

4 Steps to Stress-Free Productivity



How do you define being "productive?" Do you think of it as literally producing more? Or is it about helping you feel more in control or "balanced?" Do you tie it into impacting your bottom line and making more money? Or is that less important to you than its affect on your peace of mind? I recently asked these questions on my Facebook page.

What was fascinating was not only the answers themselves, but the way the answers diverged so much. It appears that productivity is a very personal matter. When it comes to productivity, it's "different strokes for different folks." From my years of experience researching, writing about, and working with clients to improve productivity, I have noticed that there are many approaches to productivity. And the answers to the questions above confirmed this.

Do More or Do Less?

In order to be more productive, some people need to literally do more. Others need to do less. Then there is doing the right things at the right time in the most effective way possible. Using the qualifier "right" (as defined by you), helps to really home in on what makes the most impact to help one be productive, as opposed to just being busy. So there are many layers and levels to productivity.

Some people think of being productive as producing more, or getting more done. And that's not a big surprise as to be productive literally means to produce. Therefore, many tend to translate being productive to mean that we need to keep doing and going and producing, and all at the same time. However, this can cause stress in our lives and make the quality of what we are producing decrease. So it takes a brave person to realize that you can have it all, but just not at the same time! This is a perfect example of why multi-tasking is not always the best course of action.

Focus On One Thing

Dan Thurmon, author of "Off Balance on Purpose", once said in a keynote speech that we are most effective, productive and happy when embracing the "off balance" reality of life. He continued that we should intentionally choose to take action and initiate meaningful changes.



Dan is a performance artist and professional speaker who juggles, throws knives, and rides a unicycle on stage, all of which is very entertaining and exciting. Yet his message is equally powerful. In fact, what was more impressive was his ability to weave high-level content into his performance elements, which is not an easy accomplishment to pull off.

As Dan was juggling, he explained that you must release one item in order to catch the other item. He is never actually holding more than one item that he is juggling at once! This was so powerful. It sometimes takes a visual exercise like this to snap us into realization. In our own lives, we tend to want to do it all and right now. Yet we then sacrifice the quality of our work, relationships, and life overall if we take on too much. We wind up doing a bunch of things at less than 100%, and then berate ourselves for not being able to keep up.

It takes a brave person to stop and say, "I can have it all... just not at the same time!" There is a time and a season for everything. Maybe this year is the year you work on your career transition. Maybe this month is the one to focus on cultivating a new hobby. Maybe this summer is the one when you (finally!) get organized. But if you try to get organized, embark on a career transition, and cultivate a new hobby all at the same time, while still juggling all of the other responsibilities in your life, you may fail miserably at all of them, or not enjoy any of them.

Being Busy for the Wrong Reason

Many people are busy for no reason, or for the wrong reason. They think it makes them more productive. Or they feel more productive because of all of the activity, but yet they aren't truly more productive. Busy does not equal productive at all. That is one of the biggest fallacies of our society these days.

What about using productivity to feel (and be) more at peace, happy, and successful? For many people, this is a better measurement of productivity. My personal definition of productivity falls more into this category. Being productive is accomplishing what I set out to do. That makes me feel personally productive as I have identified particular items as important and prioritized them, so they are the ones I should be focusing on. But it is less about having more, or even doing more, but feeling balanced, in control, and at peace. In fact, I have realized over the years that I am productive as a means to living a successful and passionate life. If I were just productive for the sake of productivity, I would not be as happy or feel as balanced.

Your Personal Definition of Productivity

Why are differences in the definition of productivity important to recognize? For one, productivity consultants need to keep this in mind and can't try to give a "one size fits all" solution to clients. From my perspective, most productivity consultants are quite aware of this, but it still bears mentioning. And all of us need to give this some thought and determine our personal definition of productivity. That is the best way to measure whether we feel (and are) productive. We first have to know what being productive truly means to us.

So I encourage you to determine YOUR personal definition of productivity. Don't worry so much about what everyone else is doing or thinking. Yes, it is great to read, research, model and learn all about productivity. But it is also important to march to the beat of your own drum, and measure your success in the area of productivity against your own personal standard.

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