

How to Accomplish More in 4 Days Than Most People Do in 4 Weeks

Practice and self-control are key.



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We all know that it takes hard work to achieve our goals. And in the world of business and entrepreneurship, we often hear how we must be willing to sacrifice weeks, months, even years of slaving away to succeed.

But what if we're all just doing it wrong? What if there was a way to accomplish a huge to-do list in less than half the time it would normally take? Barring the discovery of a time machine or a wormhole, you might say this is impossible. But with a little practice and self-control, it's possible to get to the finish line before most people even start the race.

1. Use the 80/20 rule.

The Pareto principle is a universal truth that can help us recognize where to focus our efforts to be most productive. The basic rule of thumb works like this: **80 percent** of results will come from just 20 percent of the action. In other words, roughly 20 percent of your customers will account for 80 percent of your total profits. Likewise, about 20 percent of your daily tasks account for your most important and time-consuming projects. The remaining 80 percent of daily tasks are relatively low-level functions and less important undertakings.

Having a laser-like focus on those top 20 percent of tasks is the most valuable use of your time. Once those tasks are complete, you can work on the bottom 80 percent, or delegate those tasks to others. Keep yourself on track by always asking yourself: “Is this one of my top 20 percent most important activities, or is this a bottom 80 percent task?”

The same goes with other areas of your business. Focus on strengthening your relationship with the 20 percent of people who are your money makers: those who are consistently working hard for you or are your top clientele.

2. Break big tasks into manageable chunks.

Procrastination often hits us when we're feeling overwhelmed. We avoid starting a huge project because it feels daunting and we can't imagine how we'll tackle it. So stop trying to take on monster-sized jobs. Break tasks into manageable pieces so you're just taking on one small task at a time. Make sure your to-do list is broken into tasks that can be accomplished relatively quickly -- a half hour or less. Then start using a stopwatch to kick your focus into high gear.

Set a timer for **20 minutes** and tell yourself you must stay totally focused until it goes off. You'll be shocked by how much you can accomplish! And once you've finished the allotted time, you may be motivated to keep going -- how much more can you do in another 20 minutes?

3. Outsource tasks to focus on your talents.

Most of us are really good at a handful of things, and are average or OK at everything else. The best use of your time is to focus on the areas where you're strongest. If you can hand the other tasks off to someone else, you'll have more time to focus on the tasks you're best at. You can do this by outsourcing jobs that you don't excel in.

Outsourcing might mean hiring someone or using a form of automation technology. Tasks that may be easy to outsource include web developer, content writer, graphic designer or a general virtual assistant, who can ease the burden of many daily tasks such as setting appointments or returning emails.

4. Understand your natural rhythms.

What time of the day do you have the most [energy](#)? When are you most creative? In order to be efficient and make the most of your productivity, you have to know how to manage your energy. You have to understand your body's natural timetable. Is there a time of day when you always feel in a slump or a time when you feel raring to go? Prioritize important tasks to those times when you know your mind is alert.

In order for this to work, you must have established routines. This will help you create a pattern so you can observe your natural rhythms. When you know you're at your best, focus on detail-oriented and difficult tasks. And remember to give yourself breaks to keep your energy level high throughout the day.

5. Cut out distractions.

Your ability to focus is key to your productivity and getting more done in a short amount of time. Researchers have found that it takes a typical office worker 25 minutes to return to the original task after an interruption. Work interruptions also decrease accuracy by 20 percent.

By eliminating distractions, you're giving yourself back all that wasted time. Try scheduling chunks of uninterrupted time that allow you to dive into a project. And as much as possible, avoid leaving things half done. If you start something, finish it! Each day, set goals you want to accomplish and then make it happen.

Your smartphone is one of the biggest distractions. The average person can't leave their phone alone for six minutes, and most of us check it up to 150 times per day! So if you need to be hyper-focused on something, work on one screen at a time. Turn off your [smartphone notifications](#) or try putting your phone away for periods of time.

6. Focus on one thing at a time.

We used to think multitasking could help us accomplish more, but we now know that the human brain wasn't designed to focus on more than one thing at once. However, most of us find ourselves toggling between web pages, email, text messages and the task at hand, and then we wonder why we never seem to get anything done. It's time to start monotasking.

Monotasking, also known as single-tasking, is about focusing on one thing at a time so we get more done. It requires you to break your multitasking habits. Because we live in a highly connected world, that's not always easy or even possible for every task. But monotasking allows you to get into deep work, where you can really focus on a demanding task.

Try setting aside two to four hours daily when you can focus on one thing without interruption. It may take a while to develop this skill, but eventually you'll be able to engage both sides of your brain to make incredible breakthroughs that have an impact on your business.

7. Capture stray thoughts.

It can be annoying when a tantalizing thought enters your brain when you're in the middle of doing something else. "I need to remember to this!" you tell yourself. And then you try to set the thought aside, while simultaneously trying to remember it.

As you may have learned from experience, trying to remember a thought while you're involved in a task often fails. However, if you write it down you can truly let it go, knowing you can reexamine it later. You close the loop. If you rely on memory, you're either wasting energy trying to remember it, or you forget it completely and lose the value of that idea. Either way, it's a waste.

Make sure you capture these random thoughts and ideas, either in a notebook or in an app that you always have handy. This can be part of a massive, ongoing brain dump that you can refer back to and will ensure that you don't lose that lightning bolt of genius, or forget that you need to pick your suit up from the cleaner. Just be sure to review your notes on a regular basis!

8. Sleep, eat and breathe.

It's nearly impossible to be hyper-productive if you're feeling exhausted, hungry or overwhelmed. It's important that we continue to engage in self-care, even when we're slammed at work or are feeling overwhelmed with projects. You're not a machine -- you need rest, food and a clear mind to perform well. That means ditching junk food and fast food, and nourishing your body with healthy meals and snacks. It means getting a solid eight hours of sleep at night, exercising during the day and carving out time for mental breaks.

Taking even a few minutes out of your day to focus on your breathing or to meditate can help you clear your mind. Another option is to go for a quick power walk or take the stairs rather than the elevator in your office building. These activities will help reinvigorate you so you can focus. Think of it as a reboot for your brain.