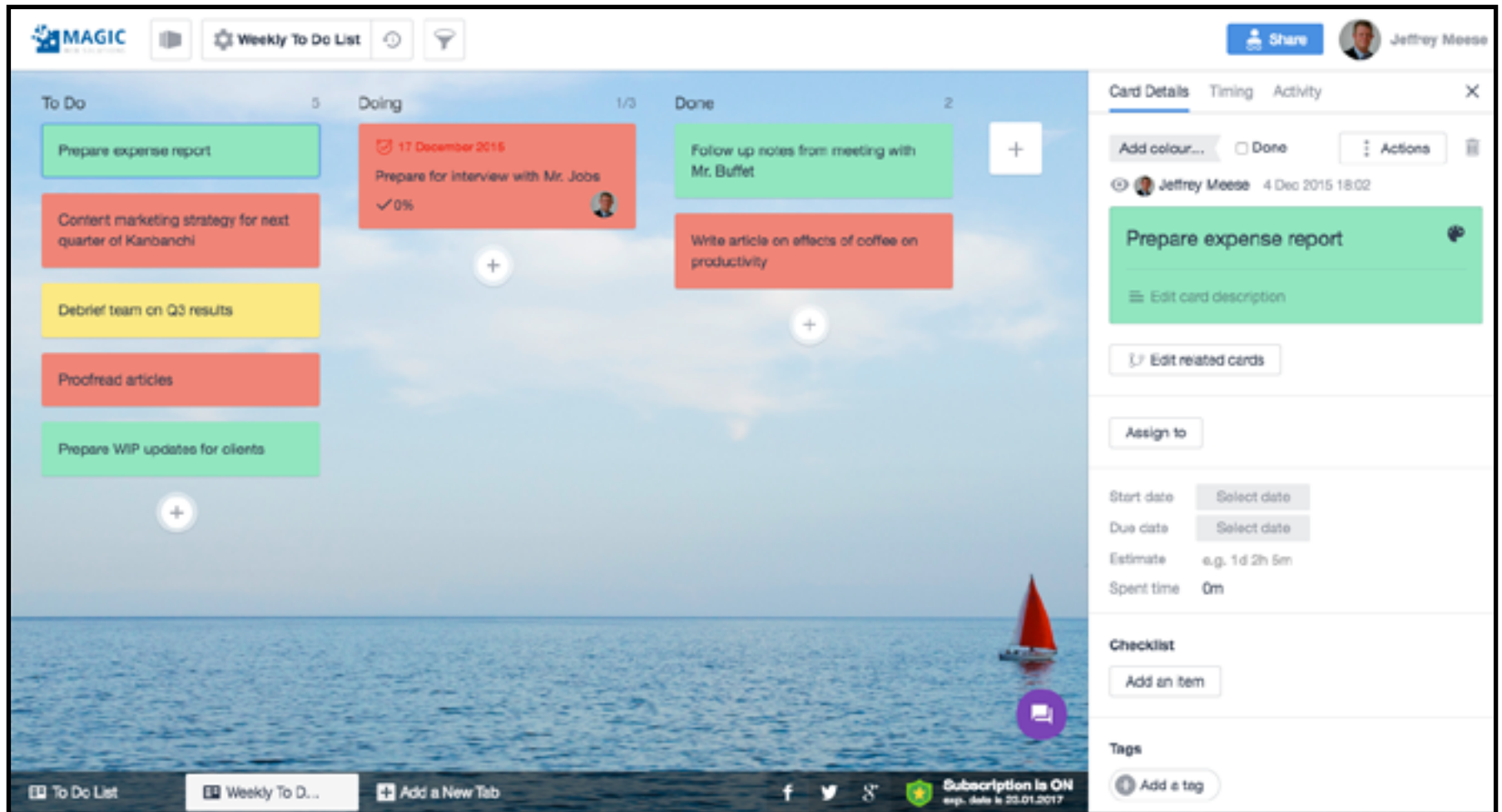


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1.5. Kanban



The Kanban methodology was born out of Toyota's lean manufacturing methodology pioneered in the 1970's and 80's. At its core it is a "3 bin system" consisting of kanban cards (the discrete tasks) and the three bins: (1) To do, (2) Doing, (3) Done. In case you're not in the manufacturing business we'll discuss this in more general terms.

This personal productivity method lets you see all of your to do items and your in progress items in one place in a very visual manner. Whether you're using a

whiteboard or wall with sticky notes, or an online Kanban software, the idea is straightforward: you pull a card from the To do column, assign it to yourself, and immediately move it into Doing. At this point you do whatever is described on the card. If for some reason you get pulled onto something else or you need something from someone else to finish it, the card stays in Doing until you've completed it.

A great tool for use in teams, as anyone can see where each task is in progress and who has it. Nobody works on the same part by accident, and if you finish your task you can just go pull another from the To do list and get on with your work.

Want to meld two personal productivity methods for some next level productivity? Try combining the Eisenhower Matrix and an online Kanban Board. Here's how it would work:

Step 1 – Create a To Do column and fill it with all of your individual to dos.

Step 2 – Create 4 columns: Urgent/Important, Urgent/Not Important, Not Urgent/Important, and Not Urgent/Not Important.

Step 3 – Create a Doing and Done column.

Step 4 – Sort your to dos into the Eisenhower columns you created.

Step 5 – Start pulling from Urgent/Important then move onto the Important/Not Urgent, and so on.

Some links to more content on Kanban:



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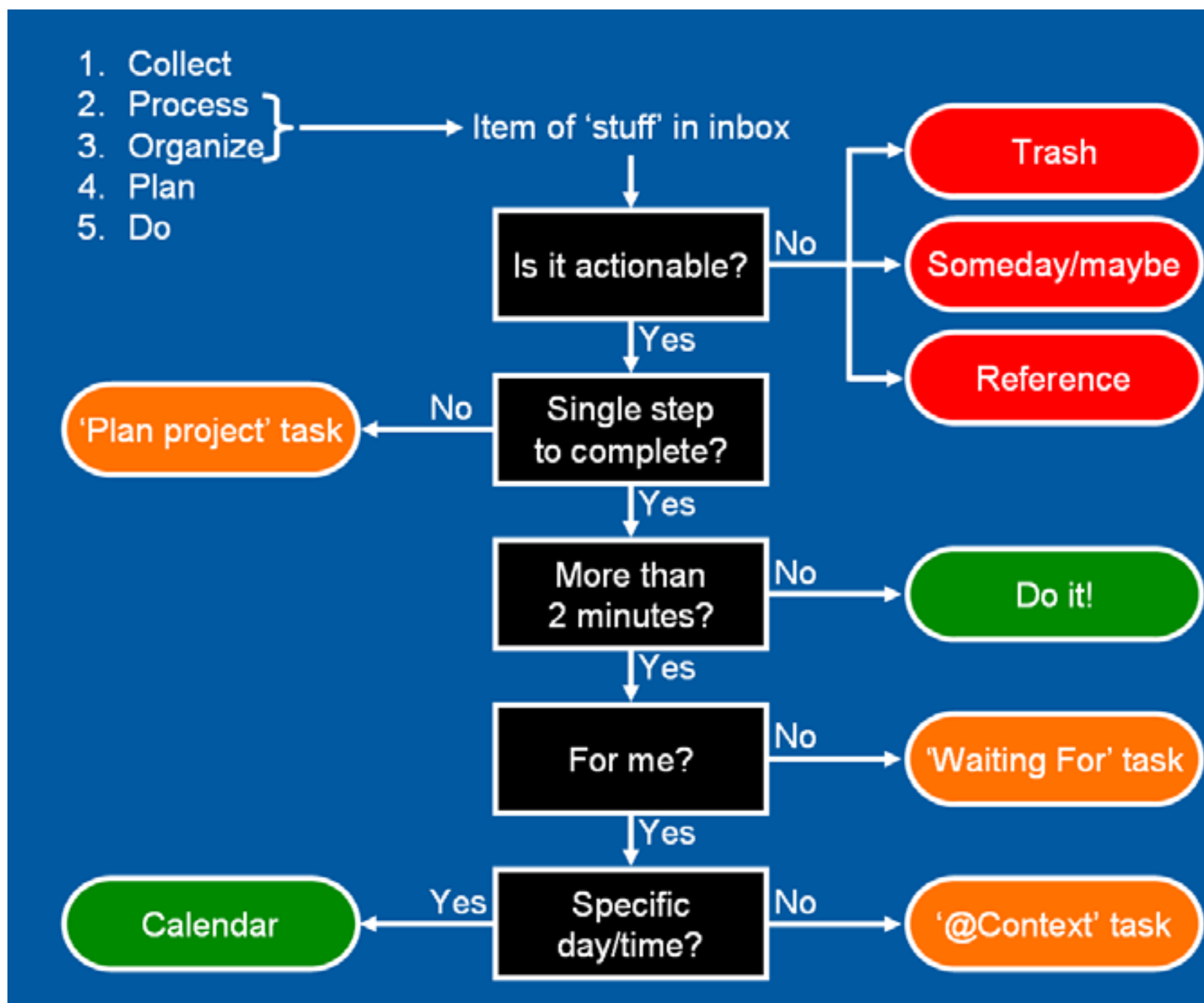
1.6. Getting things done

Getting Things Done (GTD)

This mega success book of the early 2000's written by David Allen with nearly 2,000 5 star reviews on Amazon is focused on helping you think about each task or thing that comes into your life and inserting it into a standardized decision tree. The core of the methodology is about systems, processes, and predictability. When looking at your to do list through the GTD lens you are presented with a straightforward path.

The GTD decision tree starts by you gathering ("Collecting" in the original GTD parlance) all of your to do items into a list. Each item on the list should include two things: (1) What does "complete" mean or look like? and if there is more than one step to completion (2) What is the next step to be taken?

When you encounter a task that will have multiple steps to completion, in GTD parlance this is called a Project. A Projects List is another essential piece of the overall plan. Although you will break your project into actionable single steps you don't want to lose sight of the forest for the trees. Having and reviewing your Project List will engage your mind on a longer term strategic level and help you keep perspective.



From there you enter the Processing and Organizing phase and ask “Is this item Actionable?” Many of the things that hang out on our to do list are awaiting something, whether that be the time, money or inclination to do it. If you determine an item is not actionable you are directed to categorize in one of three ways: Trash, Maybe/someday, or Reference. It’s okay to trash some items, you look at it and truly ask yourself, “Do I need to do this?”, if the answer is no stop

tormenting yourself by seeing it on the list. The Maybe/someday category is for those things that you are uncertain about and perhaps want to be reminded of for a while. As for Reference, these are to dos and ideas that aren't really something that needs to be done, but something that you want to keep track of for later access.

A note on the Reference file.

You need a reference system; this fact underpins the entire GTD methodology. In today's day and age, where digital storage is exceedingly available, having a detailed and organized system of how and where you store things is even more important and cheaper than ever. A great starting point is having a fixed naming convention for your files. Volumes of opinions exist, but a recommended method is "date broad specific", "20160625 Articles Productivity". By using the date in this way your files are automatically organized chronologically when you search by alphabetical order and you have two data points to search from: name and date. Another exceptional tool, this one for holding your ideas but can also handle your files, is Evernote. This free app has been around since 2008 and has built a cult following helping people keep track of their notes, ideas, and everything in-between. Powerful search, tags, and date/location stamping make this an ideal addition to your reference system.

What about those items that are actionable (i.e. you have the time, money, or inclination to embark upon right now)? Next your decision tree poses "Is this a sin-

gle step task or a part of a larger project?” If the answer is that it’s a part of a larger project, then set it aside in the Projects List. For those single step tasks, you next ask “Can I do it in under two minutes?” If the answer is yes, then get to it, right now and cross that bit of the list!

Many of our to do list items unfortunately take more than two minutes to complete. However, now that you’ve completed all the little items that nag at you, you’re ready to get into the meaty stuff. At this point in the GTD decision tree you have two branches to consider: Delegate or Defer.

The delegation decision comes along with it the need for another bucket to go alongside your Actionable Items and Projects, the “Waiting for” list. These are items that you cannot move forward because you’re waiting for something or someone to do something. That can mean that you delegated the task to one of your team members or it can mean that some externality controls when you can engage the item. The Waiting for List ensures that you track and follow up on the items that are holding you up from completing a broader project.

The Defer category is where our last required tool for the GTD method comes into play, the all-powerful calendar. Deferring actionable items is used for two reasons, context or time. Context based deferral simply means that doing the next most important thing on your to do list may not be appropriate, for example: if the task is “Book hotels for summer holiday” and you’re sitting at work. Time based deferral means that you’re taking that actionable task and putting it on the calendar and committing to do it on date certain.

You've now Collected all of your Actionable Items, Processed and Organized them, and now it's time to Plan them. What tasks are you going to engage in first? Prioritize from our Projects List, create Action Items from those discrete tasks from your projects and for follow up on our Waiting for items, and set the agenda for your day.

The final step in the GTD methodology is to do it. You've whittled away all of the little items, you've deferred or delegated what you can and you are left with a list of things that you need to get done.

"Your brain is for having ideas, not holding them."

David Allen

GTD is one of the most wide reaching and in-depth personal productivity methods and requires a fairly significant investment in time. Nevertheless it has rabid fans. After adoption it becomes second nature and helps free the mind from spending time on thinking about what to do next.

Some links to more content on Getting Things Done:



Read



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App

1.7. Checklist manifesto

The Checklist Manifesto

This book is a physician's tale of how the implementation and rigorous adoption of checklists can save lives. Atul Gawande extols on the virtues of checklists and how their embracing serves to take complex matters with little room for error and break them into repeatable processes that reduce mistakes.

The beauty of this method for personal productivity is in its simplicity. Creating repeatable excellence is necessary in nearly every task in business and life. When we were kids we had a list of chores. When we were in school we were given a list of pre-requisite courses for graduation. We take our car to Midas for the 24 Point Vehicle Inspection. When we board the plane we see pilots going over a preflight checklist. Checklists are ubiquitous.

Building a great checklist is simple in theory, but in practice requires a tremendous amount of experience and diligence. First, you must understand the task from start to finish. An inefficient checklist will only get ignored. Second, you must find balance between specificity and freedom with regards to implementation. Ensuring people do not feel like mindless drones will help drive adoption and continued adherence.

We all have a myriad of tasks in our lives that we repeat on a regular basis. Building a checklist not only improves our own efficiency, it also clears the path to del-

agation. One of the beauties of a great checklist is that the outcomes are known, if you follow the checklist from start to finish you should end up with X every time regardless of who is performing the task. When performing a task that you know will need to be repeated, take a moment and document the steps. Revisit this checklist the next time you come upon the task and revise your checklist. When the time comes you'll be ready to delegate it.

Can you imagine coming into a job and having your predecessor hand you manual full of checklists on the core tasks that you need to perform? How helpful would that be in getting you up to speed and productive? Now think about the awe you would inspire if it were you training up your replacement, as you're moving into your new job thanks to a big promotion!

Alone, the Checklist Manifesto may not rise to the level of an overarching personal productivity method, but that does not forestall you from integrating it into any or all of the above more comprehensive methods.

Some links to more content on the Checklist Manifesto:



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Chapter 2

Finishing and The Art of Letting Go

The chasm between finishing the little to dos and completing big projects is often the difference between mass and weight. One of the key differences is the psychological attachment we feel to bigger projects. Walking around the grocery store checking off the individual items is a far cry easier than deciding on what you're going to cook for the dinner party. Once the principal decisions are made, the tactical implementation is usually quite easy.

How many of us have started projects and got nearly to the finish line, but never actually wrapped it up? Do you have a side project you've never actually taken live? How about a piece of writing that you never published? What about those business ideas that live in your Moleskine?

Getting big projects across the finish line is the single most important part of being productive, for without it, you're not accomplishing anything. Here are some approaches and philosophies on how to finish strong.

Hell yeah

A key aspect of finishing strong is choosing your projects wisely. Entrepreneur and author Derek Sivers has a great approach to making decisions. In a widely circulated article titled "No more yes. It's either Hell yeah! or no." Sivers expands on his philosophy of choosing between the options that are presented in life; the title kind of gives it away, but it's still worth a read. [Some more from Derek Sivers on Hell yeah](#)

Decision Fatigue

Making decisions is tiring work. Ask anyone who is in a leadership role for the first time it can be completely overwhelming. The worst part: the more decisions we make, the worse our decisions get. Our ability to make trade offs, adhere to our own “rules”, and avoid making a decision increases as the day goes on and as we make more and more decisions.

[Some more on decision fatigue link](#)

Perfection

Whether you like the Italian: “Il meglio è nemico del bene” by Orlando Pescetti, or Confucius’s “Better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without” or in more common parlance “Perfect is the enemy of good”, all these drive home the point that done is better than not. Any maker, creator, author, or doer has to finish. Almost anyone who has made something is able to see it’s flaws, whether it’s a painting with a shadow that’s slightly off, a phrase in an article that’s flat, or a brick in a wall that’s not perfectly level. To the creator these are apparent, but to everyone else it oft goes unnoticed. Strive for great, but don’t let it stop you from finishing-

[Some more on perfection link](#)

Ship

Seth Godin is one of the great marketing minds of our generation and has written over 20 books that have sold millions of copies the world over. He evangelizes the “ship it” mentality and has theorized and studied on the blockades, both organizationally and internally, on getting ideas from the whiteboard to the shipping department. The key, as he believes, to great creativity is to be continuously creating and shipping your ideas. Some will succeed, some will fail, but just as Newton wrote his famous laws of motion, he failed miserably as a farmer.

[Some more from Seth Godin on shipping here](#)

The unfinished masterpiece is a poetic ideal and the final five percent is often the hardest part of an project, however done is a binary concept. Striving for perfection is an admirable goal, however it's an unrealistic expectation.

Chapter 3

One Man's Journey

I like pressure; those situations that require excellence in motion. Circumstances where you have limited time to think and instead must rely on your years of training, hours of practice, and the knowledge you have acquired along the way. In the day-to-day life of a consultant and freelancer this is a recipe for disaster. My work consists of projects that run, at minimum weeks and most often months. Prone to the thrice-quarterly all-nighter, I research, think, and note take on a project until the information has been stewing in my brain for days...yet I don't start writing. I stall and stumble until it's nearly the last minute and then I go full bore.

I should say that this was my way of life. For years, if not decades the reactionary forces that press upon all our lives drove me. Between the email notifications, phone calls, friend requests, follower updates, the text and Whatsapp messages, and Skype chats (not to mention people who still actually want to talk in person, heathens!) I was able to find ten maybe twenty minutes of uninterrupted time to work. I kept my schedule packed tight with school, work, and social engagements so that there was always an external force pressing me forward. The sheer volume propelled me.

Deep focus and relaxed reflection were reserved for morning dog walks, or more commonly, sleepless nights. I was playing defense, swatting the thing (message, email, phone call, notification) that buzzed in front of my face moment by moment without anything more than the most broadly defined "plan" for what I would accomplish, let alone how, or when.

Over the course of the past three years of research and countless rounds of trial and error I have developed a system that works for me. It's not perfect and like all

plans it relies on me actualizing it on a day-to-day basis. However, today I know that if I follow my personal productivity method step-by-step I will walk away from my desk at the end of the day feeling productive. I think of my approach in three phases: Setting the stage, planning the day, and executing.

Rise and shine: Setting the stage.

My morning, pre-work routine, takes about 45 minutes from the time I get out of bed to the time I'm getting in the shower and it is my best investment of time.

6:45 – 7:05 Get out of bed and walk the dog. No dog? You just turned this into a twenty minute routine, but I think everyone should have a dog they just make life better! No seriously, they get you out walking, greet you when you get home, and shower you with unconditional love. Not to mention teaching discipline and commitment.

7:05 – 7:15 A couple of minutes of yoga. A few basic sun salutations (need some guidance, try <http://www.doyouyoga.com/course/the-30-day-yoga-challenge/>). I do two or three runs through. It limbers up the body and has a profound impact on how I feel physically throughout the day. If you don't think there's a link between your mind and body...think again.

7:15 – 7:25 Meditation. Yup, it's kinda hippyish (could have said that after the yoga too, but that's gone completely mainstream and this will too),

but this daily practice is my secret weapon. It's a ten-minute investment that pays massive dividends. If I had to drop everything else from my morning routine, I would keep this. Start off with a free app like Headspace or Calm where they offer guided meditation. Do it for ten days and thank me later.

7:25 – 7:30 Scarf down some breakfast. I usually make a quiche or a frittata at the beginning of the week (or better yet on Sunday night) and then just slam it down while standing at the kitchen counter or walking around. I should say, I love food in a serious way, but I have learned to separate meals into the functional versus enjoyment. Weekday breakfast is about fueling the body pure and simple. Don't skip it.

This sounds like a lot to do in the morning, but I know with certainty if I complete my morning routine I'm going to have a great day. I feel good throughout the day, my brain is fueled, my body is limber, and my mind is quiet. I am able to focus, think, and create on a level that is unachievable when I roll out of bed, jump in the shower and run to the office.

I Love it When a Plan Comes Together: Planning the day.

My personal productivity method is comprised of bits and pieces of the methods I tried and loved which hacked together to fit me. Here's the first 45 minutes of my day at the office, the tools I use, how I use them and why I've selected them.

8:30 – 8:45 Arrive at the office. Despite working in a part of the world that starts much later than this, I find that by getting an early start I'm well into my flow before everyone else rolls in. I usually do a quick run through the inbox and clear out the extraneous stuff that's come in over night. This period is generally unstructured time where I can run free. For my desk setup, I work on a MacBook Air resting on a mStand by Rain with a second monitor and an Apple Magic Keyboard and Trackpad. I've had the same setup for seven years and have no intention of changing.

9:00 – 9:15 My Habit List app reminder pings me with "Plan my day" at 9am. I use Habit List to track between 7 and 10 things that I want to do on a regular basis. Ranging from my meditation practice to eating habits, and personal finance. This app incorporates aspects of the Don't Break the Chain method and tracks how many times in a row I've actualized my habits. You can set them to repeat daily, weekly, monthly, etc..

When my "Plan my day" notification pops up I open up Kanbanchi.com and my Moleskine (Black hardcover 5" x 8.25"). I keep a column in my Kanbanchi that lists every to do I have and at the start of the day I run through what's on the list checking to see if there is anything specifically dated for today and then prioritize. I also keep project specific columns and a Someday column. I take my most important three tasks that I want to achieve and transfer them to my Moleskine and close out Kanbanchi. This is a hybrid GTD - Kan-

ban methodology. I close out of Kanbanchi so that I am not distracted by other projects or to dos throughout the day. If something new comes up during the day, I add it to my Moleskine and transfer it to Kanbanchi later.

What's Next: Executing.

The plan is made, the tasks are clear and now it's time to get to work. The times below are estimates. If I have any meetings or lunches the exact timing will vary from day-to-day. However the methodology is pretty well fixed.

9:15 ~ 5:45 I pick up my task, turn off my Notifications (this depends on the task at hand; high concentration items definitely turn them off, email writing and review probably not), and fire up the Pomodoro Time app (always), set it for 25 minutes and I'm off. I target between 9 and 12 Pomodoros each day and fully adhere to the 5-minute breaks. As I wrap up a task or just before and/or after lunch I'll take a quick run through the email and if necessary set aside time to clear up anything that's come in. When I have work that requires deep concentration I pull up Spotify and throw on the Deep Focus playlist and plug in my Grado Labs RS1E headphones (okay those are aspirational, I actually use my Apple EarPods or my Seenheiser HD 280 Pro). My headphones are essential to warding off conversations and drowning out distractions.

5:00 ~ 6:00 The day is wrapping up and I'll run through the email one last time to send off any deliverables, updates, or ask questions. It's also time to open Kanbanchi back up and have a look at what I've accomplished, what I need to add to my list, and jot down any updates.

10:30 At the end of the day my Habit List app pings me again reminding me to check off the what I accomplished in the day. It also acts as a cue to reflect on my day. It's an opportunity to think back on what went well and what did not. Lastly, it's a reminder that I should head to bed. Sleep is such an important part of being productive that it cannot be stressed enough, I target seven or eight hours and find the following day a little more enjoyable when I manage to get them.

Closing thoughts.

No day is perfect and acknowledging that frees you from any sense of guilt you might feel for not “crushing it” every single day. I don’t hit my morning routine every single day, but I try. The more you do it and the better it feels the more you want to do it. Beating yourself up for missing one thing isn’t going to help you, but reflecting on why it didn’t happen and examining the root cause will. Relaxed reflection is a powerful tool that will help you be more productive and generally throughout life.

Articulating your personal productivity method, as I did above, is a potent way to solidify it. The act of writing it down somehow makes it concrete and tangible, less ethereal and more tactical. Try out some of the methodologies and don’t be afraid to pick and choose. Extremism is a poor approach to anything; realism is a far better objective. Any system that you can adhere to is better than no system. Build, try, and repeat. Like the organizing and processing approach from GTD, great, use it. Like the habit-forming power of Don’t Break the Chain, build it in.

Our approach to work and life will inevitably change as we do. Our priorities, our obligations, and our needed output will impact how we do what we do. Flexibility and process can live together; the key is knowing when it’s time for which. During these periods of transition take a step back and reflect on how you’re going about your work. If that’s too uncertain for you, calendar a quarterly or bi-annual productivity check up to examine your personal productivity method. Build your

own checklist of what your approach should be accomplishing and walk through it to ensure your method and your life still align.

Remember our friend Newton's Laws, things in motion tend to stay in motion and things at rest tend to stay at rest. Once you've got a plan rolling and you're doing it day in and day out, it will become easier. When you stumble, and you will, it will take more effort to get things in motion once again. Hopefully consciously knowing this will help make those day 1s easier and fewer in-between.

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