A sensible way to achieve more by doing less

Mark Moore

www.markmoore.co

There's a way to do it better - find it.

— Thomas Edison

4 smart, but often overlooked ways to become more productive

There are a lot of productivity tips, techniques and tools out there. So many, in fact, that wading through them all to find the ones that work would make anyone rather unproductive.

This short guide presents 4 ideas that change everything about how you manage yourself to get more done in less time.

There's no discussion of lengthy systems like GTD here, but instead an 'accelerated' introduction to some key ideas that you can immediately apply to shave hours, even days or weeks off the time you'd usually spend to get things done.

Specifically we'll look at:

- The easiest way to get more done in less time - avoid the struggle of applying multiple 'time management' techniques and instantly 'download' a new ability to work smarter
- How to tackle your tasks ahead in the most effective and efficient way possible
- How to completely overcome procrastination and actually get those things done fast
- How to realistically improve at anything every day

If I had just five minutes to chop down a tree I would spend the first two and a half minutes sharpening my axe."

— Anonymous woodsman

The easiest way to get more done in less time
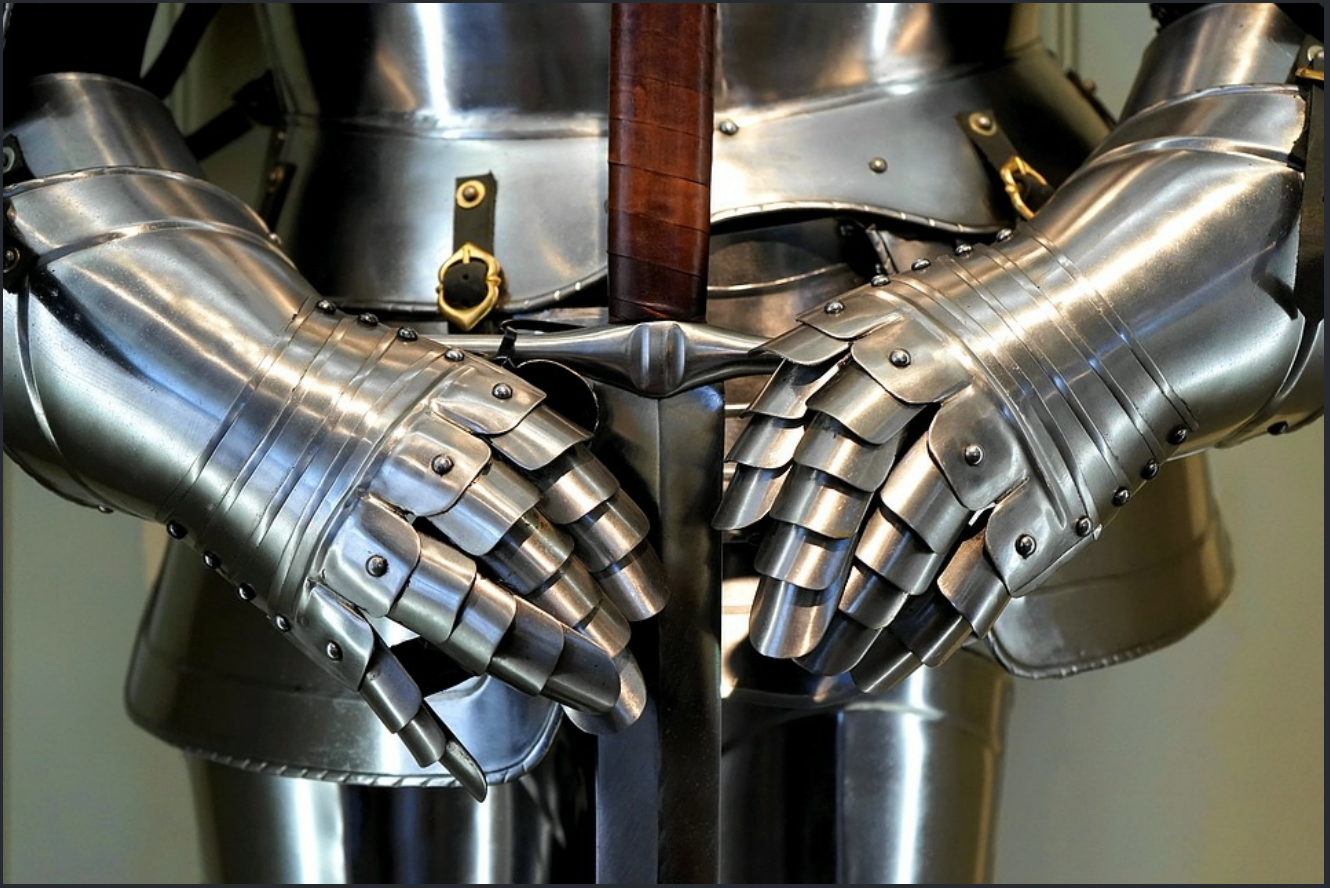
You want to get more done in less time. I know, I know.

This is easy.

Let's not make a meal of it.

There are two main parts to your goal here, "less time" and "get more done".

"Less time"

"Less time" is something you have direct control over.

So deal with this first. You just need to shrink the time available to get the job done. Slice it in half. There's a knight in the picture above with a sword. You're going to boldly use your sword to slice your time in half and decide to get the job done in less time. This isn't for wimps. It's for the knight in you.

The easiest way to get more done in less time

Decide (cut off)

You get to decide how to *cut off* your time. Decide. Cut off. Did you know the Latin root of that word is *decidere – de-* 'off' + *caedere* 'cut'?

A *real* decision

Worried that you won't stick to your new self-imposed deadline?

Easy, make a *real* decision. Worthy of a knight. Schedule a social event or a non-work related appointment to commit to and fill your time up. Now you've made a *real decision* to get your job done in the time available. I've always said that you haven't really decided until you've acted on your decision. That's when you've made a real decision. (And you haven't *really* committed until you've acted again and again, no matter what.)

Right, that's the "less time" bit dealt with. You now have less time. Simples.

Now for the 'get more done' part.

"Get more done"

This is easy too. Nature has got your back.

Since you have less time, you're going to have to sharpen your focus and attention to get the job done. You don't have long. Some overconfident nitwit knight cut your time down (I don't know, perhaps they were trying to heroically put some balance back into your life? I know, crazy.)

The beauty here is that you don't need to *try* to sharpen up. It'll just happen.

You've just forced yourself into using your time more wisely. This is called 'forced efficiency' and leverages Parkinson's Law where work expands to fill the time available. No time management course necessary. (You've saved time attending one too). You've just accelerated your learning of all the main principals they teach...

The easiest way to get more done in less time

Instantly manage your time like a pro

- instantly value your time
- focus on the important
- don't answer phone calls
- don't check emails
- don't aimlessly browse websites or float around social media
- say 'no' more easily (and from the heart!)
- start considering how to get the job done leveraging things that already exist (rather than reinventing the wheel)
- adopt the entrepreneur's way of thinking of "how can this get done?" rather than "how can *I* get this done?"
- delegate better
- avoid perfection
- focus on 'good enough'
- strip out the nonsense
- work faster
- focus your mind
- get in the zone, in 'flow', failing to notice time passing (set an alarm!)
- enjoy your social event or rest time
- have more energy and focus for the next days work

Some thoughts to help get this right

- clarify first what's most important for you to get done or deliver before slicing your time in half. You need to know what 'complete' and 'good enough' looks like. Obviously, use this technique tactically.
- you don't have to slice your time in half, you could estimate how long it would take normally, and take 25% off. You could even take 90% off when you're a pro, and still it will force your efficiency to consider how to best deliver.
- the thought exercise alone is valuable ("how would I get this job done so that it's *good enough* if I only had half the time?")
- if you're worried you won't get it done on time, do this:
    - note your actual deadline
    - create a *virtual deadline* a few days before the actual deadline
    - convince yourself that this is your new 'actual' deadline to commit to and slice the time available between now and then to get the job done (this is about discipline. If you're bold enough you could use the actual deadline, and truly force yourself into a corner, but you'll have no room for error, so be careful!)
- I designed a half day workshop once in the one hour before delivering it. Yes, it was risky, but experience and confidence helped me do this. And it turned out to be one of the best workshops I ever delivered as I kept it crisp, simple and remained very flexible to the group. **Value for many things has nothing to do with time.**

Some questions to sharpen your approach

- If you had just two hours tomorrow to make maximum impact in your job, what would you do?
- If you had just one week to land a new client, how would you do it?
- If you had just 10 minutes to create your next presentation, and step up and deliver it with impact, how would you do it?
- If you had to get your next article written in 15 minutes, how would you do it?
- How could you read that next book in 60 minutes flat (getting at the magic 20% of important info that makes 80% of all the difference, since 80% of a book is usually filler and supporting info)?
- If you worked just 3 days each week, and took 4 days off, how would you maximise your impact and value in those 3 days? How would you make yourself even more valuable to your employer or customers?
- What one thing are you paid most to do?
- What one thing can you do that no one else can do in the way that you do? (Sorry if that sounds like a Brian Adams B-Side.)

The easiest way to get more done in less time

Action

What are you working on now?

What does 'good enough' look like?

What's the actual deadline?

What's a sensible virtual deadline that gives you just enough time to bail yourself out if all else fails?

What's 50% of your estimated time for completing this?

Block out the remaining 50% with something non-work related. Schedule it. Lock it in.

Brainstorm how this job will get done to 'good enough' using all resources that come to mind. Consider asking someone else for ideas.

Set a timer.

Remove all distractions.

Go!

Optimise your day, make maximum impact, and get home early

Everyone seems too busy these days.

But most people, I'd argue, are too busy being ineffective.

"I won't be able to help you this afternoon, I've blocked two hours out of my schedule to bang my head against the wall, and re-invent the wheel, sorry!"

Being lucky enough to work with lots of different organisations, I see an awful lot of duplication, distraction, working on the unimportant, using the wrong tools for the job, failing to automate, leaders doing tasks they should be leading others to do, people holding the hammer the wrong way round, and so on.

Optimise your day, make maximum impact, and get home early

It's chaos out there! You're not contributing to it are you? And then complaining that you're overwhelmed?!

If you follow my process below you'll become more effective and efficient. And the more you use it, the more you'll develop a mindset – a habit for being effective and efficient.

Effective

By effective, I mean that you'll do the right things.

The few actions that get you the most important returns on your efforts (in relation to your purpose, goals, mission and so on.) Effective is aiming for the triple 20 in darts.

Efficient

By efficient, I mean that you'll do those right things in the right way. High output for low input. Efficient is throwing your one dart with perfect form, and hitting that triple 20.

No point, costly, and utterly ridiculous

There's **no point** doing the wrong things efficiently.

And it's **costly** to do the right things inefficiently.

And if you're doing the wrong things inefficiently, that's **utterly ridiculous**, and you might be up for a Darwin Award.

Let's prevent this.

Follow my process below. Your time invested will be a small fraction of the time you'll save.

I call my process "DAD-DC" if you want to memorise it.

Optimise your day, make maximum impact, and get home early

First, gather your list of to-dos or tasks either for today or the days or weeks ahead. Then answer these questions.

1. Dump it?

For each task on your list, ask, "how severe are the consequences on my goals, work, or life, if I totally dump this task?"

If low to zero, eliminate the unimportant by dumping it from your busy life! All other tasks make it through to the next pass through the list.

2. Automate it?

For each remaining task, ask, "can I automate it in full, or in part? If so how?"

Rather than thinking, "how can I do this?", adopt the entrepreneur's mindset of, "how can this get done?"

Google "[task] + automation tools".

Some excellent automation tools that I use to get half my own work done:

Zapier
IFTTT
Workflow (iOS)
TextExpander
Buffer
Chatbots

You can automate more than you think.

So, parts of your must-do tasks are now being automated. Perfect. The remaining tasks get through to the next round.

3. Defer it?

For each remaining task, ask, "when is the very best time to action this?"

You don't want to corner yourself doing things last minute when stress builds. But you don't want to start something so early that when things change around you, the work is no longer required and your efforts are wasted.

There is a very best time to get started on something (and complete it by). So find it. And schedule it, with milestones, for each task.

OK, your task list is shrinking fast. Those remaining make it through to the next round.

4. Delegate it?

For each remaining task, ask, "who is the very best person to action this?" (Again, the "how can this get done?" mindset).

Try to delegate to the lowest skill level available in your team to get the job done efficiently.

Delegate upwards, downwards, left and right.

And delegate but don't abdicate.

So, you're committed to your important 'musts', you've got machines doing some of your work, other people doing other parts of your work, and some tasks are on the back-burner and off your mind for now.

So, what's left for poor old muggins to do today?

5. Combine/Compound?

You can sharpen up on your own list and get home early if you ask and answer the next four questions.

Optimise your day, make maximum impact, and get home early

a) Ask yourself, "how can I combine two or more of these tasks and do them at the same time?"

I don't mean overwhelm yourself by multitasking. I mean, can you listen to audio whilst walking or driving? Can you organise three meetings in the same part of town?

Can you call your client when walking back from another client, so you don't make the excuse that you didn't have time?

Can you habitually call a client every time you walk away from another client? What if you did?

b) For each task, ask, "what already exists that I could re-use in full or in part to save me re-inventing the wheel?" This will see your previous efforts compound. You can ask your colleagues or Google for ideas.

c) If there's really nothing you can re-use, ask, "how can I do this task in such a way that makes it easily re-usable in future, in full, or in part?" (And for bonus points, consider sharing what you've created with your team!) Documenting a simple process or checklist to call upon next time is an obvious way to do this. Or saving blocks of re-usable text into a tool like TextExpander.

d) And finally, don't forget to ask your colleagues or Google (or a mentor or expert) what they think is the most efficient way to tackle your task. Worth a 60-second search to learn this at the point of need, surely?

That's it.

Do this at the start of each day, and you'll not only save lots of time and effort, but you'll also be working on your business or career as well as in it. You'll be building more and more to leverage in future, compounding your returns as you go.

Cheat Sheet

How to completely eliminate procrastination

In my FREE members resource library I have a one page cheat sheet to help you quickly apply DADDC on your tasks. You can get it free here.

You procrastinate don't you?

Even though people have told you to "break things into small parts" and "just do it!", you still procrastinate.

Why?

Because these two pieces of common advice don't address the root cause of the problem.

How to completely eliminate procrastination

And that root cause, which I'm going to show you how to eliminate, is that you're using some of your precious time to let yourself react negatively and emotionally to tasks that must be done. In doing so, you create and fuel the monster who ends up beating you.

You already know that fear, discomfort or perceived pain are behind this. And you know that this has you seeking out other tasks that you'd prefer to do. But the bottom line is, if there are tasks that you've decided must be done by you, then you must find a way to get them done.

We'll look at how in just a moment, but first let's see why those two common pieces of procrastination advice don't always cut it. It's because, even if you break things down into small steps, you still have to get the wheels in motion, and it's going from stationary to moving that is often so hard. Getting up out of your chair to walk is harder than just continuing to walk.

And even if you know to 'just do it', that doesn't change how you feel about the task. You're just telling yourself to get on with the hard task, and this still requires that you have an internal fight in your mind to overcome the discomfort or fear you're feeling.

In short, your three main enemies here are:

1. Allowing yourself to spend any time thinking about what it feels like to do the task (rather than just getting on with it)
2. Inertia (the natural reluctance to get started)
3. Perceiving something as too big or difficult to handle

So we need a solution then that:

1. Eliminates time spent thinking negatively about tackling a task
2. Has you moving already (bypassing the inertia) and creating energy and momentum
3. Has you feeling like you'll knock the task over like a champ because it's so small

So how do you achieve that?

How to completely eliminate procrastination

Like this:

1. Write out your important 'must do' tasks for the morning
2. Confirm that they absolutely must be done by you, and so there's no point in thinking about how enjoyable or painful each one is, since they must be done anyway.
3. Get a timer with an alarm
4. Allocate 'time bursts' to them by writing the number of minutes to the right of each task accordingly:
   - painful tasks get 5 minute bursts
   - enjoyable tasks that aren't quite so important also get 5 minutes (because you don't want to chew through all your precious time just doing those!)
   - other tasks that you're ok with, but aren't that thrilling either, get either a 10 min or 15 min burst.

You can adjust these amounts as you learn what this system does so that they work optimally for you.

OK, all you do now is start with the first task on your list that you're most naturally compelled to do. The one that requires no effort. Set the timer accordingly, and sprint through. No distractions. No answering the phone. If someone interrupts, your time is ticking like a bomb, so try to control the distraction.

When the alarm goes off, IF you're in the zone and in flow and it absolutely must be done today, set the alarm again for 15 or 20 mins and do another 'time burst'. Go with the flow for 10-15 mins more (but at that point you should move on to another task, since you don't want to neglect other important tasks that must be done today).

If you're not in that zone or in a state of flow when the alarm goes off, go to the next task immediately, set the timer accordingly for the duration you already noted, and repeat.

Work through your tasks like this. The key is to move fast. Each time burst is a sprint. You have to shut out any time for thinking or feeling about the tasks.

How to completely eliminate procrastination

The system works for this reason. You literally have eliminated any time procrastinating. It works because each task is small enough for you to feel like you can defeat it (because you gave it a time that made you feel it's do-able – as if you could gobble it up for breakfast.)

And it works because you don't have to get started. You already have momentum from the start purely because you begin with a 5 minute burst that you really want to do. Pick one of the fun tasks that you're naturally compelled to do, but when the 5 min alarm goes off, the game is on, and you have to switch and immediately begin on the next task.

Some of you may be asking now how you'd keep up the energy. Easy. The variety between tasks (build it in!) has you still being productive in your 'rests'. Alternate between mental and physical tasks, or analytical vs creative. Build it tactically and then work the system. Obviously you can put in some 5 or 10 min breaks too if you need it, but you should find that in your breaks, moving fast, you can get some easy things done.

The system has you spending less time on the low value tasks (if you obey the 5 minute alarm), and more time on creating states of flow on the important tasks.

You'll also find that you get in the state of flow more often, and that you find your work more rewarding as a result, and get home on time.

Don't believe me? Try it.

A realistic way to improve at anything each day
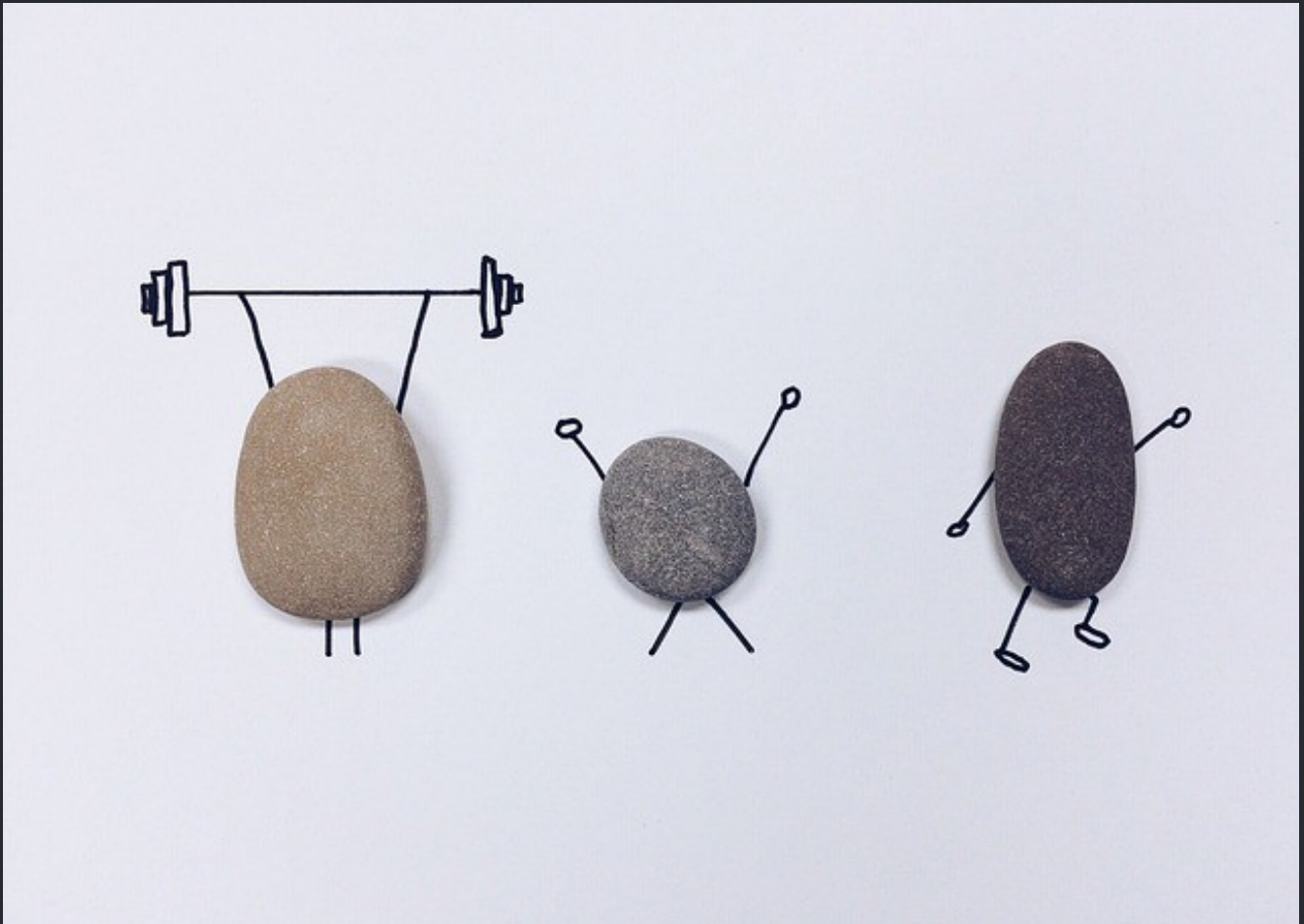
If you're finding it hard and frustrating to improve at anything in particular in your work or life, it could be down to the reason I'm about to explain.

If you find yourself failing more often than succeeding at improving your levels of activity in any area, and finding it hard not to give up, you could be focusing on the wrong thing.

On the other hand, if you want to set yourself up to win more easily and far more frequently in whatever you do, feeling better for it each day, and strengthening your position and likelihood of further success over time, a simple shift in your focus can make all the difference.

So, what's the common mistake many people make?

Trying to beat your personal best

A realistic way to improve at anything each day

Trying hard to beat your personal best sets you up for a likely short-term fail.

Think about it. It's understandable why people use their 'personal best' as a benchmark or target to beat. It appears to make sense, it's one simple number, it's usually memorable and enhances your focus. And it may appear motivating to start with.

But if you focus on that as a general rule, you're going to fail plenty of times and not taste the smaller successes along the way that serve to drive us forwards. Consider what this does to your motivation, drive and energy.

So what's the shift we could make to set ourselves up to win more often?

Trying to beat your personal average

Focus on beating your personal average and you'll win in both the short-term more often, but also the long term too.

Why?

Because your personal average will naturally increase as you progress. So if you stick to the daily rule of beating it, your progress will improve steadily, incrementally, more easily and most likely more sustainably. You're more likely to spend each day feeling like you're winning. And that's important to win in the end.

You'll need to collect some data of course and determine your daily average. But once you're tracking that figure, you're on your way.

Whether trying to build a sales activity habit like reach-outs per day, or something non-sales related, spend 5 minutes working out your personal daily average over the last few weeks, and schedule to beat that tomorrow just by one.

Then repeat.

About Mark Moore

For more tips, insights or support around productivity, effective learning, and sales for non-sales or technically minded people, you can contact me here.

Mark Moore

I help people develop their businesses and their careers by finding, learning and applying the high-impact stuff that matters most.

For more on my work and how I support businesses see my sites below:

Sales and business development for non-sales people

https://helppeoplebuy.com/

How to lead people to learn more effectively

http://helppeoplelearn.com/

Learn the 'big 4 skills' that will change everything about your business or career

http://www.markmoore.co/

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