



Work Less to Achieve More

Three Steps to Improve Productivity and Balance In Your Life

By *Joelle Jay, Ph.D.*

It seems today everyone is busier than ever. Higher standards, innovation, day-to-day operations, future planning, business travel, competition, family obligations and the details of daily life all combine to create the kind of pressure that, as one business leader put it, makes it hard to breathe. Anyone who suffers a scarcity of time must learn to be more effective in their use of time or risk becoming victims of their own success.

The solution? Stop trying to go faster, and instead maximize the time you have so you're more productive. Yes, it is possible, and the benefit is that as you gain productivity, you actually work less.

If you're ready to trade your current frantic pace of work for one that's more relaxed yet efficient, the following strategies will help you achieve more in less time.

Make New Time Rules

Fact: *We are all operating on unspoken time rules.*

Financial advisors often recommend to set "money rules," such as "save 10 percent of every paycheck." Money rules help you be decisive and stay true to your financial goals. For efficiency and quality of life, you can apply the same concept to your time by setting new time rules.

Here are some examples.

- Never open my email before planning the day.
- Turn off my computer after 7 p.m.
- Keep my PDA off during family time.
- Spend no more than two evenings away from home per week for a business event.
- Be home in time to tuck the kids in every night, or at least call them to say good night.

Would any of these rules work for you? To set time rules, notice what's not working about the way you spend your time, and write down what would work—the way you wish you could spend your time.

For instance, "It's not working for me to have people walking into my office all day. I would prefer to have at least two consecutive hours a day with the door closed." Rule: *I close my door for two hours a day.*

Time rules, even small ones, have the advantage of being concrete and explicit, making it easier to hold yourself accountable. Once you set a rule, you'll want to communicate it so you can accommodate the people in your life. They can only respect your boundaries if you're clear about them. They can only follow the rules if you set them.

Power Down

Fact: *Your brain gets a stress signal every time an email or text message comes in.*

Power down means turn off the technology. Yes, the wonders of technology can help us maximize, save, leverage and organize our time. However, technology can also eat up all your time.

Just because you can be available 24/7 doesn't mean you should be. Just because you can instant message at the same time you're writing a report doesn't mean you should. Just because you can perch your laptop on the passenger seat of your car to tap out ideas while stuck in traffic doesn't mean you should.

Give the brain time without stress, relaxing with family, exercising, eating well and sometimes, just sometimes, ignoring those emails. In other words, be the one to take control of your technology so you can get the important things done, rather than being distracted all day long.

"Wait a minute," you may be thinking. "My team expects me to be available 24/7!" This is not about ignoring people or shirking responsibility. It's about helping you focus so you can be more productive during your working hours. Most of your business partners don't really expect you to be there 24/7. Find out their expectations, then create appropriate guidelines.

When you occasionally "power down" and do what brings you progress and fulfillment, you'll be much more effective in all your efforts.

Take a Virtual Vacation

Fact: Research has shown that your brain needs time to rest and recover.

Just as your muscles need to recover from strenuous workouts, your brain needs time to recover from concentrated work. And while it would be wonderful to take a two-week trip to Tahiti every few months, few of us can realistically do that. However, you can take a short virtual vacation as often as you need.

Here are three simple ways to go on a virtual vacation:

- Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and release all thoughts. Then fill your mind with restful images, expansive thoughts, or even music. If you're worried about falling asleep, set an alarm and tell yourself that if you do fall asleep, you'll awake feeling refreshed and energized.
- Combine imagery with exercise to come away revived and restored. Yoga, walking, running, biking and swimming have a rhythmic solitude that is especially well suited to resting the mind, but you can relieve stress and frustration with any kind of sport.
- A bath, a hot shower or some quiet time on the couch can all bring the rest you need, if you're able to mentally detach from pressure and stress.

Whatever you choose, be sure it engages your mind, either by helping you escape into a meditative state or getting you so involved in something else that you forget about work for a while.

Virtual vacations give your mind the space and rest it needs to function optimally. As a result, you gain a clearer mind, which leads to more productive work. You get better ideas and find solutions to problems that enable you to blast through a project or shave time off a task.

Ultimately, gaining productivity by maximizing your time is not about what you should do; it's about what you choose to do. Take control of your time and watch your productivity soar. Remember, the goal is not just to make the best use of your time; it's to use time to get the most out of your work and your life.

JOELLE K. JAY, Ph.D., is an executive coach, author and speaker who helps leaders achieve top performance and business results. Joelle is the author of The Inner Edge: The 10 Practices of Personal Leadership.
www.networkingtimes.com/link/jay