

Work Smarter, Not Harder

A Guide To Improve Workplace Productivity





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Instituting a Spring Cleaning

As a leader, you should divide all company activities into three categories:

01 Very Important

Those considered very important and that need the most focus and energy.

02 Central

Those that are central but not urgent and that can easily be put on hold.

03 Unimportant

Those that are truly unimportant and that the company can and should stop doing immediately.

Keep in mind, too, that apart from escaping acceleration or using spring cleaning as an annual process, you can also use the method quite effectively when the company is engaged in a change involving rationalization, cost-cutting, or streamlining.

Spring Cleaning Checklist

- Challenge your company by asking, "What should we stop doing?"
- Use the spring-cleaning method regularly, ideally every year and especially during change processes or after employee opinion surveys.
- When you do decide on a spring cleaning, follow a specific, standardized protocol that is well understood by all participants.
- Continually check the strategic importance of goals, tasks, and projects, and eliminate less-important activities.
- Use three categories to differentiate activities: top priority, on hold, and stop doing.
- Ask yourself, "What activities today would we not start again if we had not already begun them?"
- Use spring cleaning at both the company level and the division or work-group level.
- Involve all managers in the process.

Step 1 - Write down the jobs you do

- Before you can create a checklist, you first need to jot down all of the jobs/tasks that you do.

Step 2 - Make a checklist for each job

- Now that you have an idea of what it is you actually do, you can begin step two
- Making a checklist for each job. This really is no more than writing down a bulleted list of what needs to be done in order for the job to be done correctly.
- The other benefit of doing this is that, along with me doing it consistently, I can now hand this job over to somebody else, and if they went through the checklist and accomplished every item on that list, then they could host a webinar in my absence.

Step 3 - Write "how to" documentation for each item on your checklist

- A lot of teams get the first two steps down pretty well
- Most organizations have procedures (i.e. checklists) that explain what needs to be done
- Where most teams fail is in implementing step 3
- Showing people how to do it.

And that's a key piece of the puzzle. Because if you want things done consistently, and you don't want to spend your whole day answering somebody's questions or walking them through the process, then you need to document how to do every line item in your checklist.



Keep Moving Forward

- Know where you are at the moment.
- Define where you want it to be.
- Build the bridge and take the steps to get you there.
 1. You Always Plan Your Entire Day Before You Begin
 2. You Do The Most Important Tasks First. Even If They're Difficult.
 3. You Work With An Attitude Of Urgency
 4. You Set Tight Time Frames For All Tasks
 5. You Take A Break At Least Every 90 Minutes
 6. You Read Email Only In Organized Blocks of Time
 7. You Review Your Performance
- Complete tasks in batches
 1. Instead of spreading out data entry and reporting tasks throughout the week, set a block of time to knock it all out at once
 2. Set meetings with colleagues back to back in the afternoon
 3. Use the "2-Minute Rule" to knock out small tasks and beat procrastination
 4. Work in 90-minute increments
 5. Answer voicemails for a chunk of time in the afternoon

PRIORITIZE YOUR MOST IMPORTANT TASKS FIRST

Is that meeting really necessary?

Make sure there is a set agenda and goal for each meeting. No agenda and goal, no meeting.

De-clutter and organize your work environment

There's a lot to be said about how much organization and less "stuff" can decrease your anxiety, thereby increasing productivity. Having less clutter will help you think more clearly and waste less time searching for that misplaced document. Toss out the trinkets and old papers sitting around your desk to see if it helps you become less distracted and more productive.

Learn to say no

Throughout your day, people will inevitably disrupt you to get your help or input on something. It's so easy to say yes and take on more things, but this is counterproductive. Learn to say no more often to guard your time for your highest leverage activities. Saying "no" to something is easier said than done, but there are ways to achieve to that end without coming across as combative or crass. When someone comes to you with a request that you need to say no to, simply ask them to give you 15 minutes (or some arbitrary interval of time) to finish what you're working on then by the time you come around to find out what they wanted, they'll often have figured it out on their own.

Focus on one thing at a time

You've undoubtedly heard that multitasking is detrimental for productivity at work. Too many people fall victim to the trap of doing several things at once so it bears repeating here to help you increase your productivity.





Step by Step Guide

Multitasking lowers IQ and reduces the performance with which you can complete any task. So would you rather do 3 things with mediocre results or 1 task with excellent results?

1.) Consolidate your errands and tasks.

- Group similar tasks and or project work on a specific day, or time of day. Use the morning to answer your email, and once again in the afternoon, for example, instead of checking your email constantly throughout the day.
- By consolidating your errands and tasks, you put an end to distracting multi-tasking and regain the focus needed to actually finish something.

2.) Get control of your meetings.

To keep your meetings short and save your business from an expensive exercise in time-wasting, remember to:

- Think of meetings as a huddle. Brief, to the point, break quickly.
- Stand during your meetings. It helps to keep them short. No sitting.
- Have a specific and singular goal for each meeting. Keep all conversation to that agenda.
- Only have the people who must be there present. The more unnecessary people you bring in, the more time is wasted across the board for your business.
- Kill meetings that have no purpose other than “we always have them.”
- Avoid meetings that are lectures. This is about communication, and that is a two-way thing. Don't let people who like to hear themselves talk run a meeting.
- Have your meetings later in the work day. The morning is your team's most productive time. Don't waste it with a meeting.

Meetings, though, have a real place in your business. They are how you make sure your team has the same focus, and keep on top of what is happening in your business.

So what does a good meeting look like?

Quite simply, you came in with a goal and you accomplished that goal in the minimal amount of time possible.

Step by Step Guide (cont.)

3.) Give your team ready access to the information they need.

Forcing your team to go hunting for the information they need is not productive. It's also pretty frustrating for your team, and encourages a lack of accuracy. After all, it's easier to just guess rather than hunt down the information. Whether an online database or actual books or manuals, the information needs to be available to everyone. This also means a reliable phone and computer network, depending upon your business, and continually updated software and hardware. Nothing is as frustrating for a team member who wants to do his job and has to fight the tools to do it. If information is power, reducing easy access to it is a serious weakness for your business, and it wastes time.

4.) Get in the cloud.

Using cloud-based apps can significantly improve efficiency. Team members who are on the road or working remotely can work from anywhere, whether on a sales trip or home sick with the flu. You should consider getting the following in the cloud:

- **Custom tools.**

Have someone build [a cloud-based app for your custom databases](#). Manage your sales and inventory in the cloud. Make it easy for your sales team to work on the road, inputting live sales and updates into your system.

- **Project management.**

[Project management apps](#) aren't necessary for every type of business, but if you feel as if team and customer communication for various projects is starting to get out of hand, head to the cloud and streamline it.

- **Documents.**

[Put your documents \(and documentation\) in the cloud](#) so your team can read, edit, and share them easily. Avoid using email to send out versions of documents. Save time by making the original accessible by all. Google Docs or Evernote are always a great choice.

- **Task management.**

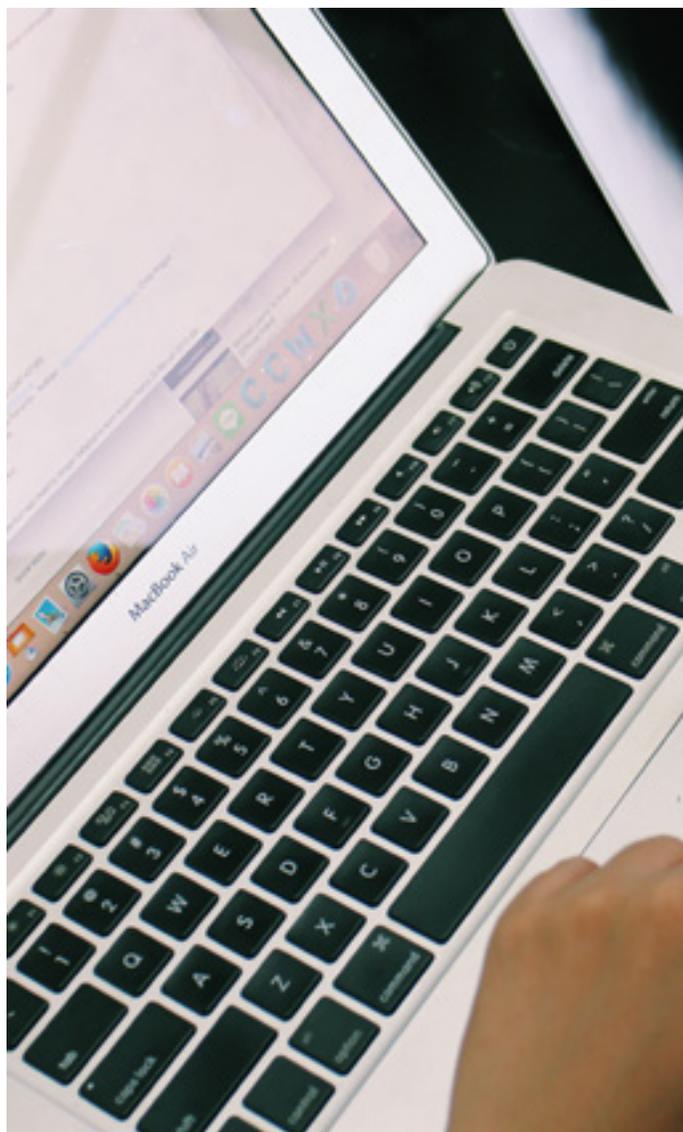
If full-blown project management doesn't make sense for your business, using [a task management app](#) is still going to be useful. When you and your team can do the work they need to do from any location, your productivity will obviously increase. Not all of your tasks can be pushed to the cloud, but look for ways that you can shift your business to the cloud to tap into this always-possible work approach.

Step by Step Guide (cont.)

5.) Build a team, and let them work.

For many small business owners, the start of their business was a singular affair. They became used to pulling long work days, doing everything themselves. As the business grows they (hopefully) realize they need to begin hiring additional help. Oddly, though, many business owners have a hard time letting their team do the work. Maybe they have control issues, or don't think anyone can do the work as well as they could. Efficiency begins when you understand that as the business owner, there are mundane jobs you no longer need to do. Your skill and knowledge needs to be focused elsewhere.

Here's a quick checklist to help you better understand if you need to be turning work over to the team you hired:



- **What are you worth?**

In other words, figure out what your time is priced at. What is your hourly rate? Now look at how you are spending your time during the day. Would you ever pay an employee as much as you are paying yourself to do menial tasks?

- **Follow your clock.**

[Track your time](#) and see how you are using your day. It might be an eye-opener to realize that much of your time is wasted chasing after what doesn't give you joy.

- **Check for outsourcing.**

Find the tasks that are sucking up a lot of time that you and your team can't afford to waste. Would outsourcing those tasks be more efficient and cost-effective in the long run?

- **Make a priorities list.**

Decide what are the most important skills or work you should be doing in your business. Compare them to how you are using your time. Are you making the best use of what you have to offer? Prioritize how you should use your time, and delegate the rest to your team. Your team wants to help. They want to do their job. If you insist on control and micro-managing, not only are you destroying your attempts to be productive, but you're not making your team feel too great about their job, either.

Step by Step Guide (cont.)



6.) Track your actual performance.

You probably track the performance of your website, but are you tracking the performance of your business? This is more than just checking the books to see that there's money in the bank.

This is about spotting trends (positive and negative) in both your team and your customers. Consider looking at your booking and appointment software, or your weekly sales. Are you retaining customers? Do you have a lot of no-shows? Without being too invasive, track how your team is doing as well. Are they hitting deadlines? Is customer support handled in a timely fashion? Is there a lot of absenteeism? You track your website and social media performance. You should use the same approach, [finding the apps and tools](#) that can help you do it, with your actual day-to-day business.

Step by Step Guide (cont.)

7.) Be serious about team member satisfaction.

Your team will work as hard as they are motivated to. If they are satisfied and feel safe and happy, your productivity will increase. How do you show your team that you care about them?

- **Give them good tools.**

As mentioned in #5, clunky or obstinate tools are a source of frustration for your team. They can't do a good job, even if they want to. Give them [the best tools you can so that their job is made easier](#).

- **Have a break area.**

Do you give your team a great place to take a break where they don't feel like the boss is watching them? Provide a place where they can relax, have lunch, get away from the computer, and not feel like they are still under observation.

- **Value their input.**

Businesses often tell their team that they value their input, but they don't always walk the talk. In your meetings, do you encourage, listen, and periodically implement your team's ideas? They want to feel like they are a part of something bigger.

- **Celebrate the important moments.**

Remember your team on special events or days. Perhaps you'll mark important project completion dates or hiring anniversaries by taking the team out for dinner. Whatever you choose to do with your team, help them feel important by celebrating them.

- **Provide a good work space.**

Some team members like the open office floor plan, while others like the privacy of cubicles. Provide yourself and your team with a workspace that they feel comfortable in. If they feel walled in or overly observed, they will waste time fighting the feelings they have about their workspace instead of doing actual work.

- **Be generous with personal time.**

Your team members need a break. And so do you. Be serious about allowing your team personal time, both during the work day and in general. Make sure your team members take frequent breaks. Schedule a break for everyone with healthy snacks, if you have to. Give them regular days off. Help them feel that the work-life balance is in order so they don't grow bitter towards their job.



Studies show that happy employees are more productive. If there is one single thing you can do to increase productivity, focus on that. All of the software and efficiency in the world can't top a team member who wants to be at work and who wants to do a good job. If you get this one right, the rest is all dessert.

Communicate effectively

- Poor communication skills can affect productivity in the workplace. Lost productivity can occur when instructions and messages are unclear.
- Unclear messages can lead to confusion, frustration and wastage of time in repeating work that has been done the wrong way.
- Inconsistent messages and communication breakdown in the work place can breed anxiety and dampen staff morale.
- Poor communication can cause misaligned priorities, unclear decisions, processes and expectations, unclear roles and responsibilities and lack of understanding.

Practice risk management

- It is under rare circumstances that everything goes according to plan. Make allowances for unforeseen circumstances.
- Emergencies, unforeseen circumstances and risks are part of the fabric of working life. A risk management process begins by identifying potential risks that can affect the completion of a project or a major task i.e. asking what if?
- Once you have identified what can go wrong, the next step is to prepare back-up plans or risk management plans that will be implemented in case the risk occurs. Thinking and planning before a risk occurs helps to save time and be more in control when a risk actually happens. In other words it helps you to be more responsive.

My Checklist

Divide all of your business activities into three categories

- Very important - direct the most focus
- Central - not urgent and can wait
- Unimportant - should stop doing

Prioritize your tasks

You should do the tasks that are most important, first. Doesn't matter if they are difficult or time consuming. After those tasks are finish, work your way down the list.

Is that meeting really necessary?

Meetings can quickly become a waste of time if you don't set a specific agenda or goal for them. They are very important for the workplace, just make sure there's an agenda beforehand and that they are brief and to the point.

Have an organized and decluttered work environment

When your work environment is organized, it decreases time searching for misplaced documents and decreases anxiety which increases productivity.

Consolidate your tasks

Group your projects and tasks for certain times of the day or certain days of the week. When you first get in the office, answer emails. Leave Wednesdays open for meetings. Consolidating will help reduce multi-tasking and help focus a more important tasks that need to be done.

Communication is key

Communication is very important when it comes to increasing productivity in the workplace. Poor communication skills can lead to unclear or inconsistent messages which then leads to confusion or frustration. Ultimately, leading to time wasted and a loss in productivity.

Let your team work

As a business owner, it's important to understand that there are jobs that you no longer need to do and that your focus and knowledge is needed elsewhere. Micromanaging can destroy yours and your teams' attempts on being productive.

My Checklist (cont.)



Give your team ready access to the information they need

Information is power and if your team always has to go searching for it then that's a serious weakness and a waste of time for your business. To increase productivity, [use cloud-based apps](#) so you and your team can work from any location.



Employee satisfaction is important

There are studies that confirm if employees are happy, they are more productive. This is very important since nothing beats employees that want to work and want your business to succeed. So make sure your team is happy, satisfied and knows you care about them.



How are you actually performing?

Tracking your company's performance is more than just checking the books, it's also noticing positive and negative trends. Not just with your customers but with your employees too. Using apps like [SWELLEnterprise](#) will help you with your day-to-day business.

Notes to self:



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