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DELIVER

— *the* —

GOODS

HACKS FOR
EFFICIENCY
&
EFFECTIVENESS

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Deliver the Goods

Hacks for Efficiency & Effectiveness

I have at least a thousand things I want to see happen in my lifetime. Sometimes I catch myself trying to accomplish a thousand things in a single day. It doesn't matter how long or short my list is if I'm not being efficient or productive. My wheels will spin day after day if I don't take the time to address the opportunities for improvement.

How many times have you made it to the end of the day and you can't seem to figure out exactly what you did all day?

You know that project you had great intentions to start and finish, but kept getting pulled away from?

We have all struggled with delivering the final product at some time or another. I promise it's not an incurable disease! Like anything else you've mastered, you need to be sure you have the right knowledge and the appropriate tools. Take a step back as you read this and give yourself an honest assessment. Bring someone else into the conversation as well if you're okay with external feedback.

Arriving successfully at your destination means planning well, packing precisely, and staying on course. In this book you'll find simple explanations and easy-to-implement habits that will help you identify the best way to achieve your goals.

Enjoy the journey.

Part 1

The Buzz Around Efficiency

Efficiency Defined

Every college student should wait tables as a job for at least a few weeks. It gives a person a lifelong appreciation for what servers go through at every restaurant in which you'll ever eat. Hopefully it also helps them give a little patience and a lot of grace (and a generous tip!) toward their future servers. In a fast paced environment like a restaurant, you learn a lot of self-management lessons and you learn them quickly. If you're not able to learn and adapt, you'll either get horrible tips or get fired. Neither of those is a good option, so it's a great way for college age people to get a quick introduction to adulthood.

The restaurant I worked at during college was the cutest little dive in Johnson City, Tennessee. It was a brand new restaurant, but designed to look dive-y. Cootie Brown's was a conglomeration of several different food styles from around the country. The murals from each area represented lined the walls of the interior dining area, from New Orleans to New York City. All the tables were handmade by the owner with wood frames and mosaic designs filled in with epoxy. As servers, we wore white painters pants and tie-dye t-shirts. It was also one of those places where squatting down next to the table to write the order or even sitting at the table if you built a quick rapport with the customer was completely acceptable.

One busy weekend night my manager noticed me constantly falling behind. I couldn't seem to keep up with the needs of the tables in my section, which were on the patio and farthest from the kitchen. I didn't realize I had been nearly running out to one table at a time in my five-table section to check on them, determine their needs, then run back to the kitchen to fulfill their request. I kept doing this for each table. My manager watched me walk out to my section holding nothing but a ketchup bottle and pulled me aside.

The manager, whose name I can't remember for the life of me, told me to consolidate. I'm guessing I had a puzzled look on my face because he further explained how to not run myself ragged and simultaneously provide better service. His advice was to check on all five tables as I was on the patio, note everything they needed in one fell swoop, then make a single trip to the kitchen for all those items.

Thank goodness the lightbulb in my brain flashed on and I was able to immediately implement his lesson in efficiency. For the amount of energy I put into every trip to the kitchen, I needed to improve the result of that trek to the other end of the restaurant. My life as a server changed that night. I was less stressed, more comfortable, and made more money.

Efficiency allows you to do more and do it faster. When efficiency is high, you achieve your goal and move on to the next. You have goals lining up in your mind, on your to-do list, or set by someone else and the sooner you can check those items off your list, you're free to move to more of the same or other goals that are more rewarding. Whether your goal is ensuring all the tables in your restaurant section have refilled drinks and ketchup for their fries or completing this week's sales calls, finishing them faster will free you up to accomplish more.

Depending on your background, your context for efficiency is somewhere along a broad spectrum. You may think of efficiency as gas mileage on your electric vehicle or the amount of energy required to hike 20 miles on the weekend. Perhaps you have images of clearing your task list before you leave the office on Friday. If you have solar panels on your house, you want them to have the greatest efficiency and provide enough energy to cover what you use.

Numerous articles are available on the research results of the most efficient machines ever built. Across the board, the bicycle ranks as one of the top inventions for maximizing the ratio of energy invested to the produced output. Then you run into a lot of discussion on gas versus electric and honestly, it's so far over my head that I stopped reading about the intricacies of combustion and the specifications of testing and comparison.

What it boils down to is that you want to get the most productivity possible for the amount of energy you put in.

The definition from dictionary.com is

Efficiency: the ratio of the useful work performed by a machine or in a process to the total energy expended or heat taken in.

Don't worry, this isn't a technical book and I'm not a technical writer, so I'll use relatable and practical ways of learning more about efficiency and productivity. I will break it down simply so you can assess your own efficiency, determine core factors which affect your efficiency, then explore ways to improve your time management.

Dreams and ideas are constantly floating around in my head and I don't know if I will achieve them all, but I will die trying. Each moment is an opportunity to make progress. Progress looks different for every single person, so I hope I get to the end of my life and feel that I made good use of my time. I want to work smarter, not harder, both in work and play. Hopefully I will accomplish a lot of my goals while knowing they had an impact as well.

Women have a lot of demands placed on them and are often required to manage their time down to the minute every single day. I love all my guys out there who support me, my vision, and all the women around them, but my voice is largely directed to women to encourage, equip, and challenge you to be the best version of yourself and accomplish amazing things.

Efficiency vs. Effectiveness

Efficiency and effectiveness are not interchangeable and may or may not co-exist. It's important to look at the differences between the two on the table below¹ in order to set appropriate goals and ensure you are pursuing what you intended. A higher emphasis on one or the other can cause a loss to the area with the lower priority.

This table includes examples of the differences between effectiveness and efficiency. Whether you are trying to improve your personal time management or implementing this in a team environment, these provide a solid filter to guide your objectives.

Effectiveness	Efficiency
Effectiveness is about accomplishing a task or producing a desired result	Efficiency is about performing a task in a best possible manner
It focuses on achieving the objective	It focuses on maximum result with least time and effort
Being effective means doing the right things	Being efficient means doing things in right manner
Effectiveness focuses on producing the result	Efficiency focuses on completing task using minimum time, effort and resources
Higher quality result can be expected from an effective person	Quick and intelligent work can be expected from an efficient person
Effectiveness is primarily concerned about results, not use of resources	Efficiency is primarily concerned on the use of time, energy and resources, not necessarily the results
It is not process and time oriented	It is process and time oriented

¹ Sandesh Adhikari, Differences between Effectiveness and Efficiency, Public Health Notes, <http://www.publichealthnotes.com/differences-effectiveness-efficiency/>

Effectiveness	Efficiency
It looks at whether the something is done or not	It looks at how the activity is done
Effectiveness has no/less economic sense	Efficiency has higher economic sense
Effectiveness is the end result	Efficiency looks at the process/ means of doing a task
It is result oriented	It is yield oriented
Effectiveness has long run perspective. It is used to achieve sustainable growth and long term profits	Efficiency has short run perspective. It is used to achieve short term goals
Here, the effectiveness of strategies are measured	It is measured in operations of the organization
Effectiveness can be considered as an extroverted approach as it is measured between one or more organizations	Efficiency can be considered as an introvert approach as it measures the performance issues (cost, time and resources) within the organization
It refers to the usefulness of a thing	It refers to the way in which something is done
Being effective means producing better and higher degree of success	Being efficient means, there is minimum waste, expenses and unnecessary effort
Effectiveness does not look at input to output ratio	Efficiency looks at input to output ratio
Effectiveness in a work/ organization should come first	Efficiency should be followed by effectiveness
Being effective means being on the right track with regard to the objective	Being efficient may not necessarily mean being on the right track with regard to the objective

As you read through the list, you probably began identifying areas that are naturally important to you. Based on factors such as your personality, your current role in life, and external influences you may not be able to control, you gravitate toward one side or the other in a given situation. Knowing the difference between efficiency and effectiveness is key to managing your time and how you should apply your resources.

Had I known the difference between these two approaches during my college days as a tie-dye wearing server, I would have been much more successful. Using only the first three rows of this comparison chart, I could coach my 20-year-old self to become more balanced. I did everything with excellence in mind (complete focus on effectiveness), but I wasted precious minutes (zero efficiency) that added up to low customer satisfaction and fewer dollar bills in my pocket.

Waiting tables is a short cycle in which to measure efficiency, so the tension between effectiveness and efficiency is fairly tight, without much wiggle room. Many goals in life have longer than a one hour timeline and that is where you will find more opportunity to make a conscious choice between the two.

Knowing goals and understanding if efficiency or effectiveness is a higher priority in each situation will clarify how to proceed. I don't do a lot of trail running, but occasionally I decide that I want to be more in tune with nature and I should do more trails than streets. I ran the XTERRA Black Mountain Trail Run for the third time during one of my nature-focused seasons. It's a fairly easy race as far as trail running goes. There is one good hill right in the middle of the 15,000-meter distance, which is just over nine miles for all the Americans reading this. Then there is a really long hill at the end that sneaks up on the first-timers. You have to know your goal in getting to the top of the hill to strategize well. Is my goal to get to the top of the hill fastest or do it well in the context of the entire race? Both have incredibly different processes.

Trail running can be summed up in one word: hills. It's different than road running and I've had to learn to change my tactics. Every hill I encounter gives me an option to choose effectiveness or efficiency. Hills will eat you alive if you don't choose the right strategy and can demolish your leg muscles early in a race if you choose incorrectly.

Newbies to trail running are easy to spot. I sailed through the first eight miles of the Black Mountain race and knew what was waiting for me. I caught up to two guys running together just before we all hit the base of that incline. I chose a spot not far up the hill where I would switch to walking. All three of us got to that point and they kept "jogging".

Unless you are an elite runner, jogging up a steep hill is a waste of energy and a poor strategy. You will use more energy trying to jog and most likely not move faster than a walker. Not only are you wasting energy in the moment, but overall you are wearing yourself out faster and won't run as well on the downhills and flat stretches of path.

As we crested the facade of the top (there is a second half of the hill you can't initially see) I began to jog slowly while the incline wasn't as steep. I passed those two guys and knew we would play the same game on the second half. Sure enough, I chose my point to switch to walking and they continued wasting energy and trying to jog up the hill. When we finally reached the top I had conserved enough energy to start running again and finish the last 500 meters well ahead of them. Not that I'm competitive or anything, but I love beating boys in the final stretch!

Understanding the priority for efficiency or effectiveness will not let you down. Life isn't only about competition, but you have much to accomplish and the better you are able to strategize, the greater your productivity will be. Finishing things faster than others gives you an advantage. The win is not to be busy for the sake of being busy, the win comes when you chip away at everything that gets you closer to seeing your dreams fulfilled.

There is a lot that goes into becoming efficient, so throughout this book you'll learn to take a well-rounded look at improving your ability to get stuff done. There are mental barriers that prevent you from even starting a project sometimes, much less finishing well. Physically, you may have opportunities to improve your processes. Doing all the things takes every bit of you and it's time to crank up your skillfulness and get the most out of each moment.

You have the potential to grow and develop to the level you choose. No one can hold you back from personal development. I imagine you identified a few areas in your life that need greater focus and improved time management or you probably wouldn't be reading this book. Whatever goals you have set for yourself, I challenge you to make them bigger. Take the vision of yourself with increased time management skills and bump it up to the next level. That's where I want you to see yourself. Now write down that vision and keep it in front of you as you head into the rest of the book.

Part 2

Productivity Hangups & Hacks

I'm the first to volunteer my own life as evidence that efficiency isn't as easy as it seems. I adopt bad habits along the way that creep in to divert my attention and focus. Sometimes I spend too much time on tasks that are not at all productive. The older I get, the more I find myself becoming less aware of the process and focused more on checking a yes or no box. That can translate into wasted minutes and days as I lose focus and don't pay attention to how I achieved the check in the box.

Today as I'm working on this chapter, I'm ironically distracted. It's been a few weeks since I've had a block of time dedicated to writing and I'll admit that the majority of my life is spent in much shorter blocks of time, often requiring less concentration. Outside of writing, I'm often multi-tasking. I listen to music while I'm working, I always have a podcast going while I'm getting ready in front of the bathroom mirror, an audiobook is in the queue for every run, and NPR is on my car radio presets so I have some idea of what is happening in the world as I drive to and from work. And now, somehow, I have to rein all that in and make my thoughts come out of my head into intelligible sentences with some sort of semblance.

Answering why you and I struggle with efficiency takes a bit of introspection and getting down to the roots of the issue. Many elements of low productivity can be traced to internal problems versus uncontrollable factors in your environment. There are direct correlations to inner turmoil which you may not realize are holding you back from utilizing your time in the best way. Addressing these now will help you reduce friction as you move through the rest of this book and begin to implement better time management habits.

Doing the hard work of self improvement requires courage and resources. One of my favorite resources to recommend is the enneagram. This chart has helped me learn things about myself I never thought of. It focuses less on behavior and puts the emphasis on motivations. Especially related to this chapter, the enneagram has given me insight into why I do what I do. Once I identified those core motivators I was able to give myself grace in some areas and challenge myself in other ways.

For example, as an Enneagram Type 1 I am often called a reformer. This means I have an idealistic view of how the world should be and am constantly trying to get everything in my life to line up with that idealistic vision. Positively, who doesn't want to live in an ideal world and wouldn't you want someone around you striving to create that world? The flip side is that as a reformer I constantly see the alternate view of everything. I mean, EVERYTHING.

When my husband, Brooks, relays a story of how difficult it was to communicate with the salesperson at the hardware store and that it took two hours to finalize an order that should take thirty minutes, normal people listen and sympathize, right? I have an annoying habit of defending the person being talked about, no matter what. I always try to step into their perspective to balance out the situation. I'm not arguing, even though that is how it comes across most of the time. My motivation is to reform and bring both sides into neutral territory to create the best possible solution.

Sharing this glimpse into my conversational dysfunction is only to share with you the benefit I found by studying the enneagram. As a Reformer I can spend time and energy arguing the opposite side of any situation or opportunity and procrastinate moving forward with any action. The enneagram reminds me that I am uniquely wired and have to spend time understanding why I do things the way I do and how I process everything that comes at me. No matter what I'm trying to improve in my life, the enneagram continues to help me see myself and my motivations as neutral, but exposed. Once exposed, I can choose to use those pieces of myself for good or let them be a hindrance.

Time management is intricately tied to the way we are wired and how we process life. Spending foundational time learning about yourself won't let you down. There are no quick fixes, so take as many intentional detours as you

need to pick up the right tools along the way. When you acquire the correct set of tools you'll progress more quickly through the following road blocks and master your efficiency.

Slow down as you read through these hangups and hacks. Use each one as a filter through which you can analyze various aspects of your life. The word hangup may have conjured negative connotations for you, when it's just a place to pause and readjust your tactics. Take a deep breath. Let it out slowly. Allow this section to be a fresh perspective.

Mental & Emotional Hangups

Mental and emotional hangups are grouped together because they are so often tied to one another. The way you feel about yourself affects your thoughts and your mental health bleeds into the way you feel about yourself, others, and your environment. The barrage of stressors from work and relationships can also contribute to delays in productivity.

I have several people close to me who live with mental illness and I have witnessed the domino effect of allowing a smallish negative thought to trigger a slightly larger or deeper negative thought, which continues tipping over the tiles of negativity, growing with each tile that falls over. The progression of mental and emotional trauma continues and creates a pattern of greater and greater stress. Over various lengths of time ranging from hours to days this can cause depression or anxiety, at the very least becoming physically exhausting. All of the energy consumed while fighting these thoughts derails you from completing your tasks.

Choosing a box of cereal was a really big deal to me as a kid. It involved a careful stroll up and down the aisle looking for the best toy featured on the front of the box. The bigger the box, the better the toy. A larger box also meant a better hunt to find that treasure. I would bend the box into a more round shape to catch a glimpse of a plastic bag encasing the amazing toy that I'm sure cost around ten cents. Don't tell my mom, but if no one was in the room you know my hand and arm went straight into that box all the way up to my elbow as I fished for the coveted prize.

Discovering that cheap toy drove me to extreme measures. I would pour out an entire box of cereal into a large bowl to find it. On the rare occasion we were allowed to choose a sugary cereal like Lucky Charms I might also pick out several of the marshmallows while I had the mountain of cereal in front of me. Every once in a while a manufacturer was kind enough to put the toy between the plastic bag and the cardboard box, but I must say that I loved the hunt.

As an adult I've learned to hunt for the origination of my emotional and mental hangups. We're not as lucky as I was with the cereal box exclaiming what treasure I was about to chase. When you begin to search your soul to uncover the mental and emotional you don't always get the exact picture of what you need to find. Years ago I grabbed the cereal box of my life and began digging and emptying until I saw the edge of the prize sticking out. Discovering who I am never ends, so each time I find victory in self discovery another area of opportunity pokes its head out and I start digging again.

One of the ugliest pieces of me came out when I found myself in a position of caretaker to someone who was recovering from surgery. When I realized that my bad attitude toward anyone or anything that required care from me was more than simply being a DINK (double-income, no kid), I had to get to the root of the issue. I thought I was baseline selfish, which is bad enough, but I quickly realized it was much worse. Anytime I felt tugged on to be a care-giver I would get cranky and out of sorts. I had to figure out why I was doing this because it consumed my thoughts and energy. It consumed my thoughts and attention to the point that my productivity was squelched to nearly nothing.

I examined every causal possibility, digging all the way down into my childhood to see if I could locate when and where this attitude began. I had to find the root of this hangup and remove it so I could resume normal levels of productivity.

Once you pinpoint the source of your attitude, take baby steps to make a change. It won't happen overnight, but it is entirely possible to reframe your outlook on life and the world around you.

Negativity

On a scale of one to ten, how positive or negative would you rate your overall attitude if one was having negative thoughts nearly all the time and ten was being genuinely positive most of the time?

You have a perspective of yourself different from what others perceive, so ask a few people around you to answer this question about you and see what they say. Asking others to do this can be a little scary the first time you encourage others to give you honest feedback. It is worth the initial discomfort and even if you hear a response you're not happy with, it most likely holds truth that will help you grow.

Negative attitudes can reduce your ability to manage your time well because you become more focused on the challenges instead of the possibilities. Small tweaks in your outlook that tip you more to the pessimistic point of view will cause you to overlook all the available options. It's a glass-half-empty symptom that will place you in a position of limited self-growth.

Determine where your negativity originated. Do you surround yourself with other negative people? Was there an incident in your past that caused you to feel this way? When you locate the source, you can deal with the deepest cause.

Fear of Failure

Another element of what may hold you back is a fear of failure. Many people are afraid to attempt something that seems out of reach, so they never attempt it in the first place. You might have ideas and dreams in your heart that you can visualize and have put on your to-do list, but have never taken the first step. Fear of failure is an epidemic, but you don't have to stay where you are.

Have you ever tried something new only to find yourself stuck and unable to complete the task?

My relationship with failure goes back to childhood, when my amazing parents would have us try different activities and hobbies. I had such high expectations of myself and anytime I didn't measure up to what I thought should be the standard, I quit. Eventually, I stopped trying at all. Those traumatic experiences impacted much of my adult life and have caused regret for all the dreams I never attempted.

Failure is a neutral event. How you perceive the results of failure is what defines your relationship with failure. Practice failing small and let your courage build. Here are a few ideas of how to fail in progressive levels.

1. Ask a friend to come over and wash your dishes just because.
2. Ask a coworker if they will give you five dollars. Offer no explanation.
3. Ask the barista at your coffee shop if you can have a scone for free.
4. Attempt a creative activity that is foreign to you such as pottery, painting, or some other type of craft.
5. Take on a project at home or work that is well beyond the limits of anything you've previously done.

Make up your own list and have fun with it. The point is to practice doing things while you're afraid and learn to minimize the distraction of fear and failure.

Control

Control follows closely on the heels of fear of failure. If you are a controlling person needing to know all the details, set the agenda, be in charge, direct the conversation, and have the upper hand, there's a good chance fear of some kind is at the root.

You might associate control with a high productivity level, but it's dangerous when your motivations are coming from an unhealthy place. Self-discipline and routine are healthy factors of good time management. If your control is fear-based, this can lead to extreme practices which are not only bad for you, but will probably impact those around you as well.

If you think you might have control issues, try this experiment. Think of one thing you normally do yourself and let someone else do it. How difficult is that for you? If you are able to choose one task, that's a great first step. Now choose another project or part of your day you could release to someone on your team and delegate that. One or two of these delegations will provide clarity into your level of need for control.

Overworking

Overworking is perhaps a not-so-obvious time management faux pas. There are people who get a sick satisfaction from being overworked. This habit can feed their identity, creating the idea that leaving work on time would have deleterious effects on their reputation. Individuals who obsess over perfection or who work too many hours can see other areas of their life suffer as a result.

Even if you are a salaried employee who isn't required to track your time, do it for a week or two and look at your schedule and patterns. Pay attention throughout that time for core beliefs or motivation to work more than necessary. Working more hours in a day doesn't always translate to higher productivity.

As you track your time, make a note of other areas of your life that are suffering as a result. Are you neglecting your health? Do you create space for relationships? Living out of balance and overworking is not a sustainable practice. Set yourself up for success by developing boundaries to maximize your productivity and be the best version of you for everyone involved.

Identifying your mental and emotional hangups goes beyond the boundaries of each struggle as a stand alone concern. Psychological health can directly impact your physical health as. If your body isn't well, you'll have a difficult time keeping up the pace at which you're striving. If poor time management is due to any of these obstacles I just mentioned, your body will eventually become exhausted you'll experience poor time usage.

This is also a good place to stress the value of therapy. When I work with coaching clients, they need to be in a healthy head space before we will make any real progress. It's an elementary level, but one that is needed to be able to see growth. If you are feeling stuck or want to get an outside opinion, find a good therapist and go have a few chats. It can't hurt and at the very least you can have them confirm that you're normal and perhaps throw in a good book recommendation.

Overcommitment

Jim Carrey starred in a movie titled, *Yes Man*, where he was hypnotized by a motivational speaker. The result of his hypnosis was that he said, "yes", to everything. I mean, *everything*. The irony was that prior to his attendance at the speaker's conference, he was a highly calculated and practical man.

This newly adventurous character began trying all sorts of extreme activities. Eventually, he had no focus or purpose and was doing things just to do things. Without a goal to provide meaning for the activities, it became an empty pursuit.

You may be an over-committer who finds yourself with little time to rest and determine what is important to you. You can have all the goals in the world, but if you are spread too thin in your commitments you'll never get around to chasing your own dreams. Sometimes you need to slow down and reassess your dreams as well, ensuring you are still on the right path.

Prioritizing is the saving grace of chronic over-committers. Events and activities they choose are rarely bad, but it is impossible to do everything well. If you find yourself in this category, prioritizing your life will be your best tool. Is family your top priority? Work? Social? Fitness? Health? Choose what is necessary and try to balance it with what brings you joy.

Creating a list of priorities is not static. Rhythms are an important part of life and much more realistic than life balance. Choose periods of time to revisit your list and assess what needs to change. In January, you might find that your social life drops to the bottom of the list because health is a greater focus following the holidays and perhaps it's a busier season at work. Then, as summer approaches, vacation and social life takes a front seat, while professional development goes on pause so that you can relax and reflect on everything over the first half of the year. Allow your priorities to shift, while keeping them narrowed to a smaller list.

Avoid becoming a "yes man" and diluting your goals. Before committing, pause and ask yourself if following through aligns with your vision or if the event prohibits you from moving closer to your goals.

Goals

Managing your time well without an end goal is like playing a football game without any score. You are going to get through a long list of plays, demonstrate your physical prowess, and high five some people around you; then at the final whistle-blow realize there was no point to the last three hours of your life.

Goals help you realize if your tasks are moving you in the right direction. Once you set your goals you can determine if you need *efficient* tasks or *effective* tasks and how to schedule them.

Both short-term and long-term goals should be part of your planning. The larger goals will keep you motivated when times get tough. Shorter goals give you opportunities to celebrate progress and remind you why you are headed for the bigger goal.

My dad was in the US Navy for thirty years. We moved across the country twice while I was a kid. On the first trip, we traveled from Virginia Beach, Virginia to San Clemente, California. We traveled a more southern route, which is fairly direct, hitting Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arizona among other states. When we moved back to the east coast, my parents changed things up and we took a northern route, visiting friends in Montana first, then staying farther north as we headed toward Washington, D.C.

Setting goals is like taking a long road trip. Each time we set out from one side of the country with the goal to get to the opposite side, there were multiple levels of goals. The overarching goal to reach the final destination 2000 miles away. Each day my parents set a goal to drive a specific distance in order to stay on track. And during each day there were smaller goals to leave the hotel at a certain times and stop for meals and tourist attractions. And certainly there were more subjective goals of keeping myself and my two siblings from arguing or having meltdowns from days in a crowded car.

Choosing goals of varying degrees helped my parents manage their time and work (drive) efficiently.

Calendars and planners of all shapes and sizes are available to help you set goals and map them out. Simple notebooks for tracking also work well. Find a system that feels right for you and stick with it. Even the best planners are worthless unless you use them and adhere to them.

Social Media & Emails

Distractions are a dime a dozen in this day and age. Have a list of housework to do? I bet that new Netflix series suddenly look more appealing. Need to finish the report for your staff meeting tomorrow? A quick Facebook check becomes thirty minutes before you know it.

I'm a huge proponent of digitizing everything I possibly can, so I'm incredibly connected to my devices. The benefits of being able to keep my entire life in the palm of my hand makes me thrilled to be alive in this generation, but I know I have to be mindful of the potential for distraction. I also love the online community and the people I have been able to meet as a result, so I would never suggest completely discarding these tools.

You need to manage these tools well. Distractions not only pull you away from your focus while you're using them, but it requires time to refocus on the more important task at hand. Set healthy boundaries for yourself, which can include time limits, specific apps you allow yourself to use, or certain times of the day.

Social media apps are designed to engage you, even create addictions. Endless feeds keep you scrolling and browsing. The rewards of logging in to read messages, see the number of likes on your post, or catch up on what your friends are doing affect dopamine in your brain and keeps you coming back for more. Fear of missing out (FOMO) became a real thing because of social media.

Long term happiness is not a factor in designing social media. It is centered around instant gratification and does nothing to help you beyond the here and now.

Businesses that revolve around or rely on social media are different. We won't get into that here, but there is much more of a research and statistical focus, so it's different on several fronts.

Emails, including those related to work, can have a similar effect. A reward system of opening and answering emails quickly can derail you from focusing on projects that need a longer train of thought. I've often heard that answering emails first thing in the morning is not always the best way to start your day. It rewards you for small accomplishments and keeps you distracted and coming back to check emails more frequently than necessary.

Turning off social media and emails for longer periods is not only acceptable, it is imperative to give your mind space to process, create, and implement. Try it and see how your time usage changes.

Work Management

When you are at the office or working from a remote location, how do you manage your time?

Common mistakes in the workplace can include not delegating tasks you shouldn't be doing, interruptions you could minimize, or micro-managing staff unnecessarily. There is a good chance you may not be aware you're doing any of these. Allow others to share their perspective as an exercise to reduce the amount of time you're focused on the wrong things.

Learning to delegate is worth the investment of your time. I know, I know, you're thinking that you can get it done faster and then you'll know it's done right. There is a very real learning curve in both training your team to handle what you have always done and teaching yourself to let go and trust others to be the competent adults they are. You will have to spend time improving your communication and perhaps changing the process of your communication. Those around you need margin to adapt and to develop a rhythm with you.

Empowering others not only allows people around you to grow, but will ease the burden on you as you become accustomed to loosening your controlling grip.

Allowing others to step into your world and become part of the process can elevate your efficiency when open communication is encouraged. Systems provide wonderful structure for any process unless you are closed off to

suggestions for improvement. As you empower those around you to take more off your plate, ensure that they have a voice in order to contribute feedback.

Open door policies are not always the best option. Evaluate the efficacy of being constantly available or scheduling shorter time periods for staff to meet with you.

We have a central office where many of our teams, who are spread out across six campuses, come to meet a few days a week. I make it a goal to be in that office at least two days a week, often sitting in the reception area so that I catch people as they come and go. Without those central meeting days I might not see some of our staff except once or twice a month, so it's a high priority for me to hang out on the couch in the front office. My capacity for this office-less setup is limited. I could never complete all that I need to with an open door policy.

My role as an Executive Pastor requires quite a bit of analysis and strategic planning, keeping me tied to a computer screen and spreadsheets much of the time. I have to set boundaries around these important blocks of time, where I'm not available at the office, I'm not checking emails and I only accept phone calls from certain people. This strategy has nothing to do with avoiding people and everything to do with time management. I can not do all the fun things like hang out with people and still manage to design strategy and provide analytics for our organization unless I prioritize my activities.

Checking up on your staff too frequently is a time waster. Assuming you have healthy staff, teams, and culture, this shouldn't be a high priority for you.

Managing five properties for our church has its challenges. I'm not directly involved with the maintenance and we have a property manager who works with our tenants. When I first stepped into that role, I was most concerned with ensuring that the pastors and directors at each property received consistent and thorough communication.

For a while, I was intercepting nearly every work order that came through to contact the various people involved in the issue. Confusion went to an all-time high because I was inevitably late jumping on the communication train and by the time I unnecessarily stepped in, everyone else was far ahead of me and handling each work request just fine.

Multiple conversations were directed toward my micro-management and eventually I got the message and stepped back into my lane. It's been smooth sailing ever since.

Assuming you hired the right people, they can manage quite well without you peering over their shoulder every five minutes.

Procrastination

It may seem like all the areas mentioned fall under this obstacle and they do in a certain way, but you know you've had plenty of straight up procrastination. Probably within the last week you can recall a time where you intentionally avoided something you needed to do for no other reason than you just didn't want to do it.

I was single for thirty-two years. I never lived with anyone and I was incredibly commitment-phobic. During those thirty-two years I feel like one of the best features of single life, which is also one of the worst features, was my ability to procrastinate as a single person. Sure, there were things I HAD to do like show up at work every day and on time, but so many other things that had fluid deadlines, constantly moving targets.

After buying a new mattress, I had the old mattress propped up in the hallway for a good three months. In my defense, I think I tried to find some organization who would accept the donation and offer pickup service. It's pretty challenging for a girl to move a queen-size mattress all alone. (In my twenties I did haul a huge mattress about a hundred yards to the dumpster, essentially strapping it to my back and dragging it across the grass field like a pack mule. That's not as easy once you're past thirty.) After three months I finally found someone to haul it to the dump for me. Geez, did I come up with every excuse in the book to avoid dealing with that!

Closet organization is something i appreciate, but not a pastime I embrace. It sounds tedious and overwhelming. Once you decide what you don't want and rearrange your closet, you're still not finished. That's where I tend to quit. Then the big black garbage bag of discarded clothes sits by my front door for weeks waiting to go to Goodwill, which is a mere three miles from my house.

These are the luxuries from my single life. I'm kidding. Maybe.

Funny to reminisce about the moments of procrastination that really don't matter, but they are important to note because incidents create habits and habits create patterns. These patterns are the repetitive motions that prevent us from hitting our target. Not taking the bag of clothes to Goodwill does more than clutter my living room. Actions like this left unchecked create patterns of thought-affirming procrastination as a way of functioning. It's not okay.

Differentiate between giving yourself a break and procrastinating. Ask yourself why you're choosing not to do something. You have to decide which answers are acceptable and which ones are excuses.

You know yourself better than anyone else. Only you can honestly answer if you are procrastinating. Don't sugarcoat it. Call it what it is. As they say, if the shoe fits...

There is no other word for it or way to explain it away. Plain old procrastination.

Perfectionism

Is it possible to pay too much attention to detail?

Depending on your goals, reviewing projects or reports can be a horrendous waste of time. Instead of moving on to another project that requires your attention, you stay stuck in an area that feels ninety-eight percent right when those who care most only need it to be ninety-five percent correct. When you've analyzed something to death, you may not even be able to make progress without stepping back and getting others' perspectives.

Based on the requirements of whatever task you are doing, don't get stuck in the mud on tiny details when it doesn't matter in the long run.

Perfectionism can also have roots of insecurity or fear. Consider any limiting beliefs you may have about yourself that drive you to need perfection.

Unhealthy Rhythms

Taking care of your body is important to maintain the ability to focus and develop endurance. Fatigue can impact you in many ways, including your attitude, your relationships, your ability to make good decisions, and to finish what you start. When you neglect your physical health, you are making a drastic statement about the value you place on your greatest asset - you.

Eating well, getting rest, and moving your body are the building blocks to stamina that will not only get you through the days and weeks, but allow you to follow your dreams as long as it takes to achieve them.

Organizational Abilities

Not everyone is born with the proclivity to manage their own calendar, know how to set goals, or even move forward in action. Talent is innate, but technical expertise is taught and built over time. Managing your time is the same way; if no one has come alongside you to provide you with the necessary tools, you need to acquire those.

Every boss I've had used a different method of organization and were very helpful in sharing what worked for them to allow me to discover what works for me. Getting and staying organized is highly individualized, so I've experimented with various modalities and continue to be open to new and better ways of managing my life.

Long before smartphones, my dad gave me a Palm PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) shortly after I graduated from college. This type of technology was fairly new, especially for someone at an entry level. I used it a little, but because it was new and uncommon and my job didn't require a lot of assistance in that way, it wasn't very helpful. I'm pretty sure I bought a paper Daytimer and carried the PDA inside it.

Learning to manage your calendar, task lists, interruptions, priorities and goals takes time and experimentation, but is attainable for anyone. It's important to try different styles and methods of organization until you find your sweet spot.

There are many reasons you may struggle with productivity and time management. As you move through these areas of efficiency it's helpful to externally process some of what you're learning with friends or family. Therapists and coaches can also help you identify and navigate some of the obstacles to better time management. Dig in and go deep within yourself to identify your core beliefs, which will illuminate many of your challenges to good time management. In the long run, that time of introspection is worth the challenge.

Finally

You have a lot to achieve. There are daily demands, the goals you set for this year, and the bigger vision you have for your life. Now that you understand the difference between efficiency and effectiveness and how they relate to each other, you're in a position to make the best choices with the time you have available.

Working every minute of every day for the sake of staying busy is hopefully not your goal. As you evolve into greater efficiency, the goal should be to accomplish your mission in a more reasonable amount of time, leaving you satisfied with the outcome and with enough energy left to enjoy other parts of your life. Prioritize strategy and rest as much as you do the actual work. Progress will come; stay engaged in a full life as you fight for your dreams.

Distractions are a dime a dozen. Give yourself grace as you start to analyze your productivity. Learning new habits takes time and it's okay if you have to start all over or try a different approach. I think one of the beautiful things about life is the chance to experiment. There is not a single right way and minimizing your distractions will look different than the person next to you.

In all my experience the biggest factor in your productivity and success is believing you can do what you set out to accomplish. When you lock eyes on that goal, no thing and no person will be able to pull you off course. You've got this. Get out there and do it.

About the Author



About Rachel Stewart

Rachel Stewart is a podcaster, blogger, and life coach residing in San Diego, CA. She is obsessed with seeing every person realize their potential and pursue their passions. Rachel operates Pieces of Grit, creating resources and opportunities for people to become the best version of themselves.

When not behind her computer and microphone, you'll find Rachel running and drinking coffee at any of the beaches along the San Diego coast.

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