

Manage Procrastination and Boss Your Day

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Today, we have five high-impact hacks that will dramatically improve your productivity and help you get more done.

Here we go.

It's easy to procrastinate. 88% of the workforce admitted to procrastinating for at least one hour of the day, and 57.8% admitted to procrastinating for more than two hours per day. [1]

You know the drill: you need to start that critical piece of work, but first, you'll just put the washing on, check your emails, and respond to your Slack/Teams/Facebook/Twitter messages.

We all do it. But let's talk about how YOU can take control.

Here are five procrastination-busting hacks you can enable today.

Hack 1 - Remove Distractions

Notifications are intrusive. Any distraction while you are trying to work is, well... distracting.

Focusing on one thing at a time is crucial to being productive and delivering quality work. And yes, multitasking is a myth [2].

Paul Atchley, a professor in Cognitive Psychology, observed the following in Harvard Business Review:

Based on over a half-century of cognitive science and more recent studies on multitasking, we know that multitaskers do less and miss information. It takes time (an average of 15 minutes) to re-orient to a primary task after a distraction such as an email. Efficiency can drop by as much as 40%. Long-term memory suffers and creativity — a skill associated with keeping in mind multiple, less common, associations — is reduced.

So, if you want to execute something well, then focus on one thing and ditch the rest.

But how do you do that?

Unless your job is to be available at the drop of a WhatsApp message, put your phone on aeroplane mode, or turn off your notifications. Do the same on your laptop.

With those muted, now think about the physical distractions.

Clear your desk of anything that isn't helping your current task. Tidy your space.

Grab your headphones and press play on a focus playlist, podcast, or audio lesson. Choose anything you feel is motivating and helps you to concentrate.

Instrumental music might block out distractions and keep you focused on the moment.

As a rule, if it can disturb you, get rid of it. Block it out. Remove it.

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Hack 2 - Only check your messages at certain times of the day

A study has projected that 361.6 billion emails will be sent in 2024 [3]. For most of us, email is going nowhere.

Take control of your messages by allocating time to answering them. No more reacting to that inbox. A proactive approach is needed.

What you can achieve will vary based on your job role, but in all likelihood, if someone has to wait an hour or two for a response, and in that time, you've completed some meaningful, creative work, that's a fair trade.

Start by only checking messages two to three times a day. Allocate 30-45 minutes to sending responses and ensure complete focus.

Some people only check their messages and mail once or twice a week. Start limiting the number of times you check your messages and decrease that number each week. See how that feels.

Other people check their emails more regularly but don't necessarily reply instantly in detail to each one. Try acknowledging you received the email with a brief response

and then scheduling an in-depth conversation at a time that suits you. That way, clients, colleagues, and customers don't think they've been entirely forgotten about!

Imagine you're running a property development project or renovating your kitchen. A proven practice here is to get your emails out early morning before the trade teams start.

Finding the approach that works for you and your team is vital. Take ownership of digital communication, and ensure you protect time in your day for high-value work.

Hack 3 - Give yourself deadlines

It's time to redefine deadlines. They are no longer the shadow looming over you. They are your friend, helping you G-S-D... get stuff done.

That's right. It's time to embrace the dreaded deadline. In fact, it might be time to start setting more.

Begin by introducing specific deadlines for tasks. No task on your list should be without a deadline. This makes it a deliverable and ensures the owner is accountable. If it's a "nice to do" or "I'll do that someday" job, either make the time for it or remove it.

Make clear decisions based on clear rules. Is this action item necessary, achievable, and high value enough to warrant your time?

Make a call. Our post-procrastination self is all about action, not "nice to dos." There's a mindset shift required here.

Next, block time in your calendar or use a timer. Timebox this stuff.

If you know a task should only take you one hour, but you're finding it's taking double that, then give yourself a set slot or defined amount of time to complete it.

Create an environment of intensity and a finish line. Our favourite is an egg timer on your desk. It could be a timer counting down or simply a slot in your calendar where it must happen now or you'll miss that deliverable.

You can go all the way and map out your whole day with tasks and times to complete them. However, a word of warning on that - a little flexibility in your schedule is a good thing. So start timeboxing essential items first, reward yourself with breaks, and find your system.

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Hack 4 - Count down from five

Just like the laptop you've not turned off in seven weeks, your brain often needs a reboot.

If you find yourself thinking about which takeaway food you're going to eat tonight rather than starting that important presentation, then you need a way to rein in that distracted mind.

Deep breaths and mindfulness techniques all work well, but simply counting down from five and starting your task is a killer hack.

Let's practice now. Five, four, three, two, one - onto the next hack.

Hack 5 - Get started

Sometimes, you just need to get a job done. The more critical, challenging, or delicate the job, the more likely you will let other tasks creep in ahead of it.

90% of tasks don't have to be flawless the first time around. In fact, you just have to complete them. Have you heard the phrase *done is better than perfect* [4]? If you approach complex tasks with the mindset of "let's just do the first version and iterate," you're far more likely to make progress. Perfectionism leads to stagnation.

Some people advocate for 'building the plane whilst you're flying.' So, if speed and velocity are part of your output requirements, then don't strive for the ideal version on attempt one.

If you are struggling to write a difficult email, write the first thing that comes to you, don't send it, and come back to it in a few hours. You'll find working on something that you've already completed a first draft of is a lot easier than getting something spot on the first time.

Clarify your intentions and build these hacks into your day. Ensuring a mindset of owning your time, your deliverables, and your procrastination will keep these hacks top of mind.

To recap:

1. **Remove distractions**

2. **Only check your messages at certain times of the day**
3. **Give yourself deadlines**
4. **Count down from five**
5. **Done is better than great**

If you remember one thing from this session, remember this. Your time is your most precious commodity; don't disrespect it.

If you take one action item from this lesson, decide which of these five hacks is now non-negotiable.

Now trust the process, stop listening to this, and conquer that action item you've been putting off.

[1] *Procrastination Study: 88% Of The Workforce Procrastinates*, Darius Foroux (2019)

<https://dariusforoux.com/procrastination-study/>

[2] *You Can't Multitask, So Stop Trying*, Paul Atchley (2010)

<https://hbr.org/2010/12/you-cant-multi-task-so-stop-tr>

[3] *How Many Emails Are Sent Per Day? (2023–2027)*, Oberlo (2023)

<https://www.oberlo.com/statistics/how-many-emails-are-sent-per-day>

[4] *Done Is Better Than Perfect*, Lee Broders (2021)

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/done-better-than-perfect-lee-broders-ll-m/>