

Tips from ‘Highly Productive People’

Recently, while I was perusing the web, a blog headline caught my eye: “6 Subtle Things Highly Productive People Do Every Day.” Of course, I had to click and read. While Internet headlines are often deceiving, I have to admit this particular blog, written by business writer Eric Barker, shared some suggestions with merit.

He noted that even though most people think they are busy, there is often a lot of wasted and “unproductive” time in our days — we can probably thank Smartphones and the Internet for a lot of that.

So how do productive people get more done? Barker’s blog shared comments from Tim Ferriss, author of the international bestseller “The 4-Hour Workweek.” I grant from the get-go that Ferriss is not living the life of a farm or ranch family; however, he does share some strategies that are useful no matter what your profession.

Manage your mood

The first tip is to manage your mood. If you wake up and dive right in to phone calls, e-mails and other fires to put out — you spend the whole day reacting. Ferriss points out that you’re not in the driver’s seat working on your

priorities, you’re responding to what gets thrown at you — important or not.

Instead, he advises, if you start the day calm, it’s easy to get the right things done and to focus. Specifically, Ferriss says, “I try to have the first 80 to 90 minutes of my day vary as little as possible. I think that a routine is necessary to feel in control and nonreactive, which reduces anxiety. It therefore makes you more productive.”

One of his biggest strategies is to avoid checking e-mails or other social media at the start of the day, so that he can plan and prioritize his own goals to pursue.

Another reason for managing your mood is that research has shown you procrastinate more when you’re in a bad mood. Conversely, studies have demonstrated happiness increases productivity and leads to more success.

The bottom line is to think a little less about managing the work and a little more about managing your moods.

Prioritize

Another “productivity” strategy shared was this: “Before you try to do it faster, ask whether it should be done at all.” Ferriss suggests most people are spreading themselves too thin and

doing too many things — many of which offer little or no return.

He emphasizes that knowing your goals and having a plan are essential to help prioritize your projects and time management.

Along with that, Ferriss says that having a daily routine to follow helps create a system for success. One important aspect in a routine should include setting your daily priorities the night before and writing them down.

Ferriss reports that studies have shown these activities have a secondary benefit. Writing down what you need to do tomorrow relieves anxiety and helps you enjoy your evening.

Some additional tips that I gleaned from a few of Barker’s other blog posts include these suggestions:

- **Schedule everything. To-do lists are evil.** He says, “To-do lists by themselves are useless. They’re just the first step. You have to assign them time on your schedule. Why? It makes you be realistic about what you can get done. Until it’s on your calendar and assigned an hour, it’s just a list of wishful thinking.”

- **Make a plan for the entire week.** Barker says, “...the last thing this world needs is more short term thinking.... You’ll never get ahead of the game by only looking at today and never thinking about tomorrow.” He also shares that research backs this approach up. Research shows you spend your time more wisely when you follow a plan, and studies show writing things down makes you more likely to follow through.

- **Focus on the deep stuff.** All work is not created equal, points out Barker. Shallow work is little stuff like e-mail, meetings and moving information around — things that are not really using your talents, he says. “Deep work pushes your current abilities to their limits. It produces high value results and improves your skills.” Thus, he suggests, “Do less and be amazing at those things.” **HW**