From Ideas to Actions

When planning how to complete tasks and approach goals, it is easy to take advice from others and implement recommended methods without sufficient tailoring to our own individual styles of behavior and working. This can often be the reason for not being able to maintain new habits.

Certain behavior patterns, belief systems and natural habits that have an impact on your ability to complete tasks are detailed below:

Traits:
- Away from or towards: how are you motivated? Is it by achieving a goal that you are working towards, or is it by avoiding a problem?
- Feedback: internal or external. Do you need feedback from others to inform your progress and performance or are you able to self-appraise?
- Procedures or options. Do you like to follow a prescribed set of procedures, or are you motivated by opportunities to do something a different way?
- Sameness or difference. Do you focus on similarities or differences in something?
- How are you convinced that something is good? Automatic, number of times, or a period of time?
- Big picture or details. Do you like to have an overview of something and work at concept level, or are you focused on specific details?
- Proactive or reactive. Do you prefer to initiate action, or stand back and reflect before taking action?

What are your fears and motivations?
Common fears:
Failure
Rejection
Criticism without validation
Change

Common motivations:
Power and authority
Success and achievement
Praise and recognition
Security and harmony
Systems and procedures

Natural habits:
Pace – what is your natural pace – are you a marathon runner or a sprinter?
When do you work best – early mornings, afternoons or evenings?

In addition, as explained in this extract from a recent article by Dr Travis Bradberry, it is now largely accepted that the 8-hour workday is an outdated and ineffective approach to work.

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"It was created during the industrial revolution as an effort to cut down on the number of hours of manual labor that workers were forced to endure on the factory floor but it possesses little relevance for us today.

The Best Way to Structure Your Day
A study recently conducted by the Draugiem Group used a computer application to track employees' work habits. Specifically, the application measured how much time people spent on various tasks and compared this to their productivity levels.

In the process of measuring people's activity, they stumbled upon a fascinating finding: the length of the workday didn't matter much; what mattered was how people structured their day. In particular, people who were religious about taking short breaks were far more productive than those who worked longer hours.

The ideal work-to-break ratio was 52 minutes of work, followed by 17 minutes of rest. People who maintained this schedule had a unique level of focus in their work. For roughly an hour at a time, they were 100% dedicated to the task they needed to accomplish. They didn't check Facebook "real quick" or get distracted by e-mails. When they felt fatigue (again, after about an hour), they took short breaks, during which they completely separated themselves from their work. This helped them to dive back in refreshed for another productive hour of work.

Your Brain Wants an Hour On, 15 Minutes Off
People who have discovered this magic productivity ratio crush their competition because they tap into a fundamental need of the human mind: the brain naturally functions in spurts of high energy (roughly an hour) followed by spurts of low energy (15–20 minutes).

For most of us, this natural ebb and flow of energy leaves us wavering between focused periods of high energy followed by far less productive periods, when we tire and succumb to distractions. The best way to beat exhaustion and frustrating distractions is to get intentional about your workday. Instead of working for an hour or more and then trying to battle through distractions and fatigue, when your productivity begins to dip, take this as a sign that it's time for a break.

Real breaks are easier to take when you know they're going to make your day more productive. We often let fatigue win because we continue working through it (long after we've lost energy and focus), and the breaks we take aren't *real* breaks (checking your e-mail and watching YouTube doesn't recharge you the same way as taking a walk does).

Take Charge of Your Workday
The 8-hour workday can work for you if you break your time into strategic intervals. Once you align your natural energy with your effort, things begin to run much more smoothly. Here are four tips that will get you into that perfect rhythm.

1. Break your day into hourly intervals. We naturally plan what we need to accomplish by the end of the day, the week, or the month, but we're far more effective when we focus on what we can accomplish right now. Beyond getting you into the right rhythm, planning your day around hour-long

intervals simplifies daunting tasks by breaking them into manageable pieces. If you want to be a literalist, you can plan your day around 52-minute intervals if you like, but an hour works just as well.

2. Respect your hour. The interval strategy only works because we use our peak energy levels to reach an extremely high level of focus for a relatively short amount of time. When you disrespect your hour by texting, checking e-mails, or doing a quick Facebook check, you defeat the entire purpose of the approach.

3. Take *real* rest. In the study at Draugiem, they found that employees who took more frequent rests than the hourly optimum were more productive than those who didn't rest at all. Likewise, those who took deliberately relaxing breaks were better off than those who, when "resting," had trouble separating themselves from their work. Getting away from your computer, your phone, and your to-do list is essential to boosting your productivity. Breaks such as walking, reading, and chatting are the most effective forms of recharging because they take you away from your work. On a busy day, it might be tempting to think of dealing with e-mails or making phone calls as breaks, but they aren't, so don't give in to this line of thought.

4. Don't wait until your body tells you to take a break. If you wait until you feel tired to take a break, it's too late—you've already missed the window of peak productivity. Keeping to your schedule ensures that you work when you're the most productive and that you rest during times that would otherwise be unproductive. Remember, it's far more productive to rest for short periods than it is to keep on working when you're tired and distracted."

To increase your productivity:

Step 1: Review the different patterns explained above and reflect on your own behaviours:
- What is working?
- What needs to change?

Step 2: Based on your findings define what new habits you would like to create to increase your productivity

Step 3: Define the specific actions and when you are going to do them

Step 4: Share your action plan with someone and commit to them the actions that you are going to undertake.

Step 5: Schedule an accountability appointment with that person to review your progress and reflect on any changes to enhance your productivity

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