50 Tricks to Get Things Done Faster, Better, and More Easily

Part 1

By Dustin Wax

We all want to get stuff done, whether it's the work we have to do so we can get on with what we want to do, or indeed, the projects we feel are our purpose in life. To that end, here's a collection of 50 hacks, tips, tricks, and mnemonic devices I've collected that can help you work better.

1. **Most Important Tasks (MITs):** At the start of each day (or the night before) highlight the three or four most important things you have to do in the coming day. Do them first. If you get nothing else accomplished aside from your MITs, you've still had a pretty productive day.
2. **Big Rocks:** The big projects you're working on at any given moment. Set aside time every day or week to move your big rocks forward.
3. **Inbox Zero:** Decide what to do with every email you get, the moment you read it. If there's something you need to do, either do it or add it to your todo list and delete or file the email. If it's something you need for reference, file it. Empty your email inbox every day.
4. **Wake up earlier:** Add a productive hour to your day by getting up an hour earlier — before everyone else starts imposing on your time.
5. **One In, One Out:** Avoid clutter by adopting a replacement-only standard. Every time you but something new, you throw out or donate something old. For example, you buy a new shirt, you get rid of an old one. (Variation: One in, Two Out — useful when you begin to feel overwhelmed by your possessions.)
6. **Brainstorming:** The act of generating dozens of ideas without editing or censoring yourself. Lots of people use mindmaps for this: stick the thing you want to think about in the middle (a problem you need to solve, a theme you want to write about, etc.) and start writing whatever you think of. Build off of each of the sub-topics, and each of their sub-topics. Don't worry about whether the ideas are good or not – you don't have to follow through on them, just get them out of your head. After a while, you'll start surprising yourself with really creative concepts.
7. **Ubiquitous Capture:** Always carry something to take notes with — a pen and paper, a PDA, a stack of index cards. Capture every thought that comes into your mind, whether it's an idea for a project you'd like to do, an appointment you need to make, something you need to pick up next time you're at the store, whatever. Review it regularly and transfer everything to where it belongs: a todo list, a filing system, a journal, etc.
8. **Get more sleep:** Sleep is essential to health, learning, and awareness. Research shows the body goes through a complete sleep cycle in about 90 minutes, so napping for less than that doesn't have the same effect that real sleep does (although it does make you feel better). Get 8 hours a night, at least. Learn to see sleep as a pleasure, not a necessary evil or a luxury.
9. **10+2*5:** Work in short spurts of 10 minutes, interrupted by 2 minute breaks. Use a timer. Do this 5 times an hour to stay on target without over-taxing your physical and mental resources. Spend those 2 minutes getting a drink, going to the bathroom, or staring out a window.
10. **SMART goals:** A rubric for creating and pursuing your goals, helping to avoid setting goals that are simply unattainable. Stands for: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely.

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