

Assessment: Take Control of Your Day

(Take this assessment before the session to identify your time management habits)

	Usually	Always	Often	Sometimes
I am swamped with paperwork.	A	B	C	D
My desk is covered with piles of papers, files and books.	A	B	C	D
My computer files aren't backed up.	A	B	C	D
My computer files are disorganized.	A	B	C	D
I find it difficult to throw things away.	A	B	C	D
I'm often late, and I sometimes miss appointments.	A	B	C	D
I misplace small pieces of papers and sticky notes.	A	B	C	D
People put items on my chair or computer so I'll be sure to see them.	A	B	C	D
My inbox is always full.	A	B	C	D
I don't use my computer to get organized or to automate routine jobs.	A	B	C	D
I struggle with conflicting deadlines and demands on my time.	A	B	C	D
I feel discouraged or frustrated by my work environment.	A	B	C	D
I don't know what my real priorities are.	A	B	C	D
I start one task and then get distracted and move to another one.	A	B	C	D
People can't find items that I file or put away.	A	B	C	D
I dread starting a new project because I have so many loose ends to tie up with others.	A	B	C	D

What three things are you most concerned with?

Why do they concern you?

How have they impacted your productivity?

GET ORGANIZED: TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES THAT WORK

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NALP 2019 Conference, San Diego, CA

WHAT IS IN THIS WORKBOOK?

Part 1: Self-Assessments

- Identify Your Time Management Hurdles
- Take Control of your Day

Part 2: Time Management Tips, Tricks and Tools

- The Art of Divide and Conquer
- Know Your Productivity Cycle
- Create a checklist
- Phone Calls and Voicemails
- Turn your Email into your *Electronic Assistant*
- Paper and What to Do About It
- Pick Your Organizational Tools

Part 3: Tools to Help You Track Your Time

- Time Tracker Log
- Practice Creating a Daily Plan

Self-Assessments

Assessment: Identify Your Time Management Hurdles

(Take this assessment before the session to identify your time management habits)

Who in your life is a good time manager? What do they do that makes you think that?

What is standing in your way to effective time management?

Time management experts have found the three categories that people fall into when they manage their time poorly (internal, peripheral, and cognitive).

Internal	Peripheral	Cognitive
• Not clear on goals • Miscalculate how long task takes • Task is complex • Did not assess scope of project • Disorganized • Didn't set aside time to plan • Unrealistic workload	• Issues beyond your control • In transition • Interruption prone environment • Discord from others around you • Micromanager boss/unhappy work environment	• Self-sabotaging habits • Crisis addict • Anxiety/fear/dread • Caretaker • Perfectionist • Constantly at the disposal of others • Low energy (health/motivation)

Think about your day. Which “Hurdle Behaviors” do you engage in the most (*internal, peripheral, cognitive, or all three*)?

What are the consequences of these behaviors?

Think of a problem, situation or issue that keeps you from managing your time. Once you have identified what category you fall into, brainstorm next steps.

Internal	• Develop of new skill, technique or approach.
Peripheral	• Can you directly address, adapt or manage the issues that are out of your control? If not, what next?
Cognitive	• Identify self-sabotaging habits and step away from them. Can you enroll a friend or colleague to help you?
All three!	• Address peripheral issues to help you get a handle on internal/cognitive issues.

What did you identify? What steps do you want to take next?

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Time Management: Tips, Tricks and Tools

The Art of Divide and Conquer

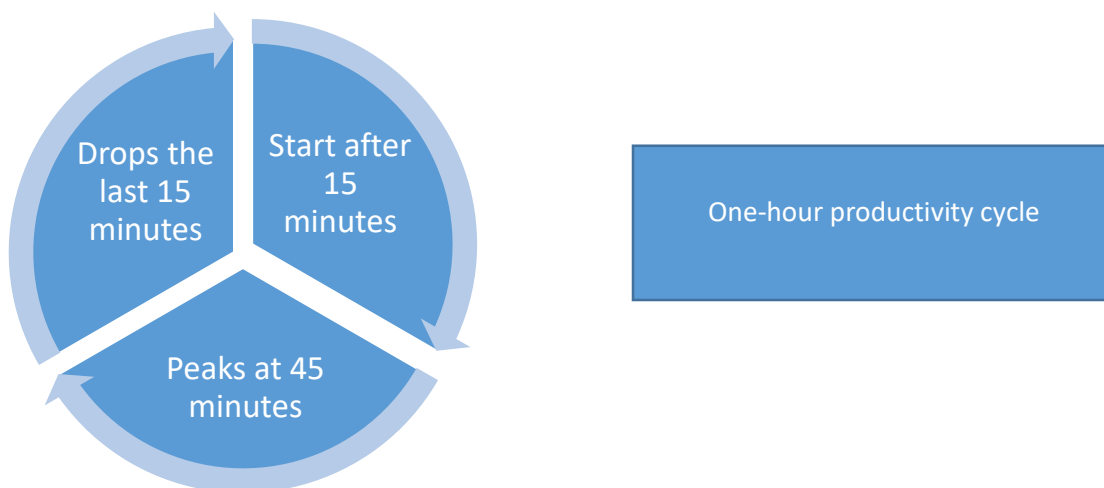
1. Break down the task by timed increments
 - “This morning, I will take 20 minutes to enter student data into excel.”
 - “This afternoon, I will spend 10 minutes answering emails from partners.”
2. Do the task you hate the thought of doing most
 - “I dislike updating student guides every summer, but I will block off my calendar for two days and get it done.”
3. Reward yourself for each increment of task completion
 - “I am going to draft two original RFP ideas, once I finish that I will do some online shopping.”
4. How to prioritize when you feel stuck?
 - Ask “What is important to me and what am I going to do first?”
 - Ask “If I can only accomplish one thing today, what would make me feel the most satisfied?”
 - Shorten work time on each task, when the time is up, move on.
 - When you are working, notice if you are focusing. If not, stop and take a break.
 - Be proactive about your time, propose and recommend solutions instead of asking for others to weigh in.
 - Get out of the weeds, schedule time for big picture goals.
 - Use the Quadrants (1-4) to determine what to do first.
 - Think of Quadrant 1 as firefighter mode. It is something that has to get done right away.
 - Quadrant 2 is important to you but can be done later.
 - Quadrant 3 is not important to you but is urgent for someone else or a project you are working on.
 - Quadrant 4 would be similar to filing or scanning paperwork. It’s something you can put off for when you have time.

1 Important/ Urgent	2 Important/ Not Urgent
3 Not Important/ Urgent	4 Not Important/ Not Urgent

Adapted from “*The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*”
Stephen Covey

Know Your Productivity Cycle

Think of your productivity cycle in one hour chunks. It takes 15 minutes to get into a task and shut your mind off from distractions. Use your first 15 minutes to get organized and close down things that distract you. Turn off your email notifications, turn off the ringer on your phone and shut your office door or put on some noise cancelling headphones. The next 30 minutes is the ideal time to perform a task uninterrupted. Once you hit the 45-minute mark you come to the end of your productivity time. The last 15 minutes are when you take a break from the task. You can use this time to get a drink of water, go for a quick walk, check your email or chat with a co-worker.



Create a Checklist

Checklists are the best way to ensure you don't miss or overlook a step, address unexpected issues, and reduce errors and inefficiencies.

1. Write down everything you have to do in one location. You can't rely on your memory.
2. Determine if the project can be completed in one task or whether it needs multiple tasks. Build those tasks in.
3. Create a "Master List" for tasks that can be done in the future and a "Daily List" for tasks that need to be done by a specific date.

Master List	Daily List	Quadrant	Completion Date

Phone Calls and Voicemails

Depending on your job you may or may not receive a lot of phone calls. One thing to remember is just because you are getting a call, it doesn't mean to have to answer it. Some strategies you can employ are the following:

1. Screen your calls and return them during a specific time of day.
2. Have your calls go directly to voicemail when you need uninterrupted time to focus and concentrate.
3. Set up a voicemail to let people know when you are available or how you would like to be contacted.
4. Avoid returning calls during peak meeting times (9:00 to 11:00 AM; 1:00 to 3:00 PM).

Turn your Email into your *Electronic Assistant*

Writing and responding to emails can take over your entire day. You can customize your email to your particular needs.

How do you handle your email? Do you spend a lot of time organizing or responding to your email over getting work done? Do you feel like you need to respond to every email immediately? Is your email inbox overflowing? Do you open an email, read it, and then leave it in your inbox?

1. **Adopt a one touch rule**

Instead of leaving an email in your inbox, create folders that allow you to decide when you will respond. You can have one that says “Today” if it needs a response today. Label a folder to say “Weekly” if you can respond anytime during the week. Label a folder that says “Assign” if someone else is required to weigh in or make a decision and “Done” if you need an archival record.

2. **Set aside time to respond to email**

Set aside times during the day. You can try first thing in the morning, midday, or at the end of the day. If you receive a high volume of email you can check once an hour for a 10-minute period. When the ten minutes are up, stop responding.

3. **Use flags, features and categories**

Use your inbox as a to do list. Use **Flags**, **Categories**, and **To Do List** instead. Create folders for messages to certain people (e.g. Supervisor). Organize “To do” items (high, normal or low frequency; assign to someone else; create a reminder for yourself or track your progress as pending, in progress, deferred or complete).

- Set up meetings through email/calendar.
- Schedule reminders.
- Creating an electronic signature saves time by having your name, title and phone number accessible.
- Set reoccurring appointments.
- Track progress on your tasks.
- Share calendars with colleagues to make it easier to schedule meeting times.
- Create more than one calendar. Set up a personal calendar with reminders and make sure its synced with your work calendar.
- Use folders.
- Make to do lists to keep track of tasks.

- Create filters to view only items or files stored in folders that meet conditions you specify.
- Add rules which tell your program what to do with an email when it arrives.
- Use the preview email pane to make viewing your email messages easier.
- Use your out of office reply when you are away to give others a sense of your response time.
- Color code your calendar. This allows you to quickly scan your schedule.
- Keep copies of your sent email. You may need to refer back to an email you sent.
- Use Slack, Google Chat or Skype Chat in your office to keep email volume manageable.

4. Use the four D's to manage your email

DELETE	-> Does not require action. Can get the information elsewhere.
DO	-> Spend 2 to 5 minutes on an email.
DELEGATE	-> Assign to someone else who can complete the task.
DELAY	-> Add to your calendar or task for a later time.

Paper and What to Do About It

Paper can pile up fast. When it does, it's tough to get motivated enough to sort through it. How can you get on top of it? Carve out time to sort paper, 10 minutes a day, once week, once a month. Sort similar items put into three piles "To Do", "To File", and "To Trash." Scan and upload important documents electronically. Don't put it off, once you have contact with a document, take action on it.

Paper

1. Don't create files you *may* need, only files you *do* need.
2. Keep priority files accessible.
3. Store files of upcoming projects alphabetically, by urgency or chronologically.
4. Don't hold on to reference material, scan and purge!

Electronic

1. Organize your files in a format that makes it easier to locate.
2. Name folders and documents in a consistent manner.
3. Avoid saving multiple copies of the same document.
4. Create archives of old documents for deep storage, and get them out of your workspace.
5. Revisit your files to get rid of old documents that are no longer relevant.

Pick Your Organizational Tools

1. **Portable Day Planner or Calendar:** A paper tool is easy to use and accessible. However, you have to view it multiple times to identify your appointments. You have to have it with you at all times and there is no digital system to find information.

2. **Email Program:** You can use tasks, reminders, and rules. There may be too many reminders and you may not be able to access easily when you are out of the office.
3. **Smart Phone:** You can download apps, have access to your calendar and set reminders.
4. **Personal Organizational Programs/Apps**

There are many organizational tools available online, most of which are free. You may have to try a few different ones to see what works for you. They may not be compatible with software you use or you may not be allowed to load them onto your work computer. Here are a number of apps that are worth taking a look at.

- **Trello:** Plan your work on a virtual bulletin board. Rather than have lists of items to complete, this creates a board with sections to organize your ideas and gives you a list function to organize them. You can have a “to do,” “doing”, and “done” boards for projects. For writing projects, you can have “outline,” “writing,” “editing”, and “published” boards. This is a great tool for brainstorming ideas. You can group your ideas at every stage until completion. *Free for core features with unlimited boards. \$9.99 per month for unlimited power ups and management tools.*
- **Evernote:** Allows you to save anything as a note. You can use a built in camera to scan documents. This allows you to track business cards, receipts, tickets, forms, and more. You can organize everything using a drag and drop filing system. You can tag items to build a customized productivity system. You can use search tools that will recognize the text in your images and scans and pull it up. You can turn your written notes into digital notes. *It's free up to 60 MB per month, then \$7.99 a month for more storage.*
- **Awesome Note:** Will combine your to-do list, notes, and calendars. It's user friendly and customizable.
- **Timeful:** Time assistant. You plug in your must do and want to do item and the app finds time on your calendar to make the most efficient schedule possible.
- **Siri, Google Assistant, and Cortana:** Digital artificial assistants. Cortana can take notes, write lists, and set reminder which you can set daily, weekly, or as a tracker (e.g. buy flowers when you pass your favorite flower shop).
- **Asana:** Group project management tool. You can collaborate on a multi-function interface to coordinate tasks and conversations. You can keep track of your colleague's schedules in one place and assign due dates and propose new ideas.
- **Zapier Price:** Project management tool that connects your apps and automates your work. The app automations are some of the most powerful ways to boost your productivity; instead of copying and pasting data between apps, sending the same messages and setting up the same project each month. This tool can do that for you automatically. It can connect over 1300 apps and workflows that tie everything together. *Free for 100 tasks per month, then starting \$20.00 for different plans.*
- **Toggle:** Tracks your time. It keeps up with your tasks and tracks how long each task takes to complete. It can also remind you to take a break. *Free for core features.*
- **Full Contact Card Reader:** Scans business cards, reads them, and converts information into an iPhone contact.

- **Todoist:** Helps you organize your tasks and tracks your productivity. It helps you plan your work. It has a tool called Quick Add that recognizes dates, project names, and tags. You can list your tasks and check them off. The tracker then calculates how productive you have been today and this week and gives you data to show whether you are being productive or not. It gives you a score to keep you motivated. It gives you your tasks to be done today and for the next seven days. You can view all your tasks and sub tasks at once or open a single project to focus on the tasks and finish them at one time. *Free for 80 active projects. \$29/year for 200 projects or access 20 people per project.*
- **Rescue Time:** Tracks your productivity. It tracks all the websites you visit, the apps you use and logs how much time you spent each day. Fee for core tracing features. *\$9/month to block distracting sites and track time away from your computer.* (Also see **Pocket** below.)
- **Google Keep:** If you are the type of person who writes notes on Post Its and then loses them, this is the app for you. It makes digital copies of your Post It notes. You can use it to add tasks, lists or reminders. There is a sidebar in Google Docs that allows you to drag notes from Google Keep into your documents so you don't forget something important you wanted to add. *Free.*
- **Pocket:** If your favorites task bar is bloated with too many favorites then use this tool to save your favorite website links. You can organize them and tag them by category. You can add it to your browser. This way, you can save articles, videos, and websites to visit later before you forget about them. *Its free but \$4.99/month for no ads and for a permanent archive.*
- **Cloze:** Organizes your contacts. It's a smart address book that pulls your contact info together automatically from social networks, email, and other apps. It will figure out which of your contacts are connected when you search. If you can't remember the name it will help you track the contact by remembering a detail. It will remind you to reconnect if you have not reached out to business contacts in a while. A little nostalgia for those of you who remember when LinkedIn used to do maps of your contacts. *Free for core features. \$19.99/month for the pro plan.*
- **Zoom:** Video conferencing tool. You can video conference in up to 100 people at one time. You can record the call, use a chat box and screen sharing. You can also use a virtual sketch board to add your ideas during a call. *It's free for up to 100 participants for a 40-minute-long meeting and \$14.99 for unlimited meetings.*
- **Last Pass:** Manages your passwords. Passwords requirements are getting more complicated and it's hard to remember all of them. This password management app keeps your passwords private. You can also use this to remember credit card info, addresses and other data that you use to fill out forms. *The core features are free then \$2/month for premium to share passwords and store encrypted files.*

Tools to Help You Track Your Time

Time Tracker Log:

How do you spend your time? Use this log to help you track how you spend your day. Ask yourself the following:

1. What is the best time for you to complete tasks that require concentration?
2. What is the best time for you to complete routine tasks that do not require a great deal of concentration?
3. Track how long it takes for you to complete projects and/or tasks?
4. Where is your wasted time going? How can you redirect it?

Time of Day	Task	Estimated Time	Project
7:00 AM			
8:00 AM			
9:00 AM			
10:00 AM			
11:00 AM			
12 Noon			
1:00 PM			
2:00 PM			
3:00 PM			
4:00 PM			
5:00 PM			
6:00 PM			
7:00 PM			
8:00 PM			
9:00 PM			

Practice Creating a Daily Plan:

Once you have identified your tasks in tab 1, take stock of your most productive hours of the day.

Prioritize what is important and urgent and then create your daily plan. Remember Quadrant 1 and 2 take priority over 3 and 4.

[illegible]

NY Times: Productivity Isn't About Time Management. It's About Attention Management

“Time management” is not a solution — it’s actually part of the problem.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/28/smarter-living/productivity-isnt-about-time-management-its-about-attention-management.html>

By Adam Grant

March 28, 2019

A few years ago during a break in a leadership class I was teaching, a manager named Michael walked up looking unsettled. His boss had told him he needed to be more productive, so he had spent a few hours analyzing how he spent his time. He had already cut his nonessential meetings. He couldn’t find any tasks to drop from his calendar. He didn’t see an obvious way to do them more efficiently.

“This is going to sound like a joke, but it’s not,” he confessed. “My only idea is to drink less water so I don’t have to go to the bathroom so many times.”

We live in a culture obsessed with personal productivity. We devour books on getting things done and dream of four-hour workweeks. We [worship at the altar of hustle](#) and [boast about being busy](#). The key to getting things done, we’re often told, is [time management](#). If you could just plan your schedule better, you could reach productivity nirvana.

But after two decades of studying productivity, I’ve become convinced that time management is not a solution — it’s actually part of the problem.

For most of my career, the most frequent question I’ve gotten is: “How do I get more done?” Sometimes people ask because they know I’m an organizational psychologist, and productivity is one of my areas of expertise. More often they’re asking because they’ve read in a [New York Times](#) article or a [popular book](#) that I get a lot done.

But the truth is that I don’t feel very productive. I’m constantly falling short of my daily goals for progress, so I’ve struggled to answer the question. It wasn’t until that conversation with Michael that it dawned on me: Being prolific is not about time management. There are a limited number of hours in the day, and focusing on time management just makes us more aware of how many of those hours we waste.

A better option is attention management: Prioritize the people and projects that matter, and it won’t matter how long anything takes.

Attention management is the art of focusing on getting things done for the right reasons, in the right places and at the right moments.

O.K., sure, but why shift our focus?

According to conventional wisdom about time management, you're supposed to set goals for when you want to finish a task. I decided to try it for this article. The target was 1,200 words, so I sat down at 8 a.m. and gave myself three hours, which would allow me to write at the leisurely pace of six words per minute. I then spent the next six minutes writing a grand total of zero words, staring at a flashing cursor. The only task I completed was a Google search of whether the cursor was named in honor of all the writers who have cursed it. (Yes, I know you're mocking me, you poor blinking excuse for a rectangle.) Then I wondered how many words I actually type per minute and took a typing test. I wasn't happy with my score, so I took another ... and another.

Eventually I got frustrated and shifted to attention management. E.B. White once [wrote](#): "I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day." But in my [research](#), I've found that productive people don't agonize about which desire to pursue. They go after both simultaneously, gravitating toward projects that are personally interesting and socially meaningful.

So instead of focusing on how quickly I wanted to finish this article, I asked why I agreed to write it in the first place: I might learn something new when synthesizing the research; I'd finally have somewhere to point people when they ask about productivity; and it might help some of those people. That led me to start thinking about specific people who might read this, which reminded me of Michael. Boom.

Often our productivity struggles are caused not by a lack of efficiency, but a lack of motivation. Productivity isn't a virtue. It's a means to an end. It's only virtuous if the end is worthy. If productivity is your goal, you have to rely on willpower to push yourself to get a task done. If you pay attention to why you're excited about the project and who will benefit from it, you'll be naturally pulled into it by intrinsic motivation.

But how do I stay on task if I'm not worried about time?

Attention management also involves noticing where you get things done. I grew up in Michigan, and when I went back there for grad school, I tried to convince a friend from the West Coast to join me.

"It's too cold and gray," she said after a visit during a snowstorm. She then went off to Stanford. That next Michigan winter was the coldest, grayest season I could remember, and I have never been more productive. There was nothing to do but work!

Sure enough, a [series of studies](#) led by Julia Lee (now at Michigan) show that bad weather is good for productivity because we're less likely to be distracted by the thought of going outside. Researchers found that on days when it rained, Japanese bank employees finished transactions faster, and on days when the weather was bad in America, people were more efficient in correcting spelling errors in an essay. With that in mind, I deliberately waited to start writing this article until the day after a snowstorm, when the melting slush outside my window was not appealing.

My favorite part of attention management is the *when*. Most of our productivity challenges are with tasks that we don't want to do but that we need to do. For years, I thought the way to handle those tasks was to do them right after the most interesting tasks so the energy would spill over. Then my colleague Jihae Shin and I ran a [study](#) in a Korean department store and found that when employees had a highly interesting task, they actually performed worse on their most boring tasks.

One possible reason is what's called [attention residue](#): Your mind keeps wandering back to the interesting task, disrupting your focus on the boring task. But in an experiment with Americans watching videos and then doing a dull data entry task, we found support for a different mechanism: contrast effects. A fascinating or funny video makes the data entry task seem even more excruciating, the same way a sweet dessert makes a sour vegetable taste yuckier. So if you're trying to power through a boring task, do it after a moderately interesting one, and save your most exciting task as a reward for afterward. It's not about time; it's about timing.

Of makers and managers

I'm guessing your goal is not just to be more productive — you probably want to be creative, too.

The stumbling block is that productivity and creativity demand opposite attention management strategies. Productivity is fueled by raising attentional filters to keep unrelated or distracting thoughts out. But creativity is fueled by lowering attentional filters to let those thoughts in.

How do you get the best of both worlds? In his book "[When](#)," Dan Pink writes about evidence that your circadian rhythm can help you figure out the right time to do your productive and creative work. If you're a morning person, you should do your analytical work early when you're at peak alertness; your routine tasks around lunchtime in your trough; and your creative work in the late afternoon or evening when you're more likely to do nonlinear thinking. If you're more of a night owl, you might be better off flipping creative projects to your fuzzy mornings and analytical tasks to your clearest-eyed late afternoon and evening moments. It's not time management, because you might spend the same amount of time on the tasks even after you rearrange your schedule. It's

attention management: You're noticing the order of tasks that works for you and adjusting accordingly.

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NY TIMES: Stop Letting Modern Distractions Steal Your Attention

Making yourself inaccessible from time to time is essential to boosting your focus.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/26/smarter-living/stop-letting-modern-distractions-steal-your-attention.html>

By, Anna Goldfarb

March 26th, 2019

When [David Rock](#) needs to immerse himself in his work, he goes offline. Being reachable, he knows, will tank his productivity.

In fact, Dr. Rock, the C.E.O. of [The Neuroleadership Institute](#) and author of “[Your Brain at Work](#),” was able to write four books during several flights to and from Australia. He credits the long stretches of uninterrupted time with granting him the ability to fully concentrate on assembling those book drafts.

Sure, not everyone can hop a 13-hour flight to Australia when they need to finish a project. But the lesson Dr. Rock learned is applicable regardless: Making ourselves inaccessible from time to time is essential to boosting our focus. A 2017 [survey](#) from the American Psychological Association found that being constantly and permanently reachable on an electronic device — checking work emails on your day off; continuously cycling through social media feeds; responding to text messages at all hours — is associated with higher stress levels.

This phenomenon of always being reachable is what [Linda Stone](#), a former Apple and Microsoft executive, calls [continuous partial attention](#). Unlike multitasking — juggling activities of similar importance that don’t require too much cognitive processing — C.P.A. is a state of alertness during which you’re motivated by the desire not to miss out on anything.

Ms. Stone, who gives lectures and consults on issues relating to technology and attention, [describes](#) C.P.A. as an “always-on, anywhere, anytime, any place behavior that involves an artificial sense of constant crisis.” Being distractible — allowing incessant beeps, flashes and trills to shatter any semblance of concentration — contributes to a strained lifestyle, she said. Half-paying attention to everything means you’re not able to fully pay attention to anything.

This kind of task switching comes with a cost. It’s called [attention residue](#), a term established by [Sophie Leroy](#), a professor at the Bothell School of Business at the University of Washington. [In a 2009 study](#), Dr. Leroy found that if people transition their attention away from an unfinished task, their subsequent task performance will suffer.

For example, if you interrupt writing an email to reply to a text message, it will take time to refocus when you turn your attention back to finishing your email. That little bit of time of adjusting your focus — the residue — compounds throughout the day. As we fragment our attention, fatigue and stress increases, which negatively [affects performance](#).

“You can’t positively adapt to stress if you’re consistently run down,” said [Paula Davis-Laack](#), a stress and resilience expert. “We know that chronic stress is linked to higher rates of errors, safety issues, lack of concentration, working memory problems, and inhibits effective problem-solving and kills attention. For many people, these are critical tools to effectively do their jobs, and rates of errors and safety issues impact a wide range of industries where precision is critical.”

Besides compromising your ability to be an effective worker, “being available to everyone at all times is exhausting,” said Catherine Price, author of “[How to Break Up With Your Phone](#)” and the founder of [Screen/Life Balance](#), a movement dedicated to helping people create a healthier balance between their online and offline lives. “We need to intentionally make ourselves unavailable to preserve our own sanity.”

You’ll be calmer

Ms. Price suggests trying to be unreachable for short periods of time, but she cautions you might feel twitchy and anxious at first.

“Those are withdrawal symptoms,” she said. “Stick with it, and within a surprisingly short amount of time, the anxiety is likely to shift to a pleasant sense of calm.”

She doesn’t think or expect people to ditch their phones entirely — “that would be very impractical and unrealistic” — but she does recommend experimenting with taking a 24-hour break once in a while. Yes, she emphasizes, it is possible to do. It just requires some advance planning.

At the very least, she said, start leaving your phone behind during certain periods of the day, and perhaps establishing no-phone zones in your house or workplace. Treat it as an experiment: Try things and see what makes you feel good, she said.

You’ll be more creative

A still mind is fertile ground for creative thoughts. Being unstimulated gives the brain a chance to explore ideas and create new connections that can break through into our conscious awareness, Dr. Rock explained. That’s why we tend to get so many good ideas as we wake up or take a shower — the brain is usually a blank slate while sudsing up.

“Our ‘Aha moments’ are literally quiet brain signals,” said Dr. Rock. To facilitate more flashes of inspiration, make space for these serene moments. Being “always on” and jam-packing your schedule with demanding cognitive tasks impedes the number of big ideas you’ll be able to create. Those bright, bold ideas are the ones that motivate us and can feel the most rewarding.

If you want to think deeply or have any sort of creative insight, you must give your brain breathing room, Ms. Price added. It’s not wise to always be in “intake mode,” which is what can happen when mindlessly scrolling through emails and social media feeds. To form long-term memories, you need to create new pathways in the brain, a process easily disrupted by distraction, Ms. Price said. Sadly, our smartphones are built to distract us.

You’ll be more productive

Ms. Davis-Laack said she wishes workplaces were more accepting of this need to unplug occasionally.

“Working to the extreme is often seen as a badge of honor at work and is highly rewarded,” she said. “Organizations bear a lot of the burden to examine values, process and cultural issues generally that support the inability to disconnect, recharge and recover.”

“We have literally become addicted to doing stuff all the time, and think that downtime is laziness or somehow a missed opportunity to get ahead,” Ms. Davis-Laack said. “Organizations reward this, so it’s reinforced.” Unfortunately, it’s up to us individually to put those boundaries in place.

For optimal productivity, Dr. Rock suggests focusing intensely for around 45 minutes and then indulging in a 15-minute break. The brain is not a muscle, he said, but it does need to rest and replenish like a muscle does.

He also recommends taking a brief [nap](#) in the afternoon, which has tremendous cognitive benefits.

“You wouldn’t expect someone to do a physical task like chop wood for hours on end with no break,” he said. “It’s similar with the brain.”

NY TIMES: Why You Procrastinate (It Has Nothing to Do With Self-Control)

If procrastination isn't about laziness, then what is it about?

By, Charlotte Lieberman

March 25, 2019

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/25/smarter-living/why-you-procrastinate-it-has-nothing-to-do-with-self-control.html>

If you've ever put off an important task by, say, alphabetizing your spice drawer, you know it wouldn't be fair to describe yourself as lazy.

After all, alphabetizing requires focus and effort — and hey, maybe you even went the extra mile to wipe down each bottle before putting it back. And it's not like you're hanging out with friends or watching Netflix. You're cleaning — something your parents would be proud of! This isn't laziness or bad time management. This is procrastination.

If procrastination isn't about laziness, then what is it about?

Etymologically, "procrastination" is derived from the Latin verb *procrastinare* — to put off until tomorrow. But it's more than just voluntarily delaying. Procrastination is also derived from the ancient Greek word *akrasia* — doing something against our better judgment.

"It's self-harm," said Dr. Piers Steel, a professor of motivational psychology at the University of Calgary and the author of "The Procrastination Equation: How to Stop Putting Things Off and Start Getting Stuff Done."

That self-awareness is a key part of why procrastinating makes us feel so rotten. When we procrastinate, we're not only aware that we're avoiding the task in question, but also that doing so is probably a bad idea. And yet, we do it anyway.

"This is why we say that procrastination is essentially irrational," said Dr. Fuschia Sirois, professor of psychology at the University of Sheffield. "It doesn't make sense to do something you know is going to have negative consequences."

She added: "People engage in this irrational cycle of chronic procrastination because of an inability to manage negative moods around a task."

NALP 2019 Conference, San Diego

GET ORGANIZED: TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES THAT WORK

Wait. We procrastinate because of bad moods?

In short: yes.

Procrastination isn't a unique character flaw or a mysterious curse on your ability to manage time, but a way of coping with challenging emotions and negative moods induced by certain tasks — boredom, anxiety, insecurity, frustration, resentment, self-doubt and beyond.

“Procrastination is an emotion regulation problem, not a time management problem,” said Dr. Tim Pychyl, professor of psychology and member of the Procrastination Research Group at Carleton University in Ottawa.

[In a 2013 study](#), Dr. Pychyl and Dr. Sirois found that procrastination can be understood as “the primacy of short-term mood repair ... over the longer-term pursuit of intended actions.” Put simply, procrastination is about being more focused on “the immediate urgency of managing negative moods” than getting on with the task, Dr. Sirois said.

The particular nature of our aversion depends on the given task or situation. It may be due to something inherently unpleasant about the task itself — having to clean a dirty bathroom or organizing a long, boring spreadsheet for your boss. But it might also result from deeper feelings related to the task, such as self-doubt, low self-esteem, anxiety or insecurity. Staring at a blank document, you might be thinking, *I'm not smart enough to write this. Even if I am, what will people think of it? Writing is so hard. What if I do a bad job?*

All of this can lead us to think that putting the document aside and cleaning that spice drawer instead is a pretty good idea.

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But, of course, this only compounds the negative associations we have with the task, and those feelings will still be there whenever we come back to it, along with increased [stress and anxiety](#), feelings of [low self-esteem](#) and [self-blame](#).

In fact, there's an entire body of research dedicated to the ruminative, self-blaming thoughts many of us tend to have in the wake of procrastination, which are known as “[procrastinatory cognitions](#).” The thoughts we have about procrastination typically exacerbate our distress and stress, which contribute to further procrastination, Dr. Sirois said.

But the momentary relief we feel when procrastinating is actually what makes the cycle especially vicious. In the immediate present, putting off a task provides relief — “you've been rewarded for procrastinating,” Dr. Sirois said. And we know from basic behaviorism that when we're rewarded for something, we tend to do it again. This is

precisely why procrastination tends not to be a one-off behavior, but a cycle, one that easily becomes a chronic habit.

Over time, chronic procrastination has not only productivity costs, but measurably destructive effects on our mental and physical health, including [chronic stress](#), general [psychological distress and low life satisfaction](#), [symptoms of depression](#) and [anxiety](#), [poor health behaviors](#), [chronic illness](#) and even [hypertension and cardiovascular disease](#).

But I thought we procrastinate to feel better?

If it seems ironic that we procrastinate to avoid negative feelings, but end up feeling even worse, that's because it is. And once again, we have evolution to thank.

Procrastination is a perfect example of *present bias*, our hard-wired tendency to prioritize short-term needs ahead of long-term ones.

“We really weren’t designed to think ahead into the further future because we needed to focus on providing for ourselves in the here and now,” said psychologist Dr. Hal Hershfield, a professor of marketing at the U.C.L.A. Anderson School of Management.

[Dr. Hershfield’s research](#) has shown that, on a neural level, we perceive our “future selves” more like strangers than as parts of ourselves. When we procrastinate, parts of our brains actually think that the tasks we’re putting off — and the accompanying negative feelings that await us on the other side — are somebody else’s problem.

To make things worse, we’re even less able to make thoughtful, future-oriented decisions in the midst of stress. When faced with a task that makes us feel anxious or insecure, the amygdala — the “threat detector” part of the brain — perceives that task as a genuine threat, in this case to our self-esteem or well-being. Even if we intellectually recognize that putting off the task will create more stress for ourselves in the future, our brains are still wired to be more concerned with removing the threat in the present. Researchers call this “amygdala hijack.”

Unfortunately, we can’t just tell ourselves to stop procrastinating. And despite the prevalence of “productivity hacks,” focusing on the question of how to get more work done doesn’t address the root cause of procrastination.

O.K. How do we get to the root cause of procrastination?

We must realize that, at its core, procrastination is about emotions, not productivity. The solution doesn’t involve downloading a time management app or learning new strategies for self-control. It has to do with managing our emotions in a new way.

“Our brains are always looking for relative rewards. If we have a habit loop around procrastination but we haven’t found a better reward, our brain is just going to keep doing it over and over until we give it something better to do,” said psychiatrist and neuroscientist Dr. Judson Brewer, Director of Research and Innovation at Brown University’s Mindfulness Center.

To rewire any habit, we have to give our brains what Dr. Brewer called the “Bigger Better Offer” or “B.B.O.”

In the case of procrastination, we have to find a better reward than avoidance — one that can relieve our challenging feelings in the present moment without causing harm to our future selves. The difficulty with breaking the addiction to procrastination in particular is that there is an infinite number of potential substitute actions that would still be forms of procrastination, Dr. Brewer said. That’s why the solution must therefore be internal, and not dependent on anything but ourselves.

One option is to forgive yourself in the moments you procrastinate. In [a 2010 study](#), researchers found that students who were able to forgive themselves for procrastinating when studying for a first exam ended up procrastinating less when studying for their next exam. They concluded that self-forgiveness supported productivity by allowing “the individual to move past their maladaptive behavior and focus on the upcoming examination without the burden of past acts.”

Feeding ourselves with kindness and understanding in the face of our mistakes and failures. In [a 2012 study](#) examining the relationship between stress, self-compassion and procrastination, Dr. Sirois found that procrastinators tend to have high stress and low self-compassion, suggesting that self-compassion provides “a buffer against negative reactions to self-relevant events.”

In fact, several studies show that self-compassion supports motivation and personal growth. Not only does it [decrease psychological distress](#), which we now know is a primary culprit for procrastination, it also actively [boosts motivation](#), [enhances feelings of self-worth](#) and fosters [positive emotions](#) like optimism, wisdom, curiosity and personal initiative. Best of all, self-compassion doesn’t require anything external — just a commitment to meeting your challenges with greater acceptance and kindness rather than rumination and regret.

That may be easier said than done, but try to reframe the task by considering a positive aspect of it. Perhaps you remind yourself of a time you did something similar and it turned out O.K. Or maybe you think about the beneficial outcome of completing the task. What might your boss or partner say when you show them your finished work? How will you feel about yourself?

What are some other, healthier ways to manage the feelings that typically trigger procrastination?

Cultivate curiosity: If you're feeling tempted to procrastinate, bring your attention to the sensations arising in your mind and body. What feelings are eliciting your temptation? Where do you feel them in your body? What do they remind you of? What happens to the thought of procrastinating as you observe it? Does it intensify? Dissipate? Cause other emotions to arise? How are the sensations in your body shifting as you continue to rest your awareness on them?

Consider the next action: This is different than the age-old advice to break up a task you're tempted to avoid into bite-sized chunks. According to Dr. Pychyl, focusing only on the "next action" helps calm our nerves, and it allows for what Dr. Pychyl called "a layer of self-deception." At the start of a given task, you can consider the next action as a mere possibility, as if you were method acting: "What's the next action I'd take on this if I were going to do it, even though I'm not?" Maybe you *would* open your email. Or perhaps you *would* put the date at the top of your document. Don't wait to be in the mood to do a certain task. "Motivation follows action. Get started, and you'll find your motivation follows," Dr. Pychyl said.

Make your temptations more inconvenient: It's still easier to change our circumstances than ourselves, said Gretchen Rubin, author of "Better Than Before: What I Learned About Making and Breaking Habits." According to Ms. Rubin, we can take what we know about procrastination and "use it to our advantage" by placing obstacles between ourselves and our temptations to induce a certain degree of frustration or anxiety. If you compulsively check social media, delete those apps from your phone or "give yourself a really complicated password with not just five digits, but 12," Ms. Rubin said. By doing this, you're adding friction to the procrastination cycle and making the reward value of your temptation less immediate.

On the other side of the coin, Ms. Rubin also suggested that we make the things we want to do as easy as possible for ourselves. If you want to go to the gym before work but you're not a morning person, sleep in your exercise clothes. "Try to remove every, every, every roadblock," Ms. Rubin said.

Still, procrastination is deeply existential, as it raises questions about individual agency and how we want to spend our time as opposed to how we actually do. But it's also a reminder of our commonality — we're all vulnerable to painful feelings, and most of us just want to be happy with the choices we make.

Now go finish up alphabetizing that spice drawer before it becomes your next procrastination albatross.

Correction: March 25, 2019

An earlier version of this article incorrectly referred to the university at which Judson Brewer is employed.

