

12 RULES TO INCREASE YOUR PRODUCTIVITY

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Does your productivity ever get hampered by your desire to find the best possible solution? ***As you seek the easiest or fastest route to your goal, you may find yourself stopped entirely.*** Sometimes you may even do this on purpose, to keep from having to make a decision.

However, there's a work-around. Maybe you've heard of the term, "heuristic." ***Heuristics are rules that allow a solution to be found more quickly.*** With a heuristic, a resolution can be found even when the entire path isn't clear from the onset.

For example, if there were no roads, but you lived in New York and wanted to make your way to California, a heuristic might be:

1. Walk west as far as you can.
2. Walk around any obstacle, if possible.
3. If faced with a mountain range, walk toward the space between 2 small peaks.
4. Repeat until reaching California.

Does this heuristic give you the most efficient solution? No; however, it will get you where you want to go, and you won't waste a lot of time trying to make up your mind.

Try these behavioral heuristics to increase your productivity:

1. **Choose the right time.** Nearly everyone has times of the day when they are most effective and times when they tend to drag. It's smart to schedule the most critical tasks for your most effective time of the day.

2. **Toss it.** If a task doesn't really need to be done, just get rid of it altogether.
3. **Get the bad stuff out of the way.** Do the unpleasant items quickly and as early in the day as possible.
4. **Set a goal each day (or night).** In the morning, decide what you want to accomplish that day. This can be even more effective when planned the night before. *Once you have a sense of direction, you can spend all your time getting things done!*
5. **Eliminate all communication.** While you're working, turn off the phone / cell phone, and don't check your email. Hang a sign that says, "Do not disturb," if necessary. You don't have to do this for all your tasks, but at least do it during the more difficult items.
6. **Batch similar tasks together.** Do all your emailing at one time. Make all your phone calls at another. Open your snail mail during a set block of time. You'll waste less time by doing your work in this fashion.
7. **Set a timer.** Even if a task might take hours, starting will seem easier if you simply give yourself 30 minutes to get as much done as you can. A time limit seems to help many people concentrate and work better, too.
8. **Set targets.** For example, if you have to make cold-calls for your sales job, tell yourself that you're not getting up for any reason until you've made at least 100 calls. Regardless of what happens, refuse to stop until you hit your target.
9. **Use the Pareto Principle.** This principle states that 20% of the actions you could take will provide you with 80% of the benefits. So *focus on the tasks that will accomplish the most.* Unfortunately, these are frequently the tasks that are not enjoyable. You might be surprised how little you really have to do if you focus on the critical 20%.
10. **Delegate some of your work.** Is there anyone else who can help you? The people around you are resources. When appropriate, use their time and talents wisely to get things done more quickly.

11. **Set a deadline.** Having a specific endpoint will really help to focus your time and energy. If a task doesn't feel necessary, chances are that it won't get done.

12. **Increase your speed.** It sounds silly, but this can really help. Try doing everything a little faster. Walk faster, talk faster, type faster, and read faster.

Implement these heuristics into your life and you'll find yourself getting more done in less time. The ultimate secret is to stay on task and not waste any time. These rules will help you do just that.

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