

Work Smarter—Not Harder

Reclaim your time and energy to live your best life

Each of us has just 168 hours per week to accomplish our tasks and goals—at work, at home and out in the world. If you feel like you spend too much of that time on things that don't add value to your life, you're not alone.

The good news: It's easier than ever to generate stronger results, both personally and professionally, while actually making less effort.

The key: Work smarter, not harder, by taking steps that can make you significantly more efficient and effective—freeing up precious hours each day that you can reclaim to live a better life.

So says Ari Meisel, founder of Less Doing and a world-renowned productivity consultant to businesses and individuals. Meisel highlights a three-part framework of optimizing, automating and outsourcing to achieve better results faster.

OPTIMIZE: Streamline how you do your tasks

Break down any task to its bare minimum and eliminate any step that's not necessary. The goal is to take the smallest number of actions that will produce your desired outcome.

Optimizing your time, energy and resources requires you to take two actions:

1. Identify your current patterns. Start by tracking habitual tasks or behaviors that you're interested in changing or getting rid of—what you're working on, how long those tasks take, how many things you are doing at once, etc. Assigning data to your daily routine shows you where you can improve.

You can track behaviors and time in a journal or notebook, or use technology. There are apps that track your time, that automatically tell you if you're headed toward a traffic jam, that track your spending and net worth—practically anything!

2. Implement the 80/20 rule in all you do. Typically, only about 20 percent of your actions drive 80 percent of your results. Once you identify the steps you take to complete various tasks, you can focus on doing the 20 percent that really have an impact—and jettison or reorganize the other 80 percent. Some examples:

- **Emails:** Set a filter to immediately file every email with the word “unsubscribe” in it to an optional folder. This move makes your inbox a place for productivity and getting things done. Later, you can fly through the unessential emails much faster when you address them at a time of your choosing.
- **Clients:** It's likely in business that about 20 percent of your clients account for about 80 percent of your revenue. Once you've tracked your client base and know which ones make up that 20 percent, focus the bulk of your time on them.

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NEXT STEPS

AUTOMATE: Set it and forget it

Once you've streamlined tasks, automate all you possibly can. Examine all the bite-size tasks left over after optimizing and determine how they can be accomplished without human interaction.

Example: There are lots of ways to automate activities around the house to save time, such as the subscription services offered by online retailers. You can, for example, arrange to automatically purchase many of the items you regularly need and have them mailed to you every few weeks or months. Once you've automated such tasks—"set it"—you can then "forget it" and spend your time focused on things that are more productive, fun or both.

Likewise, tech-enabled appliances can make mundane tasks such as grocery shopping more automated. One example: Smart refrigerators often come with super-wide-angle cameras mounted inside the fridge—allowing you to see your inventory from your smartphone while you're at the grocery store.

Bonus: Automating tasks not only frees up time and mental energy, but also helps to ensure you make fewer mistakes. If you automate actions that need to be taken, you can greatly lower the risk of frustrating human errors—such as not paying an important bill.

OUTSOURCE: Take it off your plate

Can't automate it? Pass it off to someone else.

Outsourcing means delegating—which can require a big mental shift if you believe you're the only person in your life capable of performing certain tasks and that your fingerprints must be on virtually every activity within your company (or department or family). But remember: You want to focus on the 20 percent of your actions that yield 80 percent of the results. Taking the bulk of your daily tasks off your plate can free up the time and energy to do so.

One great way to outsource: Hire a virtual assistant to perform tasks, do research into topics you need to know more about and so on. A virtual assistant can make a dinner reservation or doctor's appointment, find and send the perfect gift, gather information and medical reports on a health condition a family member is experiencing, and even manage projects (on the high end).

Example: You're lying in bed at the end of the day, when you suddenly remember that you need to make an appointment to see the dentist. So you alert your virtual assistant. He or she is obviously not going to make the appointment immediately, at 11 p.m. But the fact is, you are done as soon as you send that request—done worrying about it, thinking about it and even doing it. All you have to do is show up.

Best advice: Start small, on tasks that you feel aren't mission-critical. A few good outsourcing experiences may very well encourage you to farm out bigger tasks that free up serious extra time and energy.

Conclusion

Your time is a rare and valuable resource—so start using it to your full advantage. These three strategies can help you do tasks more efficiently or eliminate them entirely, leaving you with more bandwidth to focus on building a great life for yourself and the people you care about most.

OPTIMIZE | AUTOMATE | OUTSOURCE

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