20 Productivity Tips

Hiro Asari
Engine Yard
Productivity

noun
the state or quality of producing something, esp. crops: the long-term productivity of land | agricultural productivity.

• the effectiveness of productive effort, esp. in industry, as measured in terms of the rate of output per unit of input: workers have boosted productivity by 30 percent.

• Ecology the rate of production of new biomass by an individual, population, or community; the fertility or capacity of a given habitat or area: nutrient-rich waters with high productivity.
$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$

* Pythagorean Triples $(m^2+n^2, m^2-n^2, 2mn)$
5 of the most important numbers—additive identity 0, multiplicative identity 1, base to the natural logarithm e, ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter $\pi$, and the unit imaginary number i—in all of mathematics form an elegant equation that is true!

$$e^{\pi i} + 1 = 0$$
\[
\Gamma(z) = \int_{0}^{\infty} t^{z-1}e^{-t} \, dt
\]

Math.gamma(0.5)**2

# => exercise for the reader
What is yellow and equivalent to the Axiom of Choice?

Zorn’s Lemon

Bonus trivia question:
Who is the newspaper columnist who is the grandson of this “Zorn”?

* Axiom of Choice: For every family $S_i$ of nonempty sets there exists a family $(x_i)$ of elements with $x_i \in S_i$ for every $i \in I$.

* Zorn’s Lemma: Every non-empty partially ordered set in which every chain (i.e. totally ordered subset) has an upper bound contains at least one maximal element.
2
My Erdős Number

Photo Credit: Wikipedia

...inspiration for the Kevin Bacon number
* Texting and driving don’t mix!
* TEDx Midwest talk titled “Why Work Doesn’t Happen at Work”. Office is full of distractions. People don’t go to the office to get things done.
* “Meetings and Managers”
Productivity

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If you remove the fluff, you're left with this.
Goals

1) lose weight 40046 people
2) write a book 29507 people
3) stop procrastinating 29466 people
4) Fall in love 26836 people
5) be happy 24162 people
6) Get a tattoo 22024 people

http://www.43things.com/zeitgeist/popular_goals

But, what do you produce?

These are admirable goals, but not very good.
goals

Goals
“Exercise More”

Does this help you get out the door and exercise?

Put on your gym clothes, but what will you do next?
smart

Goals
SMART

Goals
SMART
Specific
Exercise more
more pushups non-stop

http://www.flickr.com/photos/36855865@N00/4253058200
...because we want to track our progress
more pushups non-stop

http://www.flickr.com/photos/36855865@N00/4253058200
10,508 pushups non-stop

http://www.flickr.com/photos/36855865@N00/4253058200
SMART
Achievable
The record for the most push-ups non-stop was 10,507, set by Minoru Yoshida of Japan in October 1980.
50 pushups non-stop

http://www.flickr.com/photos/36855865@N00/4253058200
SMART
Relevant
What exercise?

http://www.flickr.com/photos/59743169@N00/616633484
SMART

Time-boxed
50 pushups non-stop in 2 months

http://www.flickr.com/photos/36855865@N00/4253058200
Productivity

*n.*

State of producing something **towards a SMART goal.**
Know your tools

The Brain

http://www.flickr.com/photos/83346641@N00/3725688716

Know brain’s limitations
Brain, just like any other organ, needs blood. Lots, actually.

Physical exercises increase blood flow in the brain.
Speaking of exercise...
Brain can be easily manipulated. Sometimes to your advantage, sometimes not.
Optical Illusion
Optical Illusion
Brain's attention area is very small.

Brain makes up stuff outside of the small area to which it pays special attention.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilac_chaser
How many dots?
How many dots?

4
How many dots?

6
How many dots?

10

As brain is fed more and more information, it needs more time to process. The brain can grasp only about 5 things.

http://www.zompist.com/mide.htm
Siwa (goes to 2)
Guara, Wargla (go to 3)
Banbeshi (goes to 5)
Repetition

• Turn short-term memory into long-term memory
• Recall immediately after the event
• Repeat with spaced intervals

As time goes by, we lose specifics. Brains starts to fill in the missing gaps with guesses and imagination, to construct a coherent story. (In other words, brain might be making up stuff.)

...enough about the brain. What about other tools?
The Brain

• Pays attention to very little
• Is context-dependent
• Remembers “interesting” things
  • Bullet points are boring
• Needs meaningful repetition
• Needs less stress for better learning

* choose wisely what you pay attention to
* and also the context
* “interesting” can mean extraordinary, could be traumatic
Software Tools

- Use vi(m)
- Use emacs
- Use TextMate
- Use IDE
- Use muscle memory

* Prefer keyboard to mouse
Software Tools

- Command completion
- shell
  - write your own (complete)
- git (git-completion.bash)
- IRB (require 'irb/completion')

Next few slides tends to emphasize the Mac OS X (that’s what I use). If you have suggestions for your favorite platforms, please hold your suggestions until the end.
At the same time, bigger screen is found to improve productivity. This is probably due to a different factor; that is, less need for rearranging windows, etc.

Also, consider use of virtual desktop, which helps the screen more coherent.
Disable Dock

- defaults write com.apple.dock.orientation top
- Dock Gone (for Snow Leopard)

Where is the Safari icon? (it's not there.)

Up to 10.5, you can hide Dock entirely. But with 10.6, you need shareware to do it.
Consider launchers.

Launcher

- QuickSilver (Mac)
- LaunchBar (Mac)
- Alfred (Mac)
- Enso (Win)
- DTerm (Mac)
No Bouncing Icons
Disable Notifications

…unless you really, really, care about the event and process it immediately in a meaningful way

Notifications tend to become noise very quickly.
Use Full Screen Mode
Check email less frequently

Email is not a real time medium.
Quit Twitter client

Twitter is distracting.
Note taking apps

- Notational Velocity (Mac)
- Evernote (Mac, Win)
- Voodoo Pad (Mac)
- DEVONThink (Mac)
- OneNote (Win)

Repository of snippets if you can’t remember
* e.g., JRuby’s options
(Over time, you may repeat them enough times to actually remember, but that’s OK.)
Ambidexterity

Learn to use mouse with your “off” hand, so that you don't have to switch between the mouse and the pen.
Phone is not a real time medium, either.

The caller is interrupting you!
The Brain

- Pays attention to very little
- Is context-dependent
- Remembers “interesting” things
  - Bullet points are still boring
- Needs meaningful repetition
- Needs less stress for better learning

But, as far as your physical body is concerned, stress is very similar to excited, heightened exhilaration.
Adrenaline Rush

What's the difference?
Stress

* Externally observable aroused physical response
* Stimuli considered hostile
* Perceived lack of control

Jeansok Kim & David Diamond
Master the Process

• …so that you can forget about it
• …so that you are stressed less
Getting Things Done™

http://www.flickr.com/photos/40911451@N00/3591186045

Getting Things Done™

- Streamline input into one place
- Decide early what to do
- Do what you decide to do
- Review regularly what needs to be done
Getting Things Done™

- OmniFocus (Mac)
- Things (Mac)

Sorry, I don't *really* know much about Windows
Pomodoro Technique®

- 25 minutes (a Pomodoro) of concentration
- 5-minute breaks
- longer breaks every 4 Pomodoros

http://www.flickr.com/photos/13827494@N00/5222790553

Rules

! A Pomodoro Consists of 25 minutes Plus a Five-Minute Break (§2.1).
! After Every Four Pomodoros Comes a 15-30 Minute Break (§2.1.2).
! The Pomodoro Is Indivisible. There are no half or quarter Pomodoros (§2.1).
! If a Pomodoro Begins, It Has to Ring:
  ! If a Pomodoro is interrupted definitively – i.e. the interruption isn’t handled (§2.2.2) – it’s considered void, never begun, and it can’t be recorded with an X (§2.1.1).
  ! If an activity is completed once a Pomodoro has already begun, continue reviewing the same activity until the Pomodoro rings (§2.1.3).
  ! Protect the Pomodoro (§2.2.3). Inform effectively, negotiate quickly to reschedule the interruption, call back the person who interrupted you as agreed.
! If It Lasts More Than 5-7 Pomodoros, Break It Down (§2.3, §3.11, §4.2). Complex activities should be divided into several activities.
! If It Lasts Less Than One Pomodoro, Add It Up (§2.3, §4.2). Simple tasks can be combined.
! Results Are Achieved Pomodoro after Pomodoro (§3.8).
! The Next Pomodoro Will Go Better (§3.9).
Pomodoro Setup

• Timer
• Inventory List
• To Do Today List
• Records sheet

Photo Credit: http://www.pomodorotechnique.com
Pomodoro Mechanics

- Plan
- Track
- Record
- Process
- Visualize

Activity Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clean office desk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sign new contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feed neighbor's cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit the Smithsonian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Start each day by planning what to be done on the day
Start each day by planning what to be done on the day
Pomodoro Mechanics

- Plan
- **Track**
- Record
- Process
- Visualize

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To Do Today</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clean office desk</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feed neighbor's cat</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Track each Pomodoro’s results—success, failure
* Once Pomodoro starts, it must ring — if it doesn't, well, it failed.
### Pomodoro Mechanics

- **Plan**
- **Track**
- **Record**
- **Process**
- **Visualize**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Pom.</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5/17</td>
<td>Give talk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/17</td>
<td>Clean Office</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Record results for the day

Record what makes sense to you.
Pomodoro Mechanics

- Plan
- Track
- Record
- Process
- Visualize
So, after all this talk, I have a workable definition of "productivity".

Will it work? Put it to test. Use it and tell me what you find. After all, the merit of the definition is defined by its usefulness as applied to your situation.
What comments do you have?

20–30 tips depending on how you count them.
References

- David Allen *Getting things done*
- Francesco Cirillo *The Pomodoro Technique*
- Neal Ford *The Productive Programmer*
References

- Andrew Hunt *Pragmatic thinking and learning*
- John Medina *Brain rules*
- Staffan Nöteberg *Pomodoro Technique illustrated*