

Qualityinfo

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Time-Maximizing Strategies of Highly Successful People

Think carefully about why you engage in any activity

There are few executives today who don't wish they could be more productive. Even the most successful individuals are looking for new and better ways to get more accomplished while maintaining or increasing their quality of life.

"Regardless of location, industry, or occupation, productivity is a challenge faced by every professional," says Bob Pozen, senior lecturer at MIT Sloan and author of the book, *Extreme Productivity: Boost Your Results, Reduce Your Hours* (Harper Business, 2012).

Pozen was executive chairman of MFS Investment Management and previously the president of Fidelity Management & Research Co. (while a full-time lecturer at Harvard Business School and frequent contributor to *Harvard Business Review*). In other words, he knows a thing or two about time management.

Nonetheless, Pozen still finds himself working to improve his own skills, both at work and at home, to get the most out of each day. He also believes that staying tuned into the perspectives of other productivity experts is critical to a well-rounded outlook.

With that in mind, here are some tips from Pozen and other highly successful people who do their best to keep time on their side.

Get your priorities straight

"Most professionals have not taken the time to write down their goals and prioritize them," says Pozen. "Without a specific set of goals to pursue, many ambitious people devote insufficient time to activities that actually support their highest professional priorities." This discrepancy between top priorities and time allocations can happen to anyone, in any field, at any level of an organization.

His MIT Sloan Executive Education course, "Maximizing Your Personal Productivity: How to Become an Efficient and Effective Executive," begins with an important session on goal setting that forces participants to reflect on their core values and professional priorities. Pozen takes participants through a six-step exercise to establish their highest-ranking goals and to better match their time allocations with these top goals. Learn more about these steps in a previous post, "Ready, Set, Prioritize."

Pozen also reminds us that time, in and of itself, is not the best measure of your productivity or of your employees' commitment. "The key metric is what you get accomplished, not how many hours you're in [the office]."

Manage your energy level—and get more sleep

Kat Cole, the president of Cinnabon, has figured out how to monitor her energy in order to get things done. "I'm pretty religious about my sleep," Cole says, in this *Oprah.com* article. "I don't give it up easily. I just am so much less effective at time management if I haven't managed the sleep part."

According to MIT Sloan lecturer and neuroscientist Tara Swart, many people claim they only "need" a handful of hours of sleep each night to be productive, but science proves them wrong (98% to 99% of people do physically require the seven to nine hours of sleep that doctors recommend). In fact, testing has proven that most people will lose five to eight IQ points after just one bad night's sleep. While we assume we're not being productive during sleep, our brains are actually going through an important cleansing process that shouldn't be skipped.

Schedule a morning power hour

Laura Vanderkam, author of multiple books including, *I Know How She Does It* (Portfolio, 2015) and *What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast* (China Press, 2013), suggests scheduling a "power hour" first thing every morning, during which you focus on a top-priority task—and nothing else. You know those bigger projects that align with your most important goals? That's what you should tackle at the start of your day. That also means avoiding your email inbox until the power hour is over, otherwise it might never happen. To take it to the next level, dedicate all of Monday morning to bigger, speculative tasks that require your deepest thought.

Do more of what you love

Maybe this sounds counterintuitive at first, but Thomas Davies, a director of Google for Work, says prioritizing tasks you actually love can energize you. "Days when I have these tasks on my calendar mean I have more energy to get through other important tasks, too," writes Davies on *FastCompany.com*. "And if a week goes by where those sorts of tasks don't show up on my calendar, I know it's time to build them back in."

Handle your email

Business leaders, CEOs, and managers often receive hundreds, if not thousands, of emails a day. Most would agree that email is necessary, but extremely distracting. Pozen recommends checking your email only every hour or two, and then skipping the majority of them because "you can see from the subject line that they are not important." Unless you're on vacation, it's equally important to handle emails immediately and only once. Waiting to respond to an email only means you'll waste time later relocating it, re-reading it, and thinking about the issues all over again. Slightly more extreme, Tim Ferriss, well-known "life hacker" and author of *The Four Hour Work Week* (Ebury Press, 2011), advises checking email only twice a day (such as 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.). To further

curtail your email impulses, he suggests setting up an auto response, which indicates that you'll be checking email twice per day or less.

Make a to-don't list

Productivity is not just about what you do, but (perhaps most important) what you don't do. Jocelyn K. Glei, author of the book, *Unsubscribe: How to Kill Email Anxiety, Avoid Distractions, and Get Real Work Done* (Public Affairs, 2016), proposes sitting down and listing six to 10 things "that you commit to not do in 2017 because they are keeping you from focusing on your best work." These anti-resolutions might include sleeping next to your smartphone (don't do it!) and opening your email at the start of your day (try the power hour suggest above instead). Saying no to certain tasks also might mean delegating them. Pozen suggests focusing on the tasks that can only be done by you.

Eat dinner with the kids

"You'll never have enough time in the day, but it's paramount to make time for family and relaxation," says Pozen. When not traveling, Pozen makes it a priority to be home by 7 p.m. for dinner with his wife and kids. In order to stay productive, it's necessary to shut off work, and the dinner table is a perfect way to do just that.

Learn how to maximize your time and create a better balance between work and life in Pozen's program, "Maximizing Your Personal Productivity: How to Become an Efficient and Effective Executive," at MIT Sloan Executive Education.

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