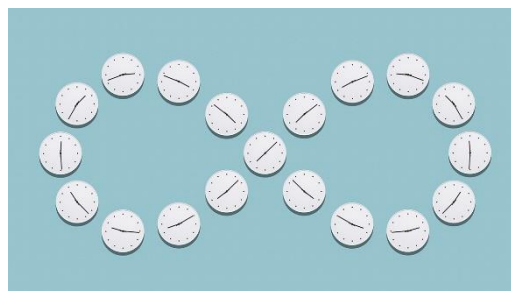


Productivity Skills to Help You Gain Time Back

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By [Steve Glaveski](#), April 07, 2020

We're all busy — so busy. We have bills to pay, a mortgage to service, kids to take care of, and of course, work deadlines to meet. All of these commitments leave us with little meaningful time for ourselves, and for cultivating meaningful relationships with others. But the good news is: When we say we're time-poor, what we really mean is that we're decision-poor. And that's something we can change.



Most of us are incredibly careful about how we spend our money. But when it comes to our time, we hardly give it a second thought. We say yes to all sorts of nonsensical requests for our time; we treat everything as urgent; we attend pointless meetings; we refuse to delegate work for fear that quality will be compromised; we spend our days tethered to our inboxes and our smartphones; and we stubbornly continue to perform tasks that a machine could do for us.

Unlike money though, time can't be earned back.

It's easy to derive a sense of identity or status from the hustle, but what's it ultimately for? As palliative care nurse Bronnie Ware noted in her book, [The Top Five Regrets of the Dying](#), one of the biggest regrets that people had on their deathbeds was that they'd worked too hard.

Design the work you want.

Step one toward joining the new rich — those who use their time wisely, and thus have the luxury of more free time — is believing in the paradox that we can actually get *more* done in *less* time, as I wrote in "[The Case for the 6-Hour Workday](#)." Refusing to believe this is to resign yourself to a life of staring at screens for [eleven hours a day](#). It's your choice.

If you choose to take back your time, here's how to get started:

1. Automate

Nowadays, all kinds of tasks can be automated. Sadly, too few entrepreneurs and business executives are taking advantage of the multitude of affordable and simple, yet effective, tools on the market.

Here's a non-exhaustive snapshot of what can be automated:

- Legal: Data mining, contract review
- Sales: Lead generation, lead nurturing, proposal development, meeting preparation, customer intelligence, competitor intelligence
- Marketing: Email templates and marketing content syndication, content repurposing, content distribution
- IT: Data backups, network management, PC maintenance, account creation, file transfers, data extraction
- HR: Payroll scheduling, candidate recruiting
- Development/programming: Scripts to copy files and perform repetitive actions, the optimization of images
- Customer support: Surveys and questionnaires, customer inquiries

Tools you can start using today:

- Workflow management: Zapier.com, IFTTT.com
- Posting to social media: Buffer and HootSuite
- Appointment scheduling: Calendly.com
- Repurposing content: Repurpose.io

2. Outsource

Process-oriented tasks that can't be automated should at the very least be delegated or outsourced. If it's a low-risk, repeatable, non-complex task that somebody else can do for you at fraction of what your hourly rate is, why are you still doing it?

In an [episode](#) of the popular Joe Rogan Experience podcast, AngelList founder Naval Ravikant suggested setting an aspirational hourly rate for yourself and sticking to it. “Never do anything with your time for less than that amount — whether it’s attending a meeting or returning a package from Amazon...If I have to return something, and it costs less than my personal hourly rate, I’ll give it away.”

Having worked with hundreds of entrepreneurs, I often show them the table below, created by author Perry Marshall, and ask, “What percentage of your time do you spend on \$10-an-hour tasks?”

Is Your Work Worth \$10 an Hour or \$10,000 an Hour?

How are you really spending your time?

\$10 per hour tasks	\$100 per hour tasks	\$1,000 per hour tasks	\$10,000 per hour tasks
Running errands	Solving a problem for a prospective or existing customer	Planning and prioritizing your day	Improving your unique selling proposition
Talking to unqualified prospects	Talking to a qualified prospect	Negotiating with a qualified prospect	Creating new and better offers
Cold-calling	Writing an email to prospects or customers	Building your sales funnel	Repositioning your message and position
Building and fixing stuff on your website	Creating marketing tests and experiments	Judging marketing tests and experiments	Executing “bolt from the blue” brilliant ideas
Doing expense reports	Managing pay-per-click campaigns	Creating pay-per-click campaigns	Negotiating major deals
Working “social media” the way most people do	Doing social media well (this is rare)	Doing social media with extreme competence (this is very rare)	Selling to high-value customers and groups
Cleaning, sorting	Outsourcing simple tasks	Delegating complex tasks	Selecting team members
Attending meetings	Customer follow up	Writing sales copy	Public speaking

Source: “80/20 Sales and Marketing,” by Perry Marshall

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“About half my time” is the usual response. When I press people to outsource, they respond without a hint of irony: “I don’t have time to do that!”

You have to spend time to make time, but like compound interest, in the long-term, you will save exponentially more time than you invest.

“But it only takes me a few minutes a day to do it!” Even a task that takes you 5 minutes a day, 5 times a day, adds up to 15 workdays per year, not even accounting for the cognitive switching costs.

To outsource more low-value tasks, try tools such as:

- Day-to-day errands: GetMagic.com, TaskRabbit.com
- Creative tasks and virtual assistants: Upwork.com, Freelancer.com

3. Use asynchronous communication

“It’s a necessary evil.” These were the words of a former manager of mine at a leading Australian bank. I had asked why 12 people had to be present for periodic three-hours-long meeting when 10 of them each had no more than five minutes of worthwhile contributions to make. It wasn’t a necessary evil, it was just inefficient and unproductive.

This lack of ownership, and tendency to outsource accountability by way of multi-person, multi-hours-long meetings and reply-all email trails leaves company productivity stagnant and employee morale low. A better approach is the “I’ll get to it when it suits me” philosophy that is at the core of asynchronous communication. The reality is that most things don’t require an immediate response, and that meetings shouldn’t be used merely to communicate information; we have email and instant messaging for that. If a discussion is warranted, then try scheduling shorter meetings, in 15- or 30-minute increments, instead of the obligatory hour which is still the default at most organizations today. And if it’s not necessary to have a meeting (it’s usually not), try one of these asynchronous communication tools:

- Instant message: Slack, Facebook Workplace, Microsoft Teams
- Project management: Asana, Trello, Basecamp, Airtable

- Pausing email and websites: Inbox Pause, Blocksite

4. Stop treating all decisions like big decisions

It's hard to talk about asynchronous communication without referring to what Amazon's Jeff Bezos calls [Type 1 and Type 2 decisions](#): Type 1 decisions are big, hairy, irreversible, and high-stakes. Type 2 decisions are reversible. If you screw up, you can make amends without too much, if any, harm having been caused.

Most of our decisions are Type 2 decisions, and they should be made quickly. The fewer decisions that are treated as Type 1 decisions, the less time will get eaten up with meetings and communications.

5. Try task bundling

Multi-tasking is a myth, and [task-switching leaves us unproductive and exhausted](#), but that doesn't mean that we can't bundle tasks.

Katherine Milkman, a behavioral economist at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, coined the term "[temptation bundling](#)." It refers to bundling things you want to do with things you need to do, to help you build positive habits.

Let's say my physiotherapist asked me to incorporate 30 minutes of mobility training into my day, three times a week. I could do this in isolation, or I could combine it with something I want to do like watching a documentary on YouTube, or even taking a call on speaker.

By making fewer excuses, and investing the time required to design our work and personal lives, not only can we join the new rich, but we can cultivate a more meaningful and less regrettable life. As Roman Stoic philosopher [Seneca put it](#), "Life is long if you know how to use it."