

Excerpt from Forbes Article by Michael Maven

Article: ***Use This Idea To Get More Done (In Less Time)***

Main Idea: Eliminate multi-tasking and continuous work. Reframe time perception by working less continuously to get more done.

Many years ago, I was interviewed about a productivity hack that allowed more people to reclaim their time and use it freely.

Today, I'll expand upon that idea. I'm going to talk about how you can get more done in a day by doing something that just doesn't make any sense (but 100% works).

Let's start by talking about how busy you are now.

As time goes on, would you say you have more tasks to complete in a day, or less? Probably more. And as time goes on, do you think you have more energy to complete those tasks, or less? I'm guessing less.

You're basically getting busier each day but have less energy, as time goes on. So how is it that some people seem to squeeze a lot more out of their day,

What are they doing differently to you? Believe it or not, they are actually working *less*.

Working Less Can Increase Your Productivity

So, you're getting busier and have less energy. More demands are coming your way. How do you compensate? By working harder and longer than you ever have before.

This is a brute-force method that is natural to us as humans. It makes sense. We're pushed upon, so surely, we must push back?

You come to this conclusion because you're measuring total work done. Of course, if you work harder for longer periods of time, your total work done,

will increase. The problem is that it's not sustainable, especially when your energy will naturally reduce over time.

This is how people get stressed and sick.

You need to focus on a new metric – work done per hour. You also need a smart way of working that lets you put this into a system and then maximise your work done per hour.

The foundation of doing this is to remove a major piece of the problem: multi-tasking.

Multi-tasking splits your attention.

[Research done by the Institute of Psychiatry](#) (University of London) studied 1,100 workers. They found that multi-tasking caused a greater decrease in IQ than smoking pot.

Our brains are not made for multi-tasking. As a demo, ask someone to walk fast in a straight line and count backwards from 200 in 7's (so 200, 193, 186, 179, 172 etc). You will see that their walking will slow down as they work out the numbers in the sequence.

Here, the multi-tasking is causing a physical slowdown that you can visually see. The mind just wasn't built to process multiple tasks at once.

Context Switching

When you multi-task and do two things together, your brain is “context switching.”

Here's what the process looks like when we multi-task:

- You start task #1
- You stop doing task #1
- You mentally bookmark what you were doing in task #1

- You start task #2
- You finish task 2
- You recall your mental bookmark to remember where you were in task #1
- You start task #1 again

Do you see how confusing and full of friction that process is? This is called a context switch. It's like driving down the street and pressing the brake every 10 seconds.

It's inefficient and it burns you out. And just like a car, your brain slows down when you give it multiple start-stop commands at once.

Mixed Mode

When you're multi-tasking with your mind, you're in something called a 'mixed mode'.

Unbelievably, many people live their entire lives in a mixed mode. They're not completely focused on work, but they're not completely switched off, either.

This can slow you down. It can burn you out and, just like the car example, it will suck up all of your energy. Then you'll wonder why you're so tired all the time.

Could this be you? Are you stuck in the mixed mode without even knowing it?

Here's three clues that might help:

1. When you work, you often work until you're distracted. You just work on one single task until your attention gets diverted. That's when you start a new task until you're side-tracked again. You have trouble focusing.
2. You are never fully disconnecting and always seem to be multi-tasking. You're at home with your family but you check your phone constantly. You're at a social dinner but all you can talk about is work. You walk the dog but check your emails as you go.

You never get to completely relax and recover. Naturally, you feel burnt out. You have low energy and are tired all the time.

3. You never take breaks. You work on tasks until they are fully complete. You ignore physical signs, tension and muscle stiffness telling you that you need to take a break. You work through the mental cues and distractions, telling yourself it builds strength while you actually run your mental energy down, faster. When your concentration finally evaporates, you don't have the energy to reboot, so you get stuck in mixed mode.

The worst part is, when you deplete yourself of strength and will by working like this, you leave your body open to needing pick-me-ups, in the form of nourishment.

This leads to craving and eating sugary drinks and snacks, which is why many office workers' diets in particular, are often very poor.

It's the ultimate negative double-whammy. Your output and productivity takes a hit and you're also more prone to put on weight by working like this.

Our Natural Rhythms

As living organisms, we have natural work and rest cycles built into our bodies.

Known as [Circadian rhythms](#), they allow us to anticipate and prepare for precise and regular environmental changes. This helps us to make the best use of environmental resources like light and food.

If you compare that to those that can't predict such availability of natural resources, our work and rest cycles give us a selective advantage in terms of evolution. It makes sense that we listen to them.

For example, if we lift weights without breaks, we will damage our muscles and be in lots of pain too. But if we never use our muscles, they will get weaker.

The solution is to work out and cause a little stress to our muscles. Then we need a period of rest where the body recuperates and makes itself stronger.

The Secret To Personal Performance

Just like we work at a gym in cycles, we also need to work in a similar way with our minds. If you work continuously without breaks, you will burn out — mentally and physically. But if you don't do much work at all, your performance will be affected negatively.

So, to maximize your work output, try locking your work into ninety-minute chunks of 'focus mode'. Then follow that up with thirty-minute breaks, called the 'stop mode'.

Try and get your first 'focus mode' completed as early as you can. Getting that ninety minutes of focused (and uninterrupted) work done first thing in your day, will give you a substantial result for your efforts with just one session.

That'll be satisfying and addictive so it'll encourage you to do more of it.

Then it's time for your first 'stop mode' block. That's the thirty-minute period where you should completely disconnect from work.

The idea with the 'stop mode' is to switch gears and be in a different mode completely. Get away from your desk. Try not to think about work. Unplug completely and unwind.

Pay attention to the invisible tensions in your body and focus on stretching and relaxing these areas. Try and get your blood moving with a brisk walk even. When it's time to get back into work, you should feel recharged.

Run the 'focus mode' session four times in a day. That'll give you six solid hours of productive work. That's actually better for you than working eight straight hours. It's also definitely better than eight straight hours of working in the unproductive 'mixed mode'.

You will also feel benefits in your thinking, which will seem clearer because you're able to focus. You'll have more energy because you're not wasting thinking power in the mixed mode any more. You'll also notice that you get more work done in less time too.