



Leslie Shreve
Founder & Productivity Expert
leslie@productiveday.com
410-218-4896

Leslie's Top 10: Productivity Tips to Unleash the Power of Your Most Productive Work Day

In your perfect work day, you would be enjoying peak productivity all day, every day. Your office would be completely organized, you'd have a wonderful file system where you could find things in 3 seconds or less and your task list would be inclusive of everything you need to do, consolidated all in one place.

You would be using your time carefully, finding electronic documents with ease and keeping little or no e-mail in your Inbox. And you wouldn't have to second-guess yourself on whether or not you forgot to return a call and you wouldn't have to apologize for missing a deadline or losing important information. You would be completely in control and on top of your game.

Sound a little unrealistic? It's not! My clients enjoy these benefits every day and then they have more time to focus on what they *love* to do. Whether it's their job, career or business they call their passion, they would rather spend more time on *that* and not on all the stuff that can take over their work day.

I've compiled *Leslie's Top 10* – my favorites – for you to get your feet wet in the world of peak productivity. Start here and then visit the ProductiveDay.com website for more information products so you too can *CRUISE* on the road to peak productivity!

1.) Fight Distractions and Keep Your Focus

Our brains are made to focus on one thing at a time, so succumbing to distractions, interruptions and multi-tasking diminishes the quality and productivity of anything we're working on at any one time. Strive to concentrate on only one thing at a time—and do that one thing well.

While we may have many projects and tasks in progress and at different stages of completion all the time, we cannot give our attention to more than one of them at one time and expect to produce our best work. Focus on one task and finish it. Don't bounce from one task to the next if you're not finished with the first one. For example, don't try to talk on the phone and e-mail at the same time (or any other similar combination), expecting to get top results on both.

Use laser-sharp focus on one thing at a time, excluding all else. The results will show effort and reliability and you will have confidence that what you produced was quality work, no matter how big or small.

2.) Take Control of Your Day

Don't let interruptions from colleagues, staffers, phones or e-mails control you. Take control of your day. Decide when you will look at e-mail, when you'll take calls and when you will be available to others.

Isn't it true that sometimes you are completely unavailable because you are in a meeting at the office or you're off site or you're away on a trip? Treat some of your office time as if you were completely unavailable, as in a meeting or out of the office. It will be a meeting with yourself so that you can continue to focus on your tasks and priorities and you won't feel like the whole day got away from you... again.

3.) Use Those Bits and Blocks of Time

Learn to recognize the value of 5-, 10- and 15-minute blocks of time that you have throughout your day. Match up small tasks with these windows of time and get more things accomplished. Often, doing a little piece of a larger project is possible in some small windows of time. Leave a voice mail, type an e-mail, file some papers or files. Don't waste this time. It all adds up. And remember this: "Don't do nothing because you can only do a little. Do what you can!"

4.) Know the Power of “No”

No matter how stimulating it is to be busy, don't forget that over-commitment can be stressful and unhealthy. Learn to say “no” ... politely. Your personal productivity depends on it.

Deciding which responsibilities and invitations you accept will have a significant impact on your day-to-day achievements. If you struggle with getting things done throughout your days or weeks, it may be because you're spreading yourself too thin.

Identify how much time it will take to get your priorities accomplished while still having enough time to sleep, eat and play. Once time is made for those commitments, *then* consider extracurricular involvement in associations, clubs or committees. Make it a point to spend quality time on the things and with the people you value the most.

5.) Choose to Make a Change: Get Organized

Are you a creative person or entrepreneur who struggles with getting or keeping an organized office or desk? You can conquer the clutter by creating new systems and new habits to maintain them.

Set aside time each week to start building a new system to store and manage all your papers and files, including both files in existing cabinets as well as for the active papers and files on your desk. Make decisions about what to keep and what to throw away. If it's a challenge to tackle it alone, then ask someone to do it with you.

Your reward will be having more time to be creative and to do the things you LOVE instead of wasting precious time struggling to find items you need. The long-term goal is to stay organized and become more productive. If you maintain the systems you build, then you'll never have to carve out time to “clean up” on a weekend or after hours ever again.

6.) Free Your Mind: Do a Regular Brain Drain

If ideas and thoughts keep bouncing around in your head and remain un-captured on paper or on an electronic task list, you will fight harder to maintain concentration on immediate tasks *and* potentially lose all those great ideas.

Download everything that pops into your mind onto a list so you won't lose ideas and 'to dos.' Then you can free your mind to accomplish your priorities.

7.) It's an E-mail *IN*box, not a File Cabinet or To-Do List

Your e-mail Inbox was meant to be a tool for bringing e-mail IN, not as a catch-all for every e-mail you've ever received.

What comes in must go back out! E-mails and e-mail attachments you want to keep for future reference should be transferred out of e-mail and into 'My Documents' or another drive for future reference. If there is no risk of reduced computer memory or speed, then a few folders under the Inbox are acceptable. However, e-mails saved in e-mail folders really should be for more temporary information, while the computer can store more permanent information.

File e-mail like you would a hard copy document in a file cabinet, using similar categories for ease of use and consistency. Be specific when re-naming electronic documents and files so you know what they are without having to open them.

E-mails with actions associated with them can be moved out of the Inbox to an electronic task list or, if that's not possible in your system, they can be moved into an e-mail folder called "Action" and the task can be noted elsewhere.

Having a system set up for all your information and making decisions more immediately regarding the purpose or next steps of each e-mail will allow you to sort and process your e-mail much faster.

8.) Your Task List: Paper or Electronic?

Lists, whether personal or professional, are important tools for staying organized and productive. However, a list is only useful to you if you get into the habit of using it and maintaining it: reviewing it, checking things off, updating it and adding to it *daily*.

Using a daily planner or calendar that includes a place to write daily tasks is helpful, but using an electronic task list is much better than using paper because:

- You won't have to re-write your tasks from day to day
- You won't have trouble re-prioritizing
- You won't miss something written or scribbled sideways on a piece of paper
- You won't have trouble summarizing what you're doing for any given day, week or month
- You won't waste time looking for where you wrote something or where the paper is
- You won't lose track of what ALL of your responsibilities are

How to use a paper notepad? The role of paper is to keep it in places where you do your best thinking. Tear off the page (leave the pad) and consolidate these thoughts and actions into a master electronic task list.

Consolidation of thoughts and planned actions into one trusted system is paramount. With a full inventory of all tasks and ideas, you are more able to organize, prioritize and reach peak productivity every day.

9.) Let It Go!

If you find yourself saying, "I wish I had just done it myself," then you're not alone. Delegation is an art... and if no one has modeled it for you or taught the proper steps for effective and successful delegation, then it's no wonder it may not be working right for you.

The benefits of proper delegation include allowing leaders to boost their productivity and pursue other goals, as well as allowing opportunities for staff to grow and pursue new challenges, which can be a big motivator.

Five steps must be included to practice successful delegation:

1. Define the details of the task/project and the scope of responsibility for your staff member. Set expectations, communicate the desired outcomes and set a timeline.
2. Allow an opportunity for the staff member to ask "how to" questions when the task or project is initially delegated.
3. Make yourself available and/or meet periodically with your staff member to see if things are on time and on target according to plan.
4. Offer resources and support necessary for successful completion, plus steady feedback.
5. Recognize a job well done, but be open and straightforward about areas for improvement.

10.) To pile or to file? That is the question.

The answer, almost invariably, is to FILE. Why? Because piles can grow out of control and may remain untouched for longer periods of time. Piles can become more intimidating and add more pressure every day that passes.

Even if you are among those who say, "But I know exactly where everything is in these piles," it's still not the *most* efficient system. At one point or another, you will be guessing exactly *where* the papers are in that pile or you may *forget* which pile holds the papers you're looking for. It's not the most trusted system. It's a gamble.

If you take the time to decide the fate of each paper that crosses your desk before you start piling it, you may discover that much of what you have can be filed as reference or tossed. You may also discover that your actionable papers and files (your to dos) are a lot fewer than you originally thought.