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POWER HABITS

How to boost productivity to make sure you reach your goals

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*“The way to get started is to
quit talking and begin doing.”*

Walt Disney



We all have goals. We all have ambitions. We all have things that we'd like to have happen in our lives. The good news is that all of those goals, ambitions and positive occurrences are possible. All we have to do to achieve them is start doing the work that needs to be done in order to make them real.

You've probably heard the phrase "*carpe diem*". That's Latin for "seize the day". If you want to move your life in a different direction, one that produces positive changes, then make *carpe diem* your motto. You need to begin seizing the day and using your time productively so that you begin building the future that you want to live in.

The leadership guru John Maxwell once said that "You'll never change your life until you change something that you do daily. The secret of your success is found in your daily routine." This article is all about helping you to establish "power habits" in your *daily routine* that will allow you to crank your productivity to eleven. Adopting some or all of these habits and incorporating them into your day-to-day schedule will crank you into overdrive. You'll not only begin reaching your goals, you'll also begin reaching them sooner than you ever thought possible.

1. Rise and Shine

When you get up earlier than normal two things happen. First, you have more time in your day to get more things done. Productivity is all about accomplishing tasks. The more hours that you have to play with, the more likely it becomes that you're going to initiate and complete projects.

Second, let's talk about energy. Now, maybe you're already a morning person. In which case, you already know what I'm talking about. However, if you're not naturally a morning person, it may be time to think about becoming one. Study after study has shown that the most personally productive hours in the day occur before noon. It all has to do with natural body rhythms and cycles. So, when you get up earlier you not only have more time to get stuff done, you also have more energy. It's a productivity win/win.

Our thoughts and state of mind change over the course of the day as well. Research reveals we are more likely to be ambitious and self-confident early in the day, as opposed to very late at night/ early morning, when our thoughts might be more existential, or filled with negative emotion. Makes sense.

2. Be Punctual

Ok, you should have a schedule of what you want to accomplish on any given day. (If you don't, then start using one.) In order to make the schedule as effective as possible, you need to be places, take phone calls and generally do things on time, as you scheduled them. When you're not on time, you begin to fall behind on what's on your schedule. That means that you have to start rushing around to catch up, and rushing usually means that you aren't doing your best work. Make an effort to be punctual. Get to appointments, meetings and phone calls on time. The more punctual you are, the more you'll get done.

3. Sleep and Move

Besides food and water, your body only has two other absolute needs - sleep and exercise. When you don't get enough rest, you cannot maintain the mental energy levels that are required for you to be optimally productive. Likewise, when you don't get enough exercise you don't have the stamina it takes to remain productive over the course of a long day. Make sure that you put enough time aside for adequate amounts of both sleep and exercise. If you do, you'll find that you have more energy and more energy equals greater productivity.

4. Develop Keystone Habits

All positive behavior is nothing more than habit. When you perform a positive action over and over it becomes habitual. You continue making the positive action without even thinking about it. In addition, one positive habit will lead to other positive behaviors which, over time, will also become habitual. That's why developing keystone habits are so important to increased productivity.

Keystone habits are nothing more than simple acts that you routinely perform throughout your day. For example, if you make your bed every morning after you get up, no matter what, you establish a tone of positive production that will stay with you as you go about your business. This effect can be enhanced by layering one keystone habit on top of another. So, you not only make your bed every day, you also make it a habit to rinse and stack your breakfast dishes in the sink or put them in the dishwasher. The point is that when you routinely do what needs to be done, you start to develop a habit of treating everything that you do in a similar way. The end result is that your productivity soars.

Charles Duhigg explains that a keystone habit is particularly powerful because it can change your *self-image*. Once you develop a positive habit, you may be more likely to notice something else in your life that could be improved and start working on making additional positive changes.



5. Have a Plan

One of the major drains on productivity is simply not knowing where to direct your attention. Let's face it, each day we are faced with information overload. We get phone calls, e-mails, text messages and more. We use apps that are supposedly designed to make our lives easier, but instead start to compete for our attention by adding their reminders to the mix of information that is already bombarding us. What can happen is that we spend our time and energy dealing with situations that do not promote our goals and best interests.

One of the best ways to combat this problem is with a daily plan. When it comes to any task, ask yourself "What is this?", "Why am I doing it", "How important is this task?" and "What do I want to get out of it?" Simply posing these questions to yourself prior to doing anything will allow you to begin to prioritize what truly needs to be done and eliminate what truly is a time waster. Again, the end result is greatly increased productivity.

6. Make Room for Down Time

There is a tendency to want to remain plugged in and on top of all communications simply because we can. However, to do so is a major mistake. One of the key ways to remain optimally productive is to know when to take it easy and start to relax, detach from your day. Put music on that you like, walk your dog and notice your surroundings, enjoy nature.

Think of your productivity like a well. You lower down a bucket and pull up a drink of cold, clear water. However, if you lower down that bucket too many times in a row, you're bound to come up empty because you've drained all the water.

You need to give yourself enough time to recharge and rejuvenate. You cannot be fully productive when your batteries are drained and you have nothing left to give. Remember to walk away from all of your tasks on a regular basis. This means *no checking your phone for messages, no answering e-mails, and no quick phone*



calls. Your time away is sacred. It is key to you being truly effective at what you do. Treat it as such.

7. Eliminate Distractions

In order to be fully productive, you have to be focused on the task at hand. However, in today's always connected, modern world maintaining focus is increasingly difficult. Studies have shown that, on average, we are only able to concentrate on a given task for **three to five minutes** before being distracted by social media, e-mails or other things that interfere with concentration. Obviously, you are not going to be very productive and task oriented when you are only able to focus in three to five minute intervals.

The secret to keeping focused on what you're doing is by removing the sources of those distractions. Because social media is one of the biggest culprits, it's important to install safeguards that allow you to resist the allure of checking for updates on social media sites again. There are now apps that will completely block your ability to access certain sites for specific periods of time. The less distracted you are, the more you can maintain your focus and the more productive you become.

Note: Our thoughts and state of mind changes over the course of the day as well. Research reveals we are more likely to be ambitious and self-confident early in the day, as opposed to very late at night/ early morning, when our thoughts might be more existential, or filled with negative emotion.



8. Make Your Workspace Inviting

Each of us spends a great deal of time in the space where we work. Now, that might be a physical office at a remote location or it might be a room or corner in your residence that has been reserved for that purpose. No matter where your “office” is located, it needs to be inviting, comfortable and welcoming. It has to reflect your personality and your style.

There’s absolutely no reason for your workspace to be spartan, cold or off-putting. You are not an anchorite and your office is not your cell. You are not literally or figuratively chained to your desk. Work should be rewarding, not a punishment and your office should reflect that fact.

Make sure that the furnishings are comfortable. A desk may be a necessity, but it doesn’t have to be uncomfortable. The same thing goes for a chair. Use a chair that makes you feel that your glad you sat down in it. Lighting, art, music and color all have an appropriate place in your office. Imagine how your productivity will skyrocket when you actually enjoy being in your workspace.

*“Once you understand that habits can change, you have the freedom and the responsibility to remake them . . . Once you understand that habits can be rebuilt, the power of habit becomes easier to grasp and the only option left is to get to work.” Charles Duhigg author of **The Power of Habit** book.*