BRAIN TRUST CEO PRODUCTIVITY™

IMPLEMENTING THESE IDEAS WILL ENABLE YOU TO GET MORE DONE AND SAVE YOU 20-30% OF YOUR TIME

The Brain Trust™
CEOs Advising CEOs

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INTRODUCTION

When it comes to working efficiently, CEOs have to be master multi-taskers to get everything done. And, with the average CEO working 62.5 hours a week[1], *how* you spend your time is key in how much you can grow your business.

With so much on your daily to-do list, eliminating time drainers and implementing time-saving and mentally-restorative habits must become an important part of your daily routine. Although some time-consuming tasks cannot be avoided, being mindful of how you tackle certain tasks can be essential in helping you increase your productivity in the office. Here are the top 20 strategies CEOs can use to free up their time, structure their lives for success, and optimize their schedules for peak performance.

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[1] https://www.cnbc.com/2018/06/20/harvard-study-what-ceos-do-all-day.html

1. GET COMFORTABLE WITH SAYING “NO”.

As the CEO, you naturally will have more requests for your time than anyone else in your organization. In order to prevent burn out and to set boundaries around your time, it is essential for you to master the art of saying “no”.

By doing so, you can pave the way toward having others value your time and in creating greater efficiency for yourself. It also reinforces the concept that you, as the CEO, has to prioritize their time in order to achieve strategic growth for your business.

Even for the most seasoned CEO, saying “no” can be difficult, it can make you feel guilty, and it can cause anxiety, but only if you allow it to. It’s natural to feel that you should say “yes”, especially if the request is coming from a friend, a dear colleague, or a rising protege that you want to help.

Society conditions us that saying “yes” is favorable and makes us a “good” person. And, saying “no” is rude, confrontational, unprofessional, or somehow negative. However, this is far from the truth. When you don’t learn how to say “no” when you need to, you are inevitably valuing others’ priorities and goals over your own.

Rather than just blanketly tell everyone who asks for your assistance “no”, take some time (not a lot) to evaluate their request in light of what you can comfortably offer.

If fulfilling the need/request will significantly detract from your time, energy, or resources and prevent you from achieving your goals, then it is best to respectfully decline the request. This also extends to saying “no” to clients. You know the mantra, “the customer is always right.” Though this could be true in a purely customer service scenario, when it comes to saying “no”, it need not apply. If what your client is asking for is not within what your company can provide with its existing resources and/or if what your client wants it outside of your strategic objectives, then “no” may be the most appropriate response. When you do say “no” to a client, it is important to give ample context, clearly explain why you cannot meet their request, and shift the focus to what your company can provide to help them meet their needs.

To get you well prepared to comfortably say “no”, here are three things to include in an email “no” response.

1.) **A firm “no”.** This may sound obvious, but too often we soften our “no” response with a “maybe next time” or “reach out to me in a few weeks”. If the answer even later will likely *still* be a “no”, then make that clear in your initial response. There is no need to get anyone’s hopes up and to prolong the inevitable. The most important thing about saying “no” is this: never leave it open-ended. You want your response to be clear, concise, and definite. When you say things like “maybe in the future” or “let me know how else I may be able to help”, it opens the door up for other requests that you may not be able to accomodate. It is always best to stand firm in your response and, should your circumstances change and you are able to help, then the ball is in your court to reach out and offer assistance. Otherwise, you leave the door open for the other party to continually ask for your help and not value your “no” response.

2.) **Context for your answer.** This does not have to be lengthy and can be straight and to the point. If your schedule is full, if you are on vacation, or if your resources just won’t allow for you to help, state that in your response. It is always helpful for the asker to know the reason you cannot assist, so that they may improve their “ask” in the future. For example, if your donation budget has run out in June, then by sharing this piece of information with the other party, they can be “groomed” to make sure to ask you well before June, should they want your help next year.

3.) **A follow-up resource.** In some cases, you may not be able to help directly, but you may know a colleague or an organization that may be able to assist. If it is applicable, adding a line such as “you may want to reach out to...” could be helpful to make your “no” response strong but also collaborative.

Considering the number of requests you likely get for your time, support, money, help, or resources, making your “no” responses as standard as possible can help you best manage your time. I highly recommend making “NO” email templates that you can quickly modify and send out as you need to. It can be modeled after the following:

Hi {insert name},

I appreciate you reaching out to me about {insert request}. However, I have a lot of projects and other tasks I am currently managing that require my full attention at this time. Unfortunately, I will not be able to help.

It may be helpful for you to reach out to {insert contact} as I believe they have helped with similar requests in the past.

Thank you for understanding,

{Signature Block}

With these templates in place, you can focus your time and attention on other tasks and do not have to invest too much time into responding back.

Remember, saying “no” is one of the single most important steps you can take to protect your time, energy, and productivity.

2. CONQUER YOUR EMAIL INBOX

Email management is one of the biggest time drainers for CEOs. And, if you're not careful, you could be sinking at least one-third of your time every day just reading and responding to emails. That's why implementing an efficient email system is the easiest thing you can do to reclaim at least two hours of your time every day.

To optimize your productivity, having a goal to get to zero emails and maintain this in your inbox is the ideal. Known as "inbox zero", not only does it dramatically reduce the stress of having to manage hundreds of unread emails, it also helps you to quickly process what's important and get rid of all other distractions.

When we don't categorize, delete, or respond to our emails, they stay there as a constant reminder of what you haven't done. Think of it like a traditional mailbox. When you get physical mail, do you look at each envelope and put them back into the mailbox, to have to resort through them again the next day? Or, would it be more efficient to read them as you see them, file some, and throw away what you know you won't need? The same principle should apply to your inbox.

You wouldn't want to wade through boxes of letters to find the one letter of importance, just in the same way you don't want to waste time searching through a cluttered inbox for an email you forgot to respond to.

To be able to best manage your inbox, you need to recognize which type of "emailer" you are.

Are you...

All Day Emailer. You keep your inbox open all the time and check it at least a few times each hour. You likely have email notifications enabled on your phone and read them as soon as they pop up alerting you of a new email. Though you are likely very responsive to emails, you have a hard time focusing on projects that require your full attention or deep thought.

Batch Emailer. You look at your emails two to four times each day and respond back to everything **only** during those times. So, if an email comes in at 9am, you are not likely to read it or send a reply until you check your email at lunch at 12pm. Those who need an immediate response from you know to wait right before one of your email batch times, as you won't respond immediately any other time in the day.

Flag Emailer. You generally have someone to help you manage the email flow. Whether it is a business partner or a personal assistant, your emails are quickly sorted so you know exactly which ones need your immediate attention. You likely have an intricate flagging or filing system so you can keep your inbox organized and delegate responses accordingly.

To increase your productivity, if you're unable to have a dedicated assistant to help with your email management, the batch method is preferred. Not only does it allow you to have uninterrupted (non-email) times to focus on strategic work, it also gives you the time and mental space to focus on your emails, when you are ready to.

A general rule of thumb is this: If you can read AND respond to an email in two minutes or less, then do so immediately. However, if it will take longer for you to process the email or to draft a response, then wait to do it later during your designated email time.

PICKING YOUR EMAIL BATCH TIME

When is the *best* time to dedicate to emails? Though responding to emails, especially those that may be to set up strategic meetings can be important, overall email management is a low "brain power" task. As such, you want to reserve time to read and respond to emails around the slower parts of your day. If you find that you are the most alert in the morning, reserve this time for more revenue-driving activities that will grow your business. And, instead, use time in the afternoon (when you are less "inspired") to go through emails. The key is you want to harvest your highest energy times for tasks that will move the needle in your business, rather than on emails.

If you're moving from being an all day emailer to a batch time, you can set up an autoresponder with a brief message explaining that you check your email at certain times throughout the day. If you like you can include the times that you check your email, so the sender is aware that your response may be delayed.

ACHIEVING INBOX ZERO

If having no emails in your inbox is the goal, then what is the best way to achieve this. Before we jump into the strategies you can use to improve your email management, let's first examine the rationale behind "inbox zero".

INBOX ZERO PRINCIPLE #1 | ALL EMAILS DON'T HAVE THE SAME VALUE.

It's roughly estimated that 80% of the emails we get every day are not important and consume most of our attention. Whereas just 20% of the emails we receive are worth reading and responding to. However, most people get bogged down sifting through the meaningless 80% that checking your email easily spirals into the biggest time drainer of the day.

INBOX ZERO PRINCIPLE #2 | TIME IS DEFINITELY MONEY.

The truth is, you won't be able to read and respond to every email. And, you don't have to! The key is to be able to sort through your inbox quickly and find the emails that matter without sinking tons of time doing so. In the same way you wouldn't waste your waiting hours for someone who is late for a meeting, you shouldn't spend hours tied to your emails, if they aren't driving growth to your business.

INBOX ZERO PRINCIPLE #3 | LONG EMAIL RESPONSES AREN'T ALWAYS BETTER.

It is important to keep in mind that the purpose of emails is~~are~~ to quickly send and exchange information (emphasis on the word "quickly"). If you are drafting a response that is more than 2 paragraphs, then it may be best to call the person to discuss. Whenever possible, leverage bullet points rather than long lengthy sentences and use bolding to draw attention to critical action items you want the reader to pay the most attention to. Keep in mind that generally 53% of emails are *actually* read[2] in their entirety. That means almost half the time, your email is quickly skimmed, if it is even read at all.

INBOX ZERO PRINCIPLE #4 | LEAVE THE EMOTION OUT OF CHECKING YOUR EMAILS.

For some checking their emails is the most anxiety-riddled part of their day. Do you have clients looking for a project that is late? Are there work-related issues you're trying to avoid having to tackle? Whatever negative emotion(s) you associate with checking your email must be left at the door. The more power you give your email inbox, the more it will rule your life.

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[2] https://www.marketingcharts.com/industries/government-and-politics-69155

INBOX ZERO PRINCIPLE #5 | BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF.

Achieving inbox zero will take dedication and decisiveness on your part. You'll need to efficiently be able to decide which emails will get deleted immediately, which will get read and filed, and which will get read and responded to. You don't want to deliberate for hours trying to sort your emails. Learning how to say "no" and deleting an email is a skill in and of itself that CEOs have to master.

To help with deciphering *how* to tackle each email, it's important to ask ourselves these questions:

- What does the email mean to me and why is it important?
- What action do I need to take on this email now?
- Is this a top priority email?
- What would happen if I don't respond? If the answer is nothing, then it likely can be deleted.

ORGANIZING YOUR EMAILS

Based on your answers to the above questions, you will have a better idea how to sort your emails accordingly. To stay organized, you want to have four email folders to keep your inbox as strategically-focused as possible.

- Folder #1: "Action required" These are emails you need to respond to or perform a task for within the next 24-48 hours.
- Folder #2: "Awaiting response" You may have already responded, but you need to monitor for an important response back.
- Folder #3: "Delegated" Use this folder if you've sent the email for someone else to respond or handle the task involved in the email.
- Folder #4: "Archived" These emails have been resolved, but we want to keep them as a record of which actions were taken or what responses were received.

When you file your emails into one of the four folders, then it is much easier to maintain a clear inbox.

You can also set up automatically email “rules” in your email system to have your inbox immediately act upon your emails. For example, you can create a rule to forward (i.e. delegate a message) to the sales department if the message received has the word “Sales” in the subject line. This way you don’t manually have to read the email and forward it yourself, it will be done for you.

3. PROTECT YOUR ENERGY

You're likely pulled in so many different directions on a daily basis. Not only does this take a physical toll on you, but your mental and emotional health can suffer as well. The average adult now sits for at least 6.5 hours everyday[3], up nearly an hour in just three years. It's not natural for humans to live such a sedentary lifestyle and doing so can wreak havoc on your overall health and quality of life.

So, protecting your energy extends to more than just your emotional or physical well being but to all areas of your life that may impact your happiness and workplace productivity. To add in some physical movement throughout your day can give you a boost of energy and help you gain mental clarity. The more oxygen you can get flowing to your brain, the more creativity you can spark in your daily work. Here are a few easy-to-implement ways to add in more movement to your schedule.

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[3] https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/the-big-numberthe-average-us-adult-sits-65-hours-a-day-for-teens-its-even-more/2019/04/26/7c29e4c2-676a-11e9-a1b6-b29b90efa879_story.html

Plan walking meetings. Instead of meeting over the conference table, why not take the meeting outside? Even walking through the halls of your building can be a great way to multitask.

Use a standing desk. Just by virtue of standing at your desk, rather than sitting you engage your muscles to stay active and you burn more calories in the process. Studies have shown[4] that standing desks can help reduce the risks of heart disease, cancer, and improve your mood and alertness.

Build your schedule around your energy. We all have mental rhythms that dictate when we are the most active and alert in the day. For example, some people may be able to sustain the greatest amount of focus at night, while others are more energetic as soon as they wake up in the morning. The importance is to learn your personal "energy" rhythm and plan your schedule around those times. You should dedicate work that requires your undivided attention during your most alert times. This is when strategic business works or meetings should be scheduled for you to take advantage of your high energy levels.

Take active breaks. Getting up from your desk or leaving the building altogether to take a brisk walk are great ways to build in active breaks into your day. The more you can remove yourself from the work you are taking a break from, the more rejuvenated your mind will feel when you return to it. You would be surprised by the surge of energy you can generate when you give your brain a short 10-15 minute break before going back into intense concentration mode.

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[4] https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/the-truth-behind-standing-desks-2016092310264

4. STANDARDIZE REPETITIVE TASKS

The average worker spends 520 hours a year doing repetitive tasks[5] that can easily be delegated or automated by a machine. That's over 21 days a year spent doing tasks that are not the best use of your time. If you do a task more than three times, we recommend writing down the steps you take and documenting this task into a "task playbook". This way, you can easily hand off the task to someone else and rest assured that they can execute the task exactly as you would, freeing up your time to do other, more strategic work.

With established playbooks, you can also scale your work and replicate it dozens of times over throughout your business. You want to keep your playbooks in a centralized location that is easily accessible to your staff. It is also important to keep your playbooks updated as changes occur. Whether it is you reviewing them once a year to make sure they are accurate, or if you assign a virtual assistant to update them, it should be a priority.

The best way to guarantee that your playbooks are a useful tool is to follow the steps that are listed in the playbook and examine the output that results. If it is not what you want, then go back and carefully review the steps you have provided.

Having playbooks for repetitive tasks makes it easier for others to do the work, but it also can give you the peace of mind knowing that you have processes in place to ensure that the work is done according to your standards.

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[5] https://blog.eversign.com/repetitive-tasks/

5. SUMMARIZE ALL OF YOUR MEETINGS

How often do you have an important meeting but forget the key takeaways hours later? For busy CEOs, it happens all the time. You want to retain as much as you can from meetings. Equally important is infusing some personal talk into your meetings to help build rapport and trust with your clients and employees.

It is a good habit to find at least one point of commonality between you and those in the meeting. Not only does this help to strengthen the business relationship but it also gives you something you can mention in future interactions to show that you were listening.

Forgetting what the details discussed in a meeting may be embarrassing and frustrating, but it also introduces inefficiency into your life. When you forget, that's one more email to send out clarifying (or asking to be reminded) what was said or that's one more back-and-forth with a client that could have been avoided.

After every meeting, jot down a few notes of what was shared (including any personal tidbits) and, more importantly, what action items were agreed upon and any next steps that have to be taken. If you have time or can delegate it to a personal assistant, it also helps to send out a summary email to all attendees outlining who is responsible for what upcoming action items and when deliverables are expected.

Better, yet, many of The Brain Trust CEOs are using an app called https://meetingking.com/.

MEETING KING:

COLLABORATE BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER MEETINGS

A good meeting starts with thorough preparation and ends with clear, well documented minutes and tasks. With MeetingKing all participants can easily work together on the agenda, share documents, and provide updates on tasks.

ALL INFORMATION IN ONE TOOL AND ONE PLACE

No more confusion about the agenda, always access to the latest presentation, and everyone sees the same notes and action items. All information is in one place and not scattered in your inbox, on a server or in 4 different tools in the cloud.

GET THINGS DONE

The central interactive task list will make sure that things get done. The task manager will send you automatic reminders. What is more, in your dashboard you can also see what others are supposed to do for you.

STAY FOCUSED

A new issue comes up during a meeting, but it may be outside the scope of the meeting. Simply add it to the Parking Lot and discuss it in another meeting. Your current meeting stays on track and the issue won't drop off the radar. Find out more about the meeting Parking Lot.

STAY IN THE LOOP

As the CEO, you cannot attend all meetings, but with MeetingKing you can easily see what is discussed, what was decided, and if the action items are completed.

SEARCH YOUR ARCHIVE

Don't waste time on discussing the same issues over and over again. Simply search your past discussions and decisions in MeetingKing to see what was decided.

6. HAVE ONLY 30-MINUTE MEETINGS

Meetings can be a “hidden” productivity drainer. Though they may seem necessary, meetings are often scheduled for too long. 38% of all CEO meetings last more than an hour, and may still not result in a clear cut decision being made[6].

By only allotting 30 minutes for a meeting, it inevitably forces you to prioritize what needs to be discussed and what relevant points must be considered. When you have an hour or more for a meeting, it introduces time for idol conversation that can drag on and create disruptive tangents that keep you off topic.

To prevent the “follow-up meeting to the follow-up meeting” cycle, always make a decision before leaving a meeting. If one cannot be made, have a clear consensus of what needs to happen next to move closer to a finite decision.

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[6] https://www.cleverism.com/time-spent-in-meetings/

7. LEVERAGE A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT (VA)

In today's hyperconnected, digital age, you can get the administrative help you need around the clock. We recommend exploring getting a virtual assistant that can help manage your email, take over repetitive tasks, and keep you organized to increase your workplace productivity. You may prefer to have an in-person assistant, however, virtual assistants are often more cost effective.

Savvy Brain Trust Members are getting this handled here … for a turn-key solution for this:
https://outsourceaccess.com/process/

This solution alone could save you 10-20% of your time.

8. CONNECT WITH YOUR INTERNAL TEAMS

In order for your business to be successful, you need everyone (you included) to be productive and performing at their best. You want your teams to have the tools, resources, and support they need to get their jobs done. However, if you never connect with them to learn where their challenges are, then you may be overlooking glaring issues that are holding them back from being productive.

You should meet with employees on a regular basis and ask the following questions:

- *What is preventing you from getting more done at work?***
- *What bottlenecks do you need removed to complete your work more efficiently?***
- *What resources do you need to move faster and be more productive every day?***

When you get answers back, always be responsive and do your best to address their needs. Productivity is contagious and an important part of a results-driven work culture. The bottom line is, the more productive your employees are, the more productive you will be as a result, too.

** In MANY cases, the person you are paying $50 per hour to is either:

1) **Doing work that can be done by a contractor or Virtual Assistant (VA)** for $10-$15 per hour, and get it done now.
2) Not getting to important tasks because they are bogged down with non essential work.

Removing bottlenecks or adding resources is easy and not expensive when you know how to do it ...you can provide solutions through outsourcing to the Global, On Demand, Virtual workforce. You can do this two ways:

1) **Hire a Virtual Assistant (VA) that** reports to either you or one of the management team such as the COO. This was discussed earlier in this document, and you can hire this person here: https://outsourceaccess.com/process/ ... THIS IS A TURN-KEY SOLUTION ...this person is trained to either self perform what is needed, or has access to hundreds of vetted resources to get the work done for nickels on the dollar.
2) The Brain Trust has developed a training video and training manual for doing this also. Click here to watch the video: https://www.dropbox.com/s/77t38hrhkr32z84/Entreholic_Global%20Workforce_Presentation.mp4?dl=0 **.... This video will teach you and your team everything you need to know about this concept, and is only available from The Brain Trust.**

What to think about when hiring a VA: https://outsourceaccess.com/how-to-find-hire-virtual-assistant/

Outsourcing to the Global, On Demand, Virtual workforce will free up the time of your key people to be working on more important tasks, and everything gets done quickly.

Example: You can hire a virtual worker for a 20 hour project within 24 hours, and they usually begin the work immediately. Sound too good to be true? Watch the 2 videos and start realizing a significant increase in productivity and up to 10+% time savings for you.

Plus, you're a hero ... if you provide resources to your key people that enables them to do what they are supposed to be doing, instead of busy work ... they are happy and more fulfilled.

Eleven year Brain Trust Member, Ken Robbins, CEO of Response Mine Interactive, avoids bottlenecks and smooths out work flow by outsourcing $1,000,000+ worth of work per year at a cost of less than $175,000. He did this as a result of training he acquired through The Brain Trust (hint ... watch the two videos above).

Beginning in 2019, Brain Trust member, Sam Fuchs, has saved an average of $500,000 per year through outsourcing and these concepts. And his company is not large ... $5M in revenue, so he is adding an ADDITIONAL 10% to his bottom line!

Example Ideas of What You can Get Done Using the Global On Demand Virtual Workforce

1) Virtual Assistant
2) Marketing Manager
3) All Marketing Functions
4) Generating More High Qualified Leads
5) Outbound Calling
6) Appointment Setting
7) Website Development
8) Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
9) CRM (Customer Relationship Management)
10) Choosing a CRM, Marketing Automation Help (Infusionsoft, Marketo, etc), Choosing a Marketing Automation System, Key Word Research
11) Google Analytics
12) Social Media Management
13) Linked In Management, Content Marketing
14) Photo and Video Editing
15) Content Writing - Blogs
16) Content Writing - Thought Leadership Guides
17) Graphic Design - Infographics
18) Graphic Design - Brochures

19) Paid Advertising on Social Media (Facebook, etc)
20) Paid Advertising for Display Ads
21) Paid Advertising - Google Adwords
22) Retargeting, Search (Google Adwords, etc)
23) Influencer Marketing (Bloggers, etc)
24) Generating PR
25) Market Research to Launch a Product
26) Competitor Research
27) Mobile App Development, Website Development
28) Text Marketing
29) Affiliate Marketing
30) Branding Videos, Explainer Videos, Marketing Videos
31) All functions that a Digital Marketing Agency would do
32) User Testing (There's an app for that also)
33) Bookkeeping
34) Data Entry
35) Collections
36) Project Management
37) Recruiting New Staff
38) Call Center/Customer Support Services
39) Data Entry Services
40) Transcription Services
41) Creative Design
42) Web Analytics Services
43) Research & Analysis Services
44) Finance and Accounting Services
45) Engineering Services
46) Legal
47) Many more too numerous to mention.

9. MAKE REFLECTION TIME A PRIORITY

Having time alone is a critical part of priming your brain to take action. When you are able to sit quietly and think on a daily basis, it will help you prevent brain fatigue. However, the sad reality is, only 28% of a CEOs time is dedicated to self-reflection.[7]

As the strategic leader of your organization who is tasked to come up with the vision and business-changing ideas, you need that time to yourself to gain clarity and peace. Whether it is one hour a day or even 15 minutes of scheduled uninterrupted time to yourself, it should become a top priority.

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[7] https://www.fastcompany.com/90220517/this-is-how-successful-ceos-spend-their-time

10. FIGURE OUT THE RIGHT TIME FOR EMAIL

Not everything is “email-worthy”. As we have discussed, you want to manage your emails so that they don’t manage you. And, the best way to do this is to keep your emails short and sweet. If you find that you’re writing more than two paragraphs for an email, then you should ask yourself if a phone call or an in-person meeting is the better avenue to save time and miscommunication.

Also clearing conveying to your teams when and when not to include you on an email is key. Having to sort through frivolous emails only serves to add more time and stress to your already booked schedule.

11. LEAVE SOME BREATHING ROOM IN YOUR SCHEDULE

No one, not even you, as the CEO can keep going non-stop. The standard belief used to be the busier you were, the more you were getting done. But, this is not entirely true. What is true is, the busier you are, the more likely you'll burn out fast. By scheduling every single minute of every single day, you leave little to no room to be human. If you're running late to one meeting, that ripple effect can shift your entire day (and sometimes spill over into the next day).

It is strongly advised to build in "empty" 15-20 minute blocks of time throughout the day. Not only does this give you some breathing room, in the event that you are running late. But, it also gives you built in time every day to spontaneously connect with employees, take a breath, take a walk, call a loved one to check in, or otherwise do something enjoyable for yourself, before returning to work.

12. GAIN A WORK-LIFE BALANCE

As the leader of your organization, having the right work-life balance is key in enabling you to perform at your best. How you manage your time and your stress levels will play a role in how productive you can be as the CEO and how well you will feel in all aspects of your life. When you are overworking, not physically caring for your body, and otherwise ignoring critical clues that may indicate that you are not in balance, you run the risk of burning out and losing important momentum you need to progress forward. Here are three things you should be doing on a regular basis to make self-care part of your daily routine.

CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF

Being aware of what you are feeling is vital in helping you be a better leader. Feelings of frustration, being overwhelmed, even confusion are all natural emotions to have, especially as you navigate complex business situations and challenges. However, how you respond when you do not feel your best is what differentiates an average leader from a great leader. Effective leaders know when it is time to take a break, they are always in control of how they feel so that they can either deal with or re-channel any negative feelings they have so that it does not interfere with their ability to lead. By taking a few moments throughout the day to identify what you are feeling and why can be a great exercise in helping you stay on top of your emotions and handle them appropriately.

MAKE PLANNING A PRIORITY

Whether you take time every day or once a week, spending time planning out your tasks is an effective way to keep you focused. You may have other more immediate things emerge throughout the week, but having an idea of what you need to accomplish and why can give you a sense of purpose and fulfillment when you are able to achieve them.

When you feel accomplished both in your personal and work life, the better you will feel in general and the more productive you will be. Planning also extends to making sure you block out times to relax and to sleep.

Getting adequate sleep is one of the easiest ways you can ensure that you'll be able to perform at your best. Sleep is the body's most-needed restorative process and when you "cheat" yourself from getting an uninterrupted 7-9 hours of sleep everyday, then you open up the doors for a host of health ailments. Not to mention severe burnout.

INVESTING IN YOURSELF

What do you enjoy doing to recharge? What brings you the most amount of joy? Whatever these activities are, find ways to incorporate them into your work. Perhaps you thrive on engaging with others, then visiting clients or conversing with employees may be an important part of your day to add in. Even taking up a hobby can be a great way to help you relax, reset, and recharge for work.

Being an effective leader begins with taking care of yourself, mentally, physically, and emotionally. In your role, as the CEO, it is easy to let your work responsibilities take over and crowd out the important time you need to recharge. If you do not already have a self-care routine in place, then now is the time to begin dedicating time each day and week to check in with yourself and do at least one thing that fulfills you.

13. TAKE A BREAK EVERY 90 MINUTES

According to Tony Schwartz, president of the Energy Project, the human body is programmed to work on 90-minute cycles.[8] This means if you have been working on something for a sustained hour-and-a-half, then it's time for you to take a break. If you don't then it will be easier to make a mistake, you may naturally become ~~mord~~distracted, and feelings of frustration may start to creep in as your alertness wanes.

When you hone in on what time of the day you feel the most energized, be sure to block off 90-minute chunks of time for you to get high-focus, strategic work done. But, also follow up these blocks with 15-minute active breaks to get you up and moving.

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[8] https://theenergyproject.com/activity-does-not-always-equal-productivity/

14. ESTABLISH A “DO NOT DISTURB” TIME

As the leader, you will always have someone vying for your time and attention. This can be a significant distraction and productivity drainer during those times when you need to sustain deep, concentrated focus. There’s nothing worse than finally getting in your mental zone to get work done and being interrupted or asked to address an unexpected question or concern.

Not only is it annoying, but research has shown that distractions are also very costly. In fact, it is estimated that it takes 20-25 minutes to regain concentration after being interrupted[9]. Now imagine the amount of time you might spend over a given week just trying to get back on track.

In the same way you schedule alone time to have time to reflect, it is also essential to have “do not disturb” work time where your colleagues know not to interrupt you. During these times, you can give your work 100% of your attention. Ideally, if you schedule this time in the 90-minute chunks we discussed you can optimize your high energy times and skyrocket your productivity overnight.

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[9] https://lifehacker.com/how-long-it-takes-to-get-back-on-track-after-a-distract-1720708353

15. PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

To achieve peak efficiency, you want to employ the 80/20 rule, also known as the Pareto Principle. This states that your time should be allocated in such a way that gives more time and attention to the tasks that are going to move the needle in your business. Generally, for a CEO, you want to dedicate 80% of your time to completing strategic tasks that will propel your company forward and 20% of your time managing and overseeing others.

To implement this principle effectively, you will need to spend time identifying what the “high value” tasks are that help to either generate revenue for your business or cut costs. Any other tasks outside of this function would be considered “low value” tasks and should not have a considerable amount of your time spent on them. For these “low value” tasks you should look to see if they can be delegated, automated, or eliminated completely.

Be mindful that what may be “high value” may change depending on what is going on with your business and the business stage you are in. For example, if you are scaling your business quickly, then customer service-related functions may be considered “high value” as you want to manage the new influx of customers and/or better engage them to grow your brand.

16. WRITE THINGS DOWN

The human brain is a muscle, but like all muscles it fatigues too! The more you keep crammed in your brain, the less free brain power you have available to do other work, to learn new things, or to even be receptive to seeing other perspectives. In the same way that you have to delete unused files from a computer to free up memory, the same is true for your brain!

Make it a daily habit to write your ideas down to “declutter” your mind. It helps to do this in the same place every day, whether it be in a Google Doc or in a journal. The key is to spend 15-20 minutes (preferably at the end of your day) to do a “brain dump”.

Not only will you have a clear head to be able to sleep at night, but you’ll also be sure to capture those golden ideas that may have been forgotten otherwise. What’s equally as powerful is going back through your ideas periodically to see which ones you should further explore.

17. DON'T BE THE BOTTLENECK

This is a tough question all CEOs must ask themselves: Am I holding up productivity for my teams by being the bottleneck?

In some instances, the answer may be a resounding “YES!” This is especially true if you (and only you) are responsible for reviewing or approving a process. In this case, you may need to assign other decision makers who have the bandwidth to quickly review work and provide the necessary feedback to keep projects moving forward.

Here are additional ways that you can prevent being your company's (most costly) bottleneck:

Be more selective in what projects you assign.

Many times, as the CEO, you may decide to move forward on a project without considering the scope of the time and resources involved. When projects are very complex or have the potential to have lots of “unexpected” parts to them, this introduces confusion and inaction for your teams. Take time to think through what a project may entail and if your team has the capacity to take it on. If, upon reflecting, you realize that other higher priority projects should take precedence, then either shelve the project for a later date or delegate it to other teams that may have more availability.

Provide accurate, upfront guidance.

If you know your time to address questions is limited, then be sure to invest time in detailing the context, expectations, and desired outcomes of your projects before handing them off. Nothing is worse than losing progress on a project because you didn't have the time to respond to an email about a clarifying question that the team needed answered before they could start the project or complete a deliverable.

18. ALL FIRST STRINGERS ON YOUR MANAGEMENT TEAM

This is a great idea that comes from John Wilson, Founder and CEO of the CEO Global Network in Toronto. He had a CEO idea exchange on "Time Management" with his CEO members recently, and he shared the ideas with me.

The best idea that came out of that meeting is this point. If you have any second or third stringers on your Management Team, then this will absolutely cause a drain on your time. It's you that will have to make up the difference between the contribution that is expected vs. the actual contributions received from any weak players.

19. USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO SAVE TIME

We have an IT expert in The Brain Trust named Chris Chao, and Chris reports that having dual monitors on your PC will save you 20-30% of your computer time. Our member, Nathaniel Bronner, took that advice, and says, "This one idea is saving me 20-25% on computer time. I have converted our entire company to dual Monitors."

Nathaniel also recommends the use of "Evernote" for his go to app for keeping track of things. www.evernote.com.

20. USE OF APPS FOR PRODUCTIVITY

Do you like to learn and stay current with Best Practices and Knowledge about your competitors and the marketplace? Are you looking for ways you can do that without sacrificing time?

About 90% of books are available to listen to (in your car, while running on a treadmill while walking, etc.). Our Brain Trust CEO's are doing this most every day, and Thanks to one of our members, James Bronner, he recommends using audio books from www.audible.com.

James also recommends using book summaries from www.blinkist.com or www.optimize.me. This information is available to listen to, also … grow your knowledge and expertise with no additional time burden.

BONUS TIP: GIVE YOURSELF LESS TIME

Though this can sound contrary to what we've been told, setting shorter, more aggressive deadlines can actually perform as a "forcing function". In other words, when we know we have less time to complete a task or a project, we tend to have better focus and motivation to get it done, in the limited amount of time. According to Parkinson's Law, "work expands to fill the time allotted to it". I highly encourage you to click on the link! You'll save thousands of hours throughout your life (and accomplish a lot more) if you read that and put it into action.

So, if you give yourself a year to complete a project, it will take a year (if not longer). If you, instead, give yourself a month, it will take a month. With this principle in mind, set realistic but aggressive timelines to get work done and stick to it.

Being in THE FLOW and Being in a PEAK STATE.

Do you remember those times when you felt in the flow and that you were performing at a peak state? How would you like to feel that way almost every day?

THIS IS MY GIFT TO YOU:

NOTE: THIS ARTICLE ALONE IS WORTH THE VALUE OF THIS ENTIRE DOCUMENT:

https://benjaminhardy.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Peak-State-Checklist-By-Benjamin-P.-Hardy.pdf

CONCLUSION

We all are given the same 24 hours in a day to get through our to do lists. What differentiates high-performers from those that achieve mediocrity is how resourceful and intentional they are in implementing daily habits that prime them for success. Whether you utilize one of the strategies in this guide or leverage all 20, you inevitably will free up more time (and brain space) to approach your work with clarity and focus.