Why Does Novelist Jeffrey Archer Use an Hourglass When He Writes?

It’s a productivity tool that’s worked since antiquity.

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Want to know how to really get things done? Just ask Jeffrey Archer. Since publishing his first novel, *Not A Penny More, Not A Penny Less,* in 1976, the iconic British author has written more than 20 books that have sold more than 300 million copies worldwide. But that’s not all. He’s also written plays, short stories, children’s books and non-fiction works. Even at 79 years old, Archer isn’t slowing down. His latest novel, the internationally best-selling *Nothing Ventured*, came out in September and marks the start of yet another series of books (this time about a detective), following the success of his seven-part *Clifton Chronicles*. The guy just doesn’t stop.

You’ve heard the phrase, “If you need something done, just give it to a busy person.” Like any entrepreneur or business owner, Archer is a busy person. He has deadlines. He has production quotas. He has promised deliverables. So what’s his secret for being so productive? The answer may surprise you.

“I use an hourglass,” he told journalist Simon Akam on the podcast *Always Take Notes*. A what?

According to Archer, an old-fashioned hourglass, which has used sand to track time since antiquity, is the most effective way to keep him on task. He claims it’s a much better device

than a clock, because with a clock, he says, “It’s very easy to stop at five to or 10 to the hour, but if you do that eight times a day, then that’s 80 minutes you haven’t done.” Which means instead of putting in eight hours, you’ve only done six hours and 40y minutes. That’s a big difference. “The hourglass is there to make sure I don’t cheat myself,” he says.

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Archer has other rituals when he writes. He blocks out multiple, specific, two-hour segments of the day each day and rigorously sticks to the schedule. He always writes in a quiet place and is adamant about not being disturbed. He treats his writing as a job because, well, it is. He also makes sure that everything is in place around him to keep things consistent.

“I like my pencils in a row, I like my pens in a row, my sharpener where it is and the picture of my wife where it is,” he says. “I’m ruthlessly organized.”

There’s no magic to being productive, no secret sauce, no tricks or voodoo. Being productive means being disciplined. It means having a routine. It means not cutting corners. It means being adamant about fulfilling your personally set quotas. It means blocking out all distractions and sticking to your plans – day in and day out.

If, like Jeffrey Archer, you just need a simple, old-fashioned hourglass – as people have for thousands of years in order to stay on task – then by all means, go for it. You may not become a best-selling novelist, but you’ll certainly get a lot more things done in the day.

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