EMPLOYEE SERIES

Tips to become more productive

Zoom out. When you zoom out from a task you're working on and think about how it fits into the bigger picture of your life, you can see at a higher vantage point why it's important that you get it done. Zooming out to see how a task fits into the bigger picture of your life will help you understand its purpose and see how important the task actually is. (And if it turns out a task has no purpose or doesn't make an impact in your life, you should probably eliminate, delegate, or shrink it instead.)

Look out for the seven procrastination triggers. There are seven characteristics ugly tasks have that make you more likely to procrastinate with them. They include whether a task is:

- Boring
- Frustrating
- Difficult
- Ambiguous
- Unstructured
- Lacking in personal meaning or intrinsic rewards

When you zoom out from a task you're struggling with and ask yourself which of these attributes the task has, you can then make a plan to flip these characteristics (e.g., make the task more fun, clear, or easy) to warm up to completing it.

Mind your self-talk. If most people talked to their friends the way they talk to themselves, they wouldn't have a lot of friends left. Unfortunately, when you put pressure on yourself to get stuff done when you're just not feeling it, your negative self-talk can go through the roof. As an experiment, the next time you find yourself putting off work, pay attention to what you say to yourself in your head. If you find yourself saying a lot of things like, "I can't do this," "I'm no good at this," and "Why can't I just stop wasting time," you're probably only making things worse.

Give yourself permission to do a bad job. Everyone's work is different, but if you're responsible for completing a lot of challenging solo tasks, try giving yourself permission to do a terrible job. The first draft no one will see anyway

Set limits. When you set a hard limit for how long you'll work on a task, you motivate yourself to expend more energy over a shorter period of time to get a task done faster. This tactic also shrinks your work, but in a totally different way than tactic 5.

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Shrink your work. Trying to work too hard or too much when you're not feeling it will only serve to discourage you further. To combat this, shrink how long you'll work on something until you feel more comfortable with how much time you'll spend on it.

- For example, if you need to work on a report but you're simply not feeling it, shrink how long you'll work on the report until you no longer feel resistance to it.

Get a change of scenery. We're creatures of habit, and as such, we behave differently depending on what environment we're in. Often a change of scenery is all you need to get out of a rut and start working again. For example, if you work in an office, try exposing yourself to a change of scenery by arriving at work early when fewer people are in the office, or by working from home or out of a coffee shop if you have that flexibility.

Disconnect from the Internet. Disconnecting from the Internet is one of the most underrated ways to become more productive. Disconnecting from the Internet—even for just an hour or two—will help you hunker down, waste less time, and become more productive when you just don't feel like it. Especially when the switch to turn the Internet off on your computer, phone, and tablet is just a couple of taps or clicks away, do so if you want to waste less time and get more done.

Bribe yourself. When all else fails, try bribing yourself to meet your productivity goals by rewarding yourself when you meet them. A reward can be anything from a coffee, to 15 minutes on Facebook, to a 30-minute break, for the reward to be truly motivating it has to be genuinely rewarding to you.

Embrace unproductivity. Productivity is one of the most powerful ideas in the world: the more productive you become and the more you can get done in less time, the more time you free up to do things that are the most important to you. But it's totally unrealistic to expect yourself to be productive 24/7. Often "not feeling it" is a great sign that you should step back from your work to recharge and be unproductive for a while. Completely separating yourself from your work may not always feel like the best course of action, but when you're not in the mood to work, it's worth asking yourself whether you're simply procrastinating, or whether you're genuinely in need of a break. Breaks help you recharge, reduce your negative self-talk, and warm up to tasks that you're resistant to completing. Taking a break from productivity every once in a while will help you become much more productive at the end of the day—and when you're mindful of your energy levels as you detach yourself from work, you can pick the perfect time to end your break and start working again.