The Science of Productivity and Performance in Our Busy, Always-On World

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Today, We Can Work:

Anytime

Anywhere

On Any Device

With Anyone
Yet We Struggle to Get Things Done More than Ever Before
Our Productivity Has Been Hijacked

- Constant Interruptions
- Excessive Email/Communications
- Unproductive Meetings
An Alarming, Deteriorating Reality

3.5 hours or less
Portion of workday that is considered focused and productive

90 seconds
Average amount of time between knowledge worker interruptions

ATLASSIAN

UC IRVINE
How Did We Get Here?

(WHAT CHANGED AND WHAT DID NOT)
The Nature of Work Radically Shifted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-1990s</th>
<th>Post-2000s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNICATION</strong></td>
<td>In-Person</td>
<td>Email/Slack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WORK HOURS</strong></td>
<td>9-5</td>
<td>24/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OFFICES</strong></td>
<td>Cubicles</td>
<td>Open Floor Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TEAMS</strong></td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Global</td>
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</table>
But Human Brains Did Not...
We Need to Stop Fighting and Work in Line With Our Biology
What to Expect Today

- 6 biggest mistakes of WFH
- The scientific reasons behind WHY people commonly make those mistakes and what to do instead
Muddled Associations
Our behavior is driven by our neural networks
Stimulus → Neural Activation → Behavior
Home Associations are At Odds With Work
1. Design Cognitive Associations

The Ideal Set Up?

- Dedicated workspace in a separate or private area
1. Design Cognitive Associations

The Ideal Set Up?

- Dedicated workspace in a separate or private area

No Space?

- Use a physical/sensory trigger to automatically enter Focus mode
  - Music
  - Candle
  - Table cloth
  - Clothes
  - Beverage / mug
1. Design Cognitive Associations

Have a Trigger to Turn Off

- Ramp down music
- Mug / beverage
- Consistent sleep position
MISTAKE #2

Poor Hygiene
You are hard-wired to constantly scan your environment
Visual Distractions Reduce Productivity and Increase Cortisol

Constant faces and movement

All potentially relevant
STUDIES

Auditory Distractions Make You Slower

Background noise (especially intelligible speech) $\rightarrow$ up to 10% performance decrement
Auditory Distractions Make You Slower

Background noise (especially intelligible speech) → up to 10% performance decrement
2. Protect Your Sensory Systems

Visual

- Create a visual barrier / wall
2. Protect Your Sensory Systems

Visual

- Create a visual barrier / wall
- Turn toward a wall / away from foot traffic
- Close your eyes
- Hide “Self View”
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Auditory
- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Music with no lyrics or lyrics you don’t understand
Now for the biggest drain...
Cognitive Capacity vs. Phone Location
Cognitive Capacity vs. Phone Location

“The mere presence of a smartphone reduces brain power, even if it’s turned over and even if it’s off.”
Being a Passenger
We are wired to seek reward and avoid pain
Slow Dopamine
Slow Dopamine  Fast Dopamine
MITs → Slow Dopamine

LITs → Fast Dopamine
“What is your unique contribution?”
3. Focus on Contribution

Most Impactful

- Prioritize your MITs (maximum 1-3) each day
- Avoid procrastination and accelerate execution by making MITs look like LITs
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Most Impactful
- Prioritize your MITs (maximum 1-3) each day
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Quick Win
- Know and ruthlessly de-prioritize your LITs
MISTAKE #4

Constant Expenditure
The hours of the day are not equal
## Biological Chronotypes

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<tr>
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![Average Energy Level vs. Hour of Day](chart.png)
Mychronotype.com

Code: gobears
4. Strategically Design Your Day

Most Impactful

- Protect your 1 of your Peak Performance Hours for strategic, cognitively intensive, high-value work
- Take periodic, brain breaks to regain energy and motivation
Ultradian Rhythms

Source: Basic rest-activity cycle (Kleitman, 1982)
4. Strategically Design Your Day

Most Impactful

- Protect 1 of your Peak Performance Hours for strategic, cognitively intensive, high-value work
- Take periodic, “cognitive” breaks to regain energy and motivation

Quick Wins

- Schedule an email or administrative sprint during a low-energy period of the day
Intense Exercise Does Not Reverse the Negative Impacts of Chronic Sitting
MISTAKE #5

Excessive Task-Switching
You pay a fine for every small switch
“Multitasking” = Task-Switching

Switch Cost

Task A Task B Task A Task B

Task A Task B

Time
5. Minimize Switch Cost

Most Impactful

- Mono-task on one task or project at a time (i.e. Focus Sprint)
5. Minimize Switch Cost

Most Impactful

● Mono-task on one task or project at a time (i.e. Focus Sprint)

Quick Wins

● Maximize your screen / close out of email when you’re working
5. Minimize Switch Cost

Most Impactful
- Mono-task on one task or project at a time (i.e. Focus Sprint)

Quick Wins
- Maximize your screen / close out of email when you’re working
- Interruptive ideas → record them in “Parking Lot”
5. Minimize Switch Cost

Most Impactful
- Mono-task on one task or project at a time (i.e. Focus Sprint)

Quick Wins
- Maximize your screen / close out of email when you’re working
- Interruptive ideas → record them in “Parking Lot”
- Tab hoarding → create “Active” and “Passive” windows for tabs
Focus Sprint

THE SINGLE HIGHEST ROI PRODUCTIVITY METHOD
Focus Sprint

1. Set aside an hour block in the calendar
Focus Sprint

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2. Write down what you aim to accomplish
Focus Sprint

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3. Eliminate distractions
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4. Focus for 50 minutes using a timer
Focus Sprint

1. Set aside an hour block in the calendar
2. Write down what you aim to accomplish
3. Eliminate distractions
4. Focus for 50 minutes using a timer
5. Take a brain break
Outcomes Within 2 Weeks

26% greater individual productivity
MISTAKE #6

Always Being Connected
We are afraid of letting down our pack
“If people can’t see me, how will they know I am working?”
Remote/Flexible Work Leads to Hyper-Responsiveness

- The freedom to choose when and where one works typically leads to perpetual presenteeism (i.e. hyper-responsiveness) out of obligation
Embrace “asynchronous” communication
6. Combat Constant Connectivity

Most Impactful

- Create an urgent line for others or enable VIP notifications
6. Combat Constant Connectivity

Most Impactful

- Create an urgent line for others

Quick Win

- Batch process your responses to email/chat (e.g. every 30 or 60 minutes)
Email “Batchers” Report Greater Productivity and Lower Cortisol

- People who primarily check email through self-interruptions report higher productivity compared to those who rely on notifications.
- The less daily time spent on email, the lower measured stress.
1. Set MITs at start of the day
IF YOU WANT TO BE 25+% MORE PRODUCTIVE

1. Set MITs at start of the day
2. Clean up digital hygiene
IF YOU WANT TO BE 25+% MORE PRODUCTIVE

1. Set MITs at start of the day
2. Clean up digital hygiene
3. Focus Sprints (3/week)
Now is a huge opportunity to upgrade how we work...
Get additional Becoming Superhuman insights!

bit.ly/wfh-superhuman

Code: “gobears”

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