

PRODUCTIVITY HACKS

GETTING MORE DONE IN LESS TIME

— By Kate Cross



“NEVER MISTAKE MOTION FOR ACTION.”

— Ernest Hemingway

Whether unexpected meetings, constant interruptions or dealing with urgent client requests, there's nothing worse than ending the day without much to show for it - being in motion but without action.

Sure, unproductive days occur in most work settings, but they should remain the exception, not the norm, right?

To help keep your workdays more productive and action packed here are four reliable productivity hacks:

1. PUT YOUR SMARTPHONE AWAY... FAR AWAY

Many of us need our smartphones to do our jobs, but how many of us need them ALL THE TIME? Ding – there's an unimportant Facebook notification. Ding – a non-urgent email. Ding – a WhatsApp message about the weekend.

Unsurprisingly, these distractions take up your productive time.

In fact, it turns out that workers are 26 per cent more productive without their smartphones, based on an experiment by the Universities of Würzburg and Nottingham Trent in 2016.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions and asked to complete a concentration test.

Their phones were either removed from the room, locked in a nearby container, placed in view close by, or left as is (in the participants' pockets or bags).

Interestingly, “the further away the smartphone, the better the results in a concentration test,” stated a report about the experiment.



2. WORK IN “SPRINTS”

A few years ago, I discovered the work of energy management expert Tony Schwartz, who wrote of the body's natural cyclical progression from high to low energy throughout the day.

In their *New York Times* bestseller, *The power of full engagement: Managing energy, not time, is the key to performance, health and happiness*, Schwartz and Dr Jim Loehr wrote “we wear our willingness to put in long hours as a badge of honour” while “the need for recovery is often viewed as evidence of weakness”.

But for optimal productivity, the go-go-go mindset is a no-no.

“Sustained high performance is best served by assuming the mentality of a sprinter not a marathoner,” they wrote.

“Performance is optimised by scheduling work into 90- to 120-minute periods of intensive effort followed by shorter periods of recovery and renewal”.



3. DON'T MULTITASK

Multitasking “undermines productivity”, according to Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy in their *Harvard Business Review* article ‘Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time’.

“A temporary shift in attention from one task to another ... increases the amount of time necessary to finish the primary task by as much as 25 per cent,” they wrote.

Since turning off my email alerts I've noticed a marked improvement in my ability to concentrate on the task at hand. Now I check my emails when I say it's time.



4. GET THE (RIGHT) TUNES GOING

It turns out that listening to music while working can be considered a form of problematic multitasking, according to Dr Anneli Haake, who researches music in relation to the workplace.

But she writes in a blog post on her website, *Music at Work*, that music can also enhance concentration.

The big question is what kinds of music boost productivity?

“It is tempting to try and simplify arguments and nail down quick explanations, such as ‘instrumental/classical music is better for concentration than vocal/pop music’,” wrote Dr Haake.

But she added: “We need to resist such quick analyses, and instead, look also at the whole context in which the listening takes place”. This, she said, might include:

1. Task difficulty – the more unfamiliar and complex a task, the more likely the music is to be distracting.
2. Listening habits – if you're used to working to music, you're less likely to be distracted.
3. Musical structure – simpler musical structures appear to be less distracting.
4. Lyrics – some lyrics hijack your attention.
5. Choice – music is more likely to help performance when you have the power to control the type and whether you'd like to listen to it.