

# 51 Ways to Boost Your Productivity...

*So You Can Grow Your Business, Reduce Your Stress  
& Have More Free Time*



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Clear. Powerful. Action.



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If you're feeling busy—over even completely overwhelmed—but not productive, then you're likely among the thousands of professionals who are suffering from disorganization, poor time management, information overload, and the absence of trusted systems and processes to help you achieve more in your workday.



While it may seem at times as if there is no way to “get everything done,” there are in fact proven productivity strategies that can help you take back control.

***Here are 51 things you can do starting today to improve your productivity:***

1. Use an electronic task list to capture ALL of your action items. Avoid using paper, as you'll waste time rewriting your list each time your priorities change.
  
2. Get everything out of your way that you don't need, use, want or love. Look around your office and question everything. Only keep what is useful to you.
  
3. Make time *the day after* a networking or professional development event to enter business card information into your contact management system. Take care of any follow-up actions right away or capture them on your task list.
  
4. Put items on the extra chairs in your office to deter unscheduled visitors from planting themselves there for an undetermined amount of time. Or, if need be, remove the extra chairs from your office altogether.
  
5. Don't multi-task. Your brain can only focus on one thing at a time in order to do it well. If a new action item pops up, take note of it in your task management system and stick with your current task. If the new task is of a higher priority, be sure to document where you are leaving off on the current activity.
  
6. When a "long talker" enters your office and you don't have time for a leisurely conversation, get up from your chair and say, "let's walk and talk." Walk the person right out of your office and down the hall so you can get more coffee or grab something from the copier. Then walk them back to *their* office if it's close by. Most importantly, return to your office alone.

7. Delegate the data entry from business cards to an intern or assistant or use a product like CardScan or Neat Business Cards to automate entry.
  
8. If you think you need at least 30 minutes or more to accomplish a priority task or series of tasks, schedule uninterrupted time on your calendar at your most productive time of day. Better yet: block uninterrupted time in both the morning and the afternoon every day.
  
9. Set your e-mail system to toss Deleted Items when you power down at the end of the day or, if you don't power down, make it a point to empty the folder at the end of each day. Your *Deleted Items* folder is not meant to be a reference file or a safety net!
  
10. Delegate effectively. Spend time with the person to whom you're delegating and clearly outline expected outcomes. Define what needs to be done and the deadlines. Allow for questions and check for understanding. Meet periodically to see if the person is on target and course correct where necessary. Praise a job well done.
  
11. File electronic documents by major themes or categories. Categories may be departments, areas of responsibility, initiatives, projects or programs. Then look for opportunities to set up sub-folders within the larger category folders for further ease of finding and filing documents.
  
12. Only put items on your calendar which are day *and* time specific. Put everything else on your task list.

13. Minimize interruptions by working from home, using a conference room in the office or simply closing your office door. Let people know that unless there's a true emergency you do not wish to be disturbed.

14. Save questions and dialog for meetings rather than interrupting others—and in turn getting caught up in idle conversations—throughout the day. Barring any major deadlines or emergencies, most things can wait.

15. Start every item on your task list with an active verb, such as: call, read, e-mail, write, buy, draft, review, update, research, etc.

16. DON'T leave your e-mail in the Inbox! An Inbox is for *bringing e-mail IN*, not for use as a file cabinet or to-do list.

17. Before putting an item on *your* to-do list, determine if *you* really have to do the task or if someone else is better suited to do it, would like to do it or would learn from doing it.

18. Overcome the temptation to read everything that crosses your path that looks interesting. Create a list of three to five topics you want to read about and toss everything that doesn't fall into one of those categories.

19. Send out an agenda and handouts at least one week prior to a meeting if you want decisions to be made *at* that meeting. Attendees should be clear on the expectation that materials are to be read before the meeting and that they are to

bring their recommendations or decisions with them for discussion.

20. Always tackle your highest priority items first, even if there are other things you'd rather do.

21. Don't fall into the trap of "I can do it better/faster myself." If you expand the knowledge of your staff, then you can delegate more and have more time to work on higher value items as time goes on.

22. Don't answer the phone just because it rings. If you're in the middle of something, let voicemail or your assistant take the call.

23. Keep your desk clear of clutter by only having documents or files out that are related to the one thing you're working on at that moment.

24. Clearly identify the very next step that must happen on each of your projects. If you're stuck on identifying the specific next step, talk it through with someone else.

25. Turn off e-mail alerts such as chimes, blinking cursors and pop-up boxes. They're so distracting that most people can't help but stop what they're doing to check it out.

26. If you have a file of "pending" or "waiting for" items, then you're kidding yourself into thinking that everyone who was supposed to get back to you

actually will. These items will always turn back into “Action” for YOU. Instead, incorporate these inevitable tasks into your e-task list and ask yourself how long you’re willing to wait before you take action again.

27. Break larger projects into manageable bite-size pieces. Treat each smaller item as a task on your to-do list with a target date for taking action or completing the task.

28. Only keep what you need. The less you have, the less you have to manage. Throw out or delete things that:

- You or others have not looked for or needed in months or years
- You can easily find again online
- You can get from someone else if you ever need it
- Are related to tasks you don't do anymore
- Are expired or outdated
- Are not useful to you

29. If you have multiple years of electronic documents but only need access to the current year, consider archiving older documents or setting up sub-folders by year.

30. If you have a tendency to let meetings or conference calls run over, schedule your commitments back to back to force yourself to keep to the allotted time.

31. For one week, keep track of where your time is going. Compare this to your priorities in order to make adjustments in your time management strategy.

32. Meet with your administrative assistant every morning for 15 minutes to touch base on outstanding tasks, priorities, issues and concerns. If you can't meet in person, at least do it over the phone.

33. Save e-mails you'll need to reference for the long term on your hard drive—not in subfolders under your e-mail Inbox.

34. Don't overload meeting agendas with topics that will not fit into the meeting time frame. If you run out of room on the agenda repeatedly, consider the following:

- Choose fewer topics and pick your priorities carefully
- Use a time-keeper to keep everyone on target with each topic
- Increase the time allotted for each meeting
- Increase the frequency of meetings

35. Keep a label maker in your desk or within reach and use it each time you need to create a new file.

36. Make the most of small chunks of time, such as the 5-, 10- or 15-minute windows of time that appear throughout your day, such as between meetings, while you're waiting for a phone call, before lunch or when you simply need to take a mental break from a thought-intensive project. These windows are ideal for sending a fax, leaving a voicemail, responding to e-mail, filing papers, reviewing your task list or completing a small step in a larger project.

37. Avoid over commitment. Be honest with yourself about how much you can accomplish in a day, week or month. Say “no” to everything else or delegate it.

38. Keep 1:1 meetings brief and to the point, preferably one half hour or less.

39. Finish what you start. Don’t surround yourself with “incompletes” - they can drag you down in a hurry.

40. Avoid back-to-back meetings day after day. Choose to protect or block some time for yourself each day in order to get things done.

41. With every new piece of information—e-mail, snail mail, voicemail, etc.—take 30 seconds to decide what needs to be done with it and where it needs to go. Ask yourself:

- Is this something that can be trashed or deleted?
- Is this something that can be handled in less than two minutes and, if so, do I have time to do it now?
- Does this need to be added to my task list?
- Does this need to be added to my calendar?
- Does this need to be filed for future reference
- Can I find it again if I toss it now and need it later?

42. Eliminate any stackable trays or horizontal filing organizers from your desk as they encourage “piling.”

43. Make sure every item that you've mentally committed to has been captured in your task list or calendar.

44. Keep paper and a pen in places where you do your best thinking so you're able to capture ideas. Then be sure to consolidate these thoughts and actions into your e-task list.

45. Use different color hanging files to help categorize your paper filing system.

46. Don't respond to every e-mail as it comes in. Instead, decide ahead of time how often you will be (1) glancing at e-mail to look for urgent messages and (2) when you will actually be "working" or processing your e-mail, which will take longer and may need to be scheduled for two or three times a day.

47. Maintain your task list daily: update it, add to and delete from it all day in order to ensure your list is always current, up to date and ready to support you at a moment's notice.

48. If you conduct regular staff meetings, review the agenda carefully. Limit items to those that affect the entire group (or at least the majority) and reserve individual topics for the 1:1 meetings.

49. Assign certain types of reading to staff members. Not only will they benefit by learning from the reading, but they can also summarize it for you or your team on a regular basis.

50. Every day you will create new tasks, change existing ones and complete others. Build time throughout the day to review your e-task list to check progress, reprioritize, and delete items that have been completed and plan for the next day/week/month.

51. Learn to say “NO!” Evaluate each task request in terms of if it’s something you *have* to do, *want* to do, or feel “guilted” into doing. Say no to anything that doesn’t move you closer to your goals and objectives.



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- **Work Day Wonders** – a FREE, award-winning e-zine to help you unleash the power of your most productive workday. <http://www.productiveday.com/e-zine>
- **Information Products** by Leslie Shreve: <http://www.productiveday.com/products>
- **Helpful articles**: <http://www.productiveday.com/articles>
- **Join Leslie** on Facebook, Plaxo, LinkedIn and Twitter





## About Leslie

**Leslie Shreve** has been helping business owners, executives and entrepreneurs unleash the power of their most productive work day for more than 7 years. Her clients are able to gain more clarity and control every day, so they can enjoy more freedom, focus and success.



Leslie is the creator of the **Productive Day Success System™**, which teaches highly motivated professionals simple, logical and easy-to-use strategies for managing tasks, time, e-mail, paper, files and electronic documents. In particular, Leslie specializes in **teaching professionals how to maximize Microsoft Outlook®** so they can get more accomplished in less time with less stress.

Leslie is a sought-after expert appearing frequently on **TV and radio**, in leading business publications and at national conferences. She has been interviewed by WBAL-TV, WMAR-TV and Maryland Public Television, is a contributing editor to *SmartCEO* magazine, and has written tips and articles for the *Baltimore Business Journal*. In addition, her expertise was featured in the book, *"The Power of Slow: 101 Ways to Save Time in Our 24/7 World."*

Leslie is also the author of [Work Day Wonders](#) a FREE twice monthly e-zine to help professionals establish systems and processes to support them so they can reduce stress, make serious progress and boost success.

For more than 15 years, Leslie worked in corporate office environments before establishing Productive Day in 2003. Leslie has a Bachelor of Science in Business from the University of Mary Washington in Virginia and in 2007 she was recognized as one of Maryland's Top 100 Minority Business Enterprises.

**To learn more about how Leslie can help you put your day  
on *cruise control* at peak productivity  
e-mail her at [leslie@productiveday.com](mailto:leslie@productiveday.com).**