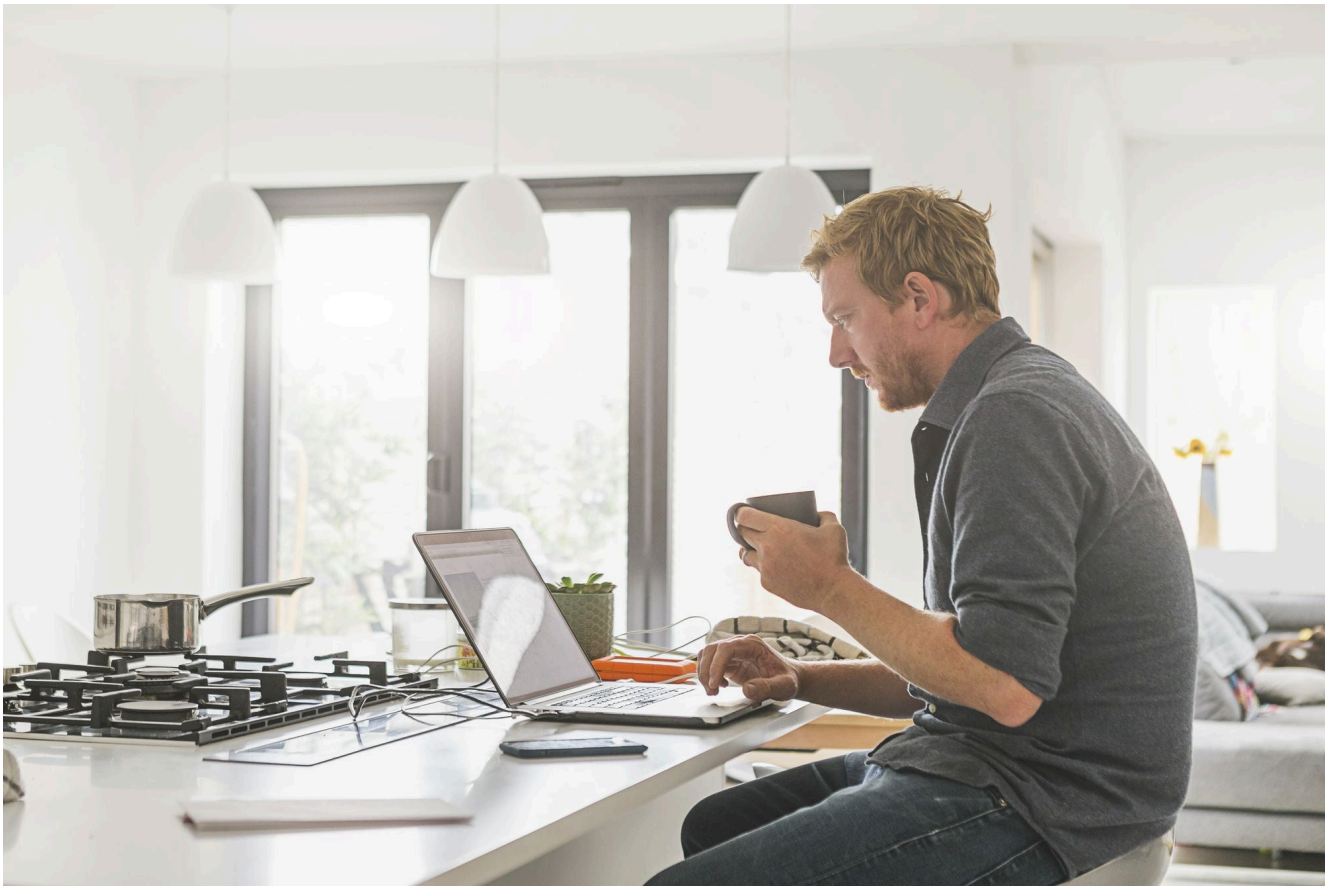
How I (Almost) Doubled My Productivity While Working From Home



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I began working for myself in 2007, after leaving an editor job for the book publishing company Penguin. I aspired to edit books as a freelancer, and within a couple of months I began ghostwriting books as well.

But not even a month into this transition, I discovered that I had very little patience for working at home. I would find myself struggling to sustain engagement for more than an hour or an hour and a half. After that I had to watch a movie or otherwise veg out.

This was a fatal flaw in my plan to work for myself.

Thankfully, within a couple of months I figured out what worked for me, which was a bizarre routine of working just 15 or 20 minutes and then taking a 10-minute break to watch part of a movie or TV. This changed everything. Giving myself constant breaks enabled me to work all day. I once wrote a whole 6,000-word chapter of a book in a single day while working through the second season of *Lost*.

This routine sustained me for a number of years, but to work a whole day I would sometimes wind up watching up to four hours of content.

As I began playing in larger ponds, the stakes got higher. Last year my company's gross income and my number of followers grew exponentially. I onboarded several employees as well.

But I was still only working five or six hours of the day. With the smaller tasks and projects, I wasn't taking breaks throughout, but I would still find myself stalled out and procrastinating for hours at a time. How could I maximize my time so that I could fill out a whole workday, and possibly even work longer hours if need be?

This past fall, I had an alarmingly simple realization that changed everything. For the second time while working for myself, my productivity would get an enormous boost.

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If you feel dissatisfied with your productivity, examine the feeling

As of last year, what I would do at the start of any given workday was write out the tasks I needed to do on my white board. That, combined with client calls and other scheduled appointments, would flesh out my day. This may have been a

straightforward enough solution, but it created a big problem for me. At night, when I would go to erase the day's task list, I would often feel a notable sense of shame when I found that I needed to leave several tasks up on the board because I hadn't finished them. I would look at my day and feel like I had been busy the whole time but hadn't actually gotten that much done. It would feel like I had been constantly sucked back into answering emails and never got to some of the more substantive work necessary to keep things moving forward as a whole.

Then in the fall I created a mastermind with some folks who live near by. I posed the problem of how I could accomplish more in the day because I was tired of feeling so dissatisfied each night. They made some nice suggestions, but nothing quite fit. A few days later, I realized what I had told them: I was tired of feeling dissatisfied. I was actually less preoccupied with what I achieved and mostly upset about how I felt. I may have felt daunted by a massive task list, but my real issue was how I felt a lack of motivation in response. I may have known what my tasks were, I just felt overwhelmed by how long it seemed they would take to complete.

I didn't have these bad feelings because of a clarity problem, but rather a *time* problem. And with that insight I realized what I needed to do: I needed to plan out my workday based not on tasks, but on time.

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Plan based on time needed, not tasks accomplished

Instead of writing out my task list for the day on my white board, I instead wrote out the various tasks I needed to accomplish in the coming days or week and then wrote out a

schedule for my day. I would factor in my client calls and other planned appointments, and otherwise plan out my day in 60-minute, 30-minute or sometimes even just 15-minute chunks.

Highlights from today, for instance, include my having spent 9 to 10 am working on a webinar, 11 to 11:30 am being interviewed by a columnist, 1 to 1:45 pm having lunch and now, from 3 to 4 pm, writing this article.

I didn't plan my day based on how much I would achieve. I planned it based on how long I imagined I could spend achieving it.

This changed everything for me. As long as I planned breaks and had realistic expectations for what I was capable of, my five- or six-hour workdays sometimes became as long as nine or 10 hours if need be — though I don't recommend many days that are quite so long.

Some other tips for you to consider in trying this out include:

- Write out your schedule the night before so as to give it even greater authority in your mind.
- Assign an hour or two at the end of the day "to be determined," in case things come up for you during the day.
- Give yourself planned breaks of even just 15 minutes to recharge your batteries in some way, with meditation or even something less ambitious like watching a funny YouTube video.

Our greatest satisfaction in our work comes from a sense of completion. And while we ultimately can't quantify the length of time it takes to perform tasks until after we've completed them, we can quantify time itself.

Running our day in this way, we don't just get more done.

We feel more accomplished.

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