



Unit 17

Personal Productivity

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Identify what personal efficiency is, what skill sets can improve your personal productivity, and what attitudes we should cultivate
- ✓ Explain why multi-tasking is a myth

Unit 17

Personal Productivity

Understanding Personal Efficiency

Defining Personal Efficiency

Operating at your most efficient means different things for different people. We think that David Allen hits the nail on the head with the term, “high-performance workflow management.”

To us, personal efficiency mean:

- Ñ Having a system to handle all the things that life throws at you so that you can stop worrying and start enjoying life
- Ñ Being able to have a good life/work balance, so that you don’t have to take work home with you, consider your laptop a family member, or miss any more soccer games
- Ñ Being able to achieve long-term goals, rather than just completing the necessary day in/day out tasks in life
- Ñ Living rather than just being!

In the Groove

When jazz musicians are at their absolute peak, playing better than they ever have before, they say they’re “in the groove.” What might being in the groove look or feel like for you? It might mean:

- Ñ Feeling in control
- Ñ Not feeling overwhelmed
- Ñ Feeling positive
- Ñ Low level of stress
- Ñ Time goes by quickly
- Ñ Mind isn’t racing with thoughts
- Ñ Easily able to focus on the task at hand
- Ñ Work seems more enjoyable

These results can’t be accomplished just with a new skill, or even a single skill like time management. (In fact, in the next lesson we’ll talk about a whole range of skills that can help you become more efficient and effective.) Many productivity experts, including David Allen and Stephen Covey, feel that a holistic approach is needed to truly improve productivity.

Making many small changes plus a few large changes, plus a whole new outlook on getting things done, is called a **paradigm shift**. This is what you need to start working towards your personal best: not a band-aid solution or quick fix, but a whole new attitude and new ways of using the skills that you already

know, plus a commitment to keep improving your attitude and skills for the rest of your life. Sounds like a big obligation? It is. But we guarantee that the results will be totally worth it.

Time Management vs. Personal Productivity

To many people, personal productivity is just a new buzzword for time management. We can assure you that this is not the case!

Time management evolved as a discipline in the 1980’s. Its focus was on schedules, daytimers, and to-do lists.

These tools are still valuable, but we need additional tools for today’s dynamic workforce. Work isn’t as clear-cut as it once was. For example, farmers didn’t need to-do lists; the work that they needed to do was pretty obvious. (Who needs an alarm clock or reminders when the horses are hungry or the cow needs to be milked – they’ll sure let us know!)

For most of us today, that isn’t the case. If you’re given a project to improve customer service, what does that mean? How do you know when you’ve reached your goal? How do you know what to do to achieve that task? Personal productivity stretches beyond traditional time management approaches to include long-term goals, project management skills, problem-solving tools, and more, to help us define and accomplish tasks efficiently and effectively.

Developing the Right Attitude

Useful Skill Sets

Brainstorm some skill sets that might be useful in becoming more efficient and productive.

Useful Attitudes

Flexibility is key.

Be ready to try new things and change your approach if what you're doing isn't working.

Focus on what you know.

You probably already have many of the skills and a lot of the knowledge required to become more effective. It isn't as hard as you might think!

Remain optimistic and be persistent.

Change is never easy but the rewards will be worth it. You might want to make a list of benefits you hope to see from being more productive, or rewards you can give yourself when you achieve something.

Have faith in yourself.

Focus on what you are doing well and how you have improved. As well, build a good support system to encourage you.

Don't be afraid to try new things, to make mistakes, and to fail.

After successfully inventing the light bulb, Thomas Edison said, "I never failed once. It just happened to be a 2000-step process."

Why Multi-Tasking is a Myth

Most of your current habits and attitudes will find a place in your new, efficient outlook on life. However, there is one habit that we want you to stop right now: multitasking.

We think that Henry Ford said it best: "A weakness of all human beings is trying to do too many things at once." When you are doing two or three things at once, you're not focused 100% on each task – you're only giving 50% or 33% to each task. With a good information management system, you will be able to decide which task is most important, focus on it 100%, complete it, and then move onto the next project.

Laying the Foundation

Creating a Personal Vision Statement

The Pyramid Structure

If you want to feel like you're getting more out of life, then we recommend that you set a personal vision statement. This will then help you set short- and long-term goals, which should influence your daily plan. Think of it like a pyramid:



There are three important steps to creating your personal vision.

Step One: Identifying Your Values

The list below reflects some common values. **Choose the ten that are most important to you** as a person (meaning that they apply both at work and at home). You can customize the wording, or add your own to the list.

Ability to make decisions and implement them	Ability to persuade and influence others	Achieving excellence
Achieving fame and recognition	Adventure and excitement	Behaving ethically
Being challenged by pressures and deadlines	Being organized and dependable	Being skilled and capable
Building a family	Building meaningful relationships with others	Competition with others
Contributing to society	Cooperation with others	Demonstrating expertise

Diversity in daily tasks	Doing something meaningful	Efficient and effective
Enjoying what you do	Environmental rights	Establishing a reputation
Expressing creativity	Feeling excited and stimulated by life	Feeling independent
Feeling of belonging and community	Feeling of inner harmony	Feeling of patriotism
Financial security	Financial wealth	Free speech/human rights
Freedom to set your own pace and goals	Having a feeling of security	Having power and control
Having privacy	Helping those in need	Religion and/or spirituality
Leading others to success	Moving at a fast pace	Moving at a slow pace
Being productive	Reliability	Self-development
Sense of accomplishment	Serving the public	Spontaneity
Truth and integrity	Working as part of a team	Working individually

We cannot focus on too many things at one time and remain effective, so look at the ten values you selected and **select the five that are most important** to you. Cross the others off. Be firm with yourself if you need to be. Remember, you are focusing on what is really important to you.

Next, **reduce the list to just three values**. These are the things at your very core. Cross the other two off your list. Put circles around the three items that are your core values. You can also write them below.

Bringing It All Together

Step Two: Defining Your Values

Now, outline what success for each of those values would look like.

Value One

Value Two

Value Three

Step Three: Putting It All Together

Finally, bring the three statements together into one paragraph. You may feel that you need to go back and re-evaluate your values, or you may want to re-work some sentences to create what is meaningful to you. That's OK! Above all, this should be a reflection of your innermost thoughts and a roadmap for how you would like to conduct your life and your work.

Write your vision statement below.

Test your knowledge

How could your vision and values statements guide your day to day planning and prioritizing?

My specific dreams might include:

- Ñ Set up an organized home office.
- Ñ Start my own consulting business.
- Ñ Learn how to do yoga and practice it daily.
- Ñ Climb Mount Everest.

Now, clearly some of these are achievable in the short term while others will take longer. Some will obviously take more work than others.

Goals with SPIRIT

Each objective should be broken down into several small, achievable goals that will help you get where you want to go. Good goals should have SPIRIT!

Specific

Be specific about what you want or don't want to achieve. The result should be tangible and measurable. "Look gorgeous" is pretty ambiguous; "Lose 20 pounds" is specific.

Prizes

Reward yourself at different points in the goal, particularly if it's long-term. If your goal is to set up a home office, for example, you might purchase a new desk when the room is cleared out and ready.

Individual

The goal must be something that you want to do. If your spouse wants you to lose 20 pounds but you think you look fine, you're not going to want to work towards the goal.

Review

Review your progress periodically. Does the goal make sense? Are you stuck? Do you need to adjust certain parts of it?

Inspiring

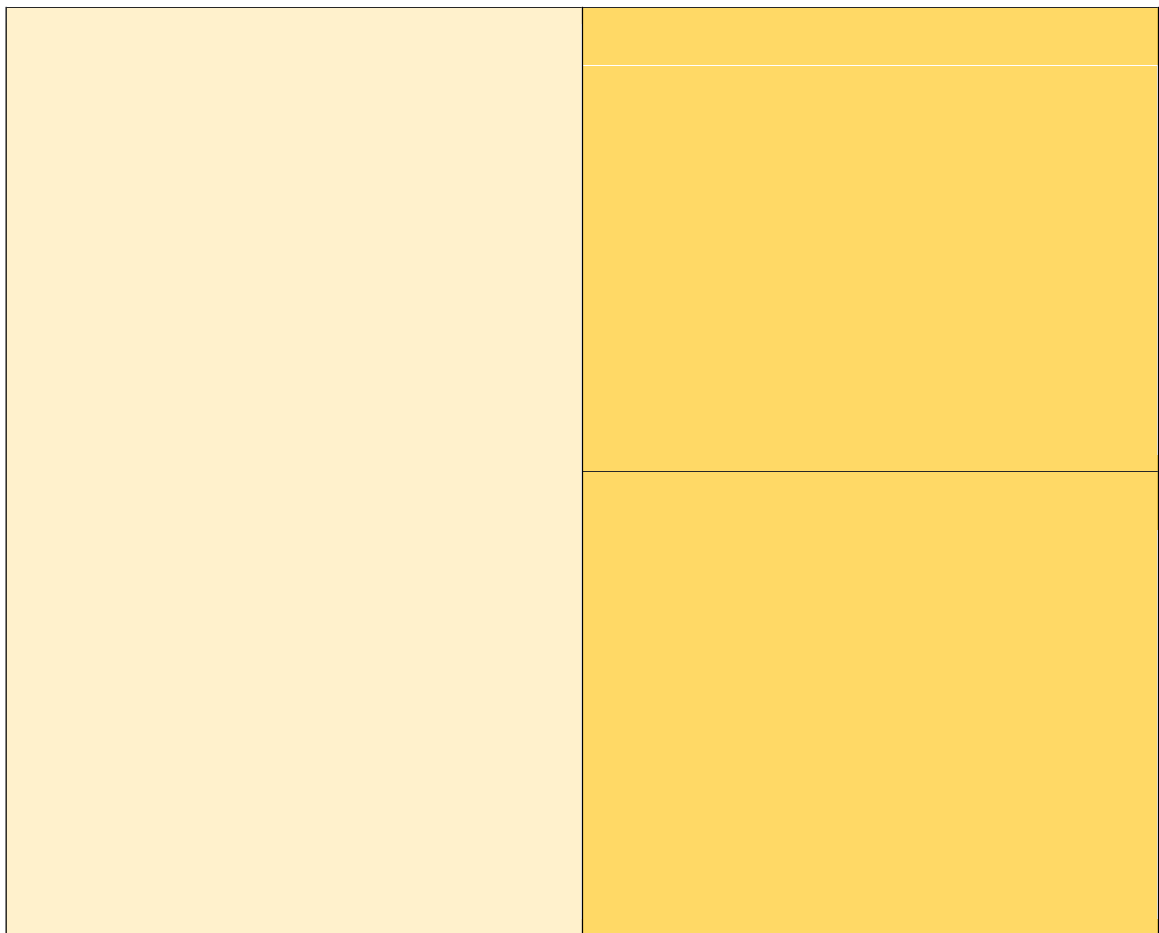
Frame the goal positively. Make it fun to accomplish. You could make a poster of the end result, frame it, and post it on the wall.

Time-Bound

Give yourself a deadline for achieving the goal. Even better, split the goal into small parts and give yourself a deadline for each item.

My Dreams and Goals

Divide a sheet of flip chart paper into three parts, like this:



In the **large space**, draw one or two life dreams. In the **top small space**, list a few objectives to support your dreams. Then, use the **bottom small space** to list some specific goals for the objective that you want to achieve next.

Further Reading:

- ✓ Kjerulf Alexander, *Happy Hour is 9 to 5*, PineTribe, 2014.
- ✓ Kouzes James M. and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge 4th Ed.*, Jossey-Bass, 2007.
- ✓ Merson Len, *The Instant Productivity Toolkit*, Sourcebooks Inc., 2005
- ✓ Palmer Louise, *How to Manage Stress in the Workplace*, Louise Palmer, 2014.
- ✓ Stone Douglas, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations How to Discuss What Matters Most*, Penguin Books Ltd., 1999.