36 Insanely Useful Productivity Hacks

A study of more than 2,300 business professionals reveals productivity hacks that will amp up your day.

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There’s no shortage of productivity tips. You find them everywhere. The problem is, many of them are just random pieces of advice that people think up with no research backing. There’s usually nothing to prove that the hacks work for anyone.

Until now.

Rather than assume what works for me is going to work for you, the RAIN Group Center for Sales Research recently studied responses from more than 2,300 business professionals to find out which work habits and hacks, when applied in different combinations, drive productivity.

Listed are 36 insanely useful productivity hacks employed by “the extremely productive” (The XP) listed in order from the greatest frequency on down. However, while the ones on top are more common, this doesn’t mean the ones on the bottom are less effective.

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Hacks only made this list if the research supported their inclusion as important for productivity.

1. Hold themselves accountable.

Ranked the No. 1 most frequent behavior of the XP (extremely productive), 76 percent of them agree that they hold themselves accountable to do what they say they'll do.

2. Are very driven.

The XP are exceptionally more likely (74 percent) to be very driven compared to "the rest" (34 percent). In fact, they are 2.2 times more determined to succeed than the rest.

3. Are very proactive.

Of the XP, 67 percent say they are proactive versus only 25 percent of the rest. Unlike the latter, The XP create their success rather than waiting for it to happen.

4. Have productive habits overall.

Noted as the top-ranked key driver, 63 percent of the XP agree that they have overall productive habits that contribute to their success. The XP are also 5.3 times more likely to have productive work habits compared to the rest.

5. Follow a consistent morning routine.

When it comes to getting off to a productive start each day, 57 percent of the XP have a morning routine to make this happen.

6. Have a productive environment.

Of the XP, 56 percent have a productive work environment. They

are 3.3 times more likely than the rest to organize their work environment to maximize productivity.

7. Sustain energy.

The XP are able to regularly sustain energy for long periods of time (53 percent vs. 15 percent), indicating they've struck a balance between work and taking time to refill their tanks. This is also a key driver of extreme productivity.

8. Multi-task.

Half of the XP are multi-taskers – but they are not rapid task switchers. They are 2.3 times more likely to multi-task compared to the rest.

9. Plan actions weekly.

Nearly 50 percent of the XP plan priorities and work activities weekly so they can be deliberate about their work choices. They do this 2.9 times more frequently than others.

10. Maximize Investment time.

Almost half of the XP spend the maximum amount of time possible on activities that drive the best results and success. In fact, the XP on average spend 46 percent more time on investment activities per day than the rest.

11. Get into the zone.

When it's time to focus, 49 percent of the XP agree they regularly enter the "zone," a state of extreme productivity. They do this 2.6 times more frequently than the rest.

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12. Break down large tasks into smaller.

Almost half of the XP report that if they’re overwhelmed by a large task, they break it down into smaller tasks that are more approachable.

13. Start with the greatest impact activity.

Roughly 48 percent of the XP begin work every day on the activity that will contribute most to their overall success.

14. Track progress weekly.

When it comes to keeping tabs on progress, 44 percent of the XP track their advancement weekly on how they’re doing relative to achieving their short-term objectives. They do this 3.4 times more frequently than the rest.

15. Use positive self-talk as a productivity hack.

Of the XP, 43 percent regularly practice positive self-talk. Doing this helps them get in the success mindset.

16. Begin immediately.

About 42 percent of the XP agree that when they think of something they should be doing, they begin immediately. They do this 3.5 times more often than the rest.

17. Recover when derailed.

Noted as a key driver of extreme productivity, 42 percent of the XP report that they can recover quickly when they’re derailed from being productive. When it comes to getting back on track, the XP are 5.3 times more likely to recover after getting derailed.

18. Calendar investment activities.

Roughly 41 percent of the XP block off time in their calendar every week to work on their most important activities. They are nearly 2 times more likely to do this compared to the rest.

19. Have written goals.

It’s important to have clearly defined, written goals and objectives for both the short-term and long-term. In fact, 40 percent of the XP have written goals, 3.3 times more the rest.

20. Devote undivided attention.

When concentrating, 39 percent of the XP tune everything else out and give all their attention to only one activity for at least short periods of time. They are 2.3 times more likely to do this than the rest.

21. Are active and fit.

Nearly 40 percent of the XP agree that they are active and physically fit. We also found this behavior to be a key driver of happiness, meaning that the more you agree that you are active, the happier you will be. This is a productivity hack for your work and personal life.

22. Take treasured time.

Noted as a No. 1 key driver of happiness, 38 percent of the XP regularly devote the right amount of time to do the activities that they treasure. The XP enjoy the time they hold dear 2.2 times more frequently than the rest.

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23. Turn off alerts.

Of the XP, 36 percent have their alerts turned off (e.g. for messages on phones, computers, incoming email, etc.). They are able to turn off and avoid the dings, buzzes and rings 1.8 times more often than the rest.

24. Do not react to others' agendas.

Recognized as a key driver of extreme productivity, 35 percent of the XP report that they are not constantly reacting to other people's agendas, they drive their own. They do this 3.5 times more often than the rest.

25. Concentrate for long periods of time.

Almost 35 percent of the XP agree that they can concentrate for long periods of time throughout the day. They can concentrate and get what they need to get done 3.8 times more frequently than the rest.

26. Plan how to respond to

triggers.

The XP (32 percent) plan in advance how they will respond to triggers, occurrences and people who negatively impact their productivity. They are 3.2 times more likely to do this than the rest.

27. Maintain the smallest priority list.

Roughly 32 percent of the XP report that they prune priorities down to the most essential, smallest list possible compared to only six percent of the rest.

28. Signal “Do Not Disturb.”

The XP signal “Do Not Disturb” when they don’t want to be disrupted. In fact, 31 percent of them agree that when they’re concentrating, they let people know that it isn’t a good time to disturb them. They do this 3.4 times more often than the rest.

29. Track their time.

The XP (30 percent) track their time meticulously. They understand the key to success is maximizing Investment time and they monitor their time five times more often than the rest.

30. Do not allow themselves to be distracted.

When it’s time to concentrate, 30 percent of the XP don’t allow themselves to be distracted by people or technology. Compared to the rest, the XP do this 3.8 times more

frequently.

31. Stop ill-advised activities quickly.

The XP (30 percent) agree that when they find themselves doing an activity or continuing a habit they want to stop, they stop quickly once they realize they should. In fact, they do this 4.3 times more often than the rest.

32. Say no.

Of the XP, 26 percent say no, even when it’s difficult to do so when faced with something that will negatively impact their productivity. They say no to people and activities that will derail them 3.7 times more frequently than the rest.

33. Minimize low impact activities.

About 25 percent of the XP consistently minimize, avoid or outsource low impact activities compared to only six percent of the rest.

34. Are difficult to interrupt.

Twenty-five percent of the XP makes it very difficult to interrupt them if they need to concentrate. In fact, they are three times more likely to avoid interruptions than the rest.

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35. Practice mindfulness.

When it comes to practicing mindfulness and/or meditating, 19 percent of the XP do this, That’s more than double what

36. Keep a “no” list.

Of the XP, 11 percent maintain an active “no” list so they know what activities to avoid. However, while only 11 percent do it, they do it 5.5 times more often than the rest.

Across the board, the XP are much more likely than the rest to exhibit each of these attributes and behaviors. In some cases, by up to 5.5 times more likely. Even the behaviors that are practiced infrequently overall, are practiced much more regularly by the XP.

It’s unrealistic to expect a single person to practice all these behaviors. However, when you choose a few and make them a part of your daily work habits and routines, you’ll see your productivity soar.

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