

MICROGUIDES

TIME MANAGEMENT

Proven methods to take your team's performance to the next level



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INTRODUCTION

The MicroGuides are your shortcut to staying current on the world's top Business, Leadership, and Personal Development books. They are used by individuals looking to better themselves, as well as by teams and organizations looking to create and foster cultures of continuous learning and development.

The MicroGuides are meant to serve as your starting point for identifying your goals and the obstacles that are standing in your way of achieving them. In addition to participation in regular ActionClasses, we urge leaders to use the content in these guides as inspiration for developing your own unique ActionPlan to make your ideal state a reality.

TIME MANAGEMENT

At least one thing is said to be true about time: we never seem to have enough of it. People that learn to manage their time effectively by focusing on the tasks that matter most are able to achieve their goals faster than people who have not mastered this skill. When you better manage your time, you are able to achieve more, take on new opportunities, and spend more time bettering yourself.

If time management were easy, though, we'd all have organized schedules and we'd never feel overwhelmed with tasks. The reality is that effective time management is a skill that must be developed and continually refined. Keep reading to learn more about which strategies you can employ in your own life to help make time an asset, not an enemy.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey

01

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Powerful Lessons in Personal Change by Stephen R. Covey

The Wall Street Journal has called this book "the most influential business book of the century" and it's certainly one of the most recognized. Despite being written a number of years ago, it still remains an insightful and thought-provoking reference for today's leaders. Join us for the next ten minutes or so while we revisit the ideas of the late Dr. Stephen Covey and their alignment to today's world.





At the nub of Covey's habits is a progression through dependency. He implies there are three progressive levels.

Dependence is the paradigm of third party care. You support me and tell me what to do and think. If things go wrong, you're to blame.

Independency is the paradigm of me. I'll look after myself. I'll decide what to do. I'm responsible.Interdependency is the paradigm of us. Let's work on this together. Two minds are better than one.

Life is interdependent. If I'm interdependent, I am self-reliant and capable, but I also realize that you and I working together can accomplish far more than I could accomplish alone.

Covey's first three habits focus on the move from dependency to independency. Habits 4 to 6 support the move from independence to the advantages of interdependency. The seventh habit keeps us there.

Habit 1: Be Proactive

What is proactivity? By Covey's definition, it's more than taking initiative. It's about assuming responsibility for ourselves. We take the responsibility to make things happen. Highly proactive people recognize that responsibility. They do not blame circumstances for their behavior. Their behavior is a product of their own conscious choice based on personal values.

A great way to become more self-aware regarding our level of proactivity is to look at where we focus our time and energy. There are some things over which we have no real control and others that we can do something about. Proactive people work on the things they can do something about – their Circle of Influence.

To take the first steps to proactivity:

Make a promise — and keep it.

Set a goal — and work to achieve it.

The power to make and keep commitments to ourselves is the essence of developing the basic habits of effectiveness. Start with small commitments within your Circle of Influence.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind

When we set out on a journey we usually have an idea of where we want to go. Unfortunately, for many businesses this is not the case. Covey puts it succinctly: it's really easy to get caught up in the busy-ness of life, to work harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success...only to discover it's leaning against the wrong wall. It is absolutely possible to be busy — without being very effective.

If we want to have a successful enterprise, we need to clearly define what it's trying to accomplish. We develop the product we want to provide, we identify our target market, then organize finance, R&D, operations and marketing to meet that objective. Depending on how well we have the end in mind will govern whether or not we succeed.

Adaptive Reflection
Question: What
small commitment
within your Circle of
Influence can you
make today that will
put you on track to
become more
proactive?

If we don't take that control, we allow other people and circumstances outside our Circle of Influence to shape our destiny.

Covey suggests an effective way to begin with the end is to develop a personal mission statement, focussing on what we want to be and to do and on the values or principles upon which being and doing are based. It becomes a personal constitution, the basis for making daily decisions in the midst of the circumstances and emotions that affect our lives.

Start a collection of notes, quotes, and ideas that you may want to use as resource material in writing your personal mission statement. Break the statement down into the specific role areas of your life and the goals you want to accomplish in each area.

Habit 3: Put First Things First

Putting first things first is effective management. Many tasks and activities in our lives can be urgent. Many can also be important. But not all. Urgent means it requires immediate attention. Importance, on the other hand, has to do with results. If something is important, it contributes to our mission, our values and our goals. Effective management deals with things that are not urgent, but are important. There are four key facets of effective management set out by Covey:

It's principle-cantered.

It's conscience-directed.

It defines our unique mission, including values and long-term goals.

It helps balance our life by identifying roles, and by setting goals.

The starting point is therefore a commitment to start organizing, meeting the four facets above and creating the fifth facet: a commitment to do it regularly.

Habit 4: Think Win/Win

Win/Win is not a technique; it's a philosophy of human interaction. Thinking Win/Win is the core of interpersonal leadership. It consists of mutual learning, mutual influence, and mutual benefit. The principle of Win/Win is fundamental to success in all of our interactions. Character is the foundation of Win/Win, and Covey describes three traits.

INTEGRITY: The value we place on ourselves.

MATURITY: The balance between courage and consideration.

ABUNDANCE MENTALITY: The belief that there is plenty out there for everybody.

Win/Win can only survive in an organization where Win/Win is embedded. If we talk Win/Win but reward Win/Lose, we're the ultimate losers. For Win/Win to work, the planning system, the communication system, the budgeting system, the information system, the compensation system... all have to be based on the principle of Win/Win.

Adaptive Reflection Question: How can you implement a Win/Win mentality in your team and/or organization?



So let's identify a relationship where we'd like to develop a Win/Win agreement. We need to step into the other person's shoes, and write down how we think that person sees the solution. Then list, from our own perspective, what results would constitute a win for us. Does it fit? Approach the other person and ask what they think. Is it enough of a starting compromise?

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood

The key to effective interpersonal communication is to seek first to understand, then to be understood. According to Covey, when another person speaks, we listen at one of four levels: We may be ignoring another person, not really listening at all.

We may practice pretend listening.

We may practice selective listening, hearing only certain parts of the conversation.

We may even practice attentive listening, paying attention and focusing energy on the words that are being said.

...but very few of us ever practice the fifth level, the highest form of listening, empathic listening - listening with intent to understand.

Empathic listening is powerful because it gives us accurate data to work with. Instead of projecting our own perspective and assuming thoughts, feelings, motives and interpretation, we're dealing with the reality inside another person's head and heart. How do we do it? According to Covey, empathic listening, involves four developmental stages.

The first and least effective is to mimic content. Just listen to the words that come out of someone's mouth and repeat them. The second stage is to rephrase the content. This time, we've put his meaning into our own words. Now we're thinking about what he said, mostly with the left side, the reasoning, logical side of our brain.



The third stage brings our right brain into operation. We reflect feeling. Now we're not paying as much attention to what he's saying as to the way he feels about what he's saying. The fourth stage includes both the second and the third. You rephrase the content and reflect the feeling. As we seek to understand, as we rephrase content and reflect feeling, we give him room to express and work through his own thoughts and feelings.

Now that you have listened and understand the other person's perspective, it's time for you to be understood. To be understood is simply the reverse. Place your point of view in a way that the other party can review it within their own context and situation.

Habit 6: Synergize

What is synergy? Simply defined, it means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

When we communicate synergistically, we are opening our mind and heart to new possibilities, new alternatives and new options. Synergy is exciting. It's amazing what open communication can produce. According to Covey, the possibilities of truly significant gain, of significant improvement are so real that it's worth the risk that openness entails.

We need to value the difference in our perceptions, value each other and believe in the possibility that we're both right. Life is not always binary--there are almost always third alternatives. Valuing the mental, emotional and psychological differences between people is the essence of synergy. The key to valuing those differences is to realize that all people see the world, not as it is, but as they are.

We need to value the differences in our perceptions, value each other and believe the possibility that we're both right. Life is not always binary — there are almost always third alternatives.

When we see only two alternatives (ours and the "wrong" one) we need to look for a synergistic third alternative. If we work with a Win/Win philosophy and seek to understand, we can find a solution that will be better for everyone concerned.

To put synergy thinking in to action, engage a person who typically sees things differently than you do. Consider ways in which those differences might be used as stepping-stones to third alternative solutions.

Habit 7: 'Sharpen the Saw' Principles

Habit 7 is personal professional development. It's all about enhancing the greatest asset we have – ourselves.

"Sharpen the saw" means exercising all four dimensions of our nature: Physical, Spiritual, Mental and Social/Emotional, regularly and consistently.

The physical dimension involves caring effectively for our physical body: eating the right kinds of foods, getting sufficient rest and relaxation, and exercising on a regular basis.

Renewing the spiritual dimension provides leadership to your life. The spiritual dimension is your core, your center, your commitment to your value system. It's a very private area of life and a supremely important one. Exposure to the things that inspire and uplift you are critical, as is immersion in great literature or great music.

Most of our mental development comes through formal education. But as soon as we leave school, we lose that discipline. We don't do any more serious reading, we don't think analytically, we don't write... instead, we watch TV or mindlessly browse Twitter and Facebook. Continuing education is key and proactive people can figure out many, many ways to educate themselves and keep their minds sharp.

The social and emotional dimensions of our lives are tied together because our emotional life is developed out of our relationships with others. Renewing our social/emotional dimension does not take time in the same sense that renewing the other dimensions does. We can do it in our normal everyday interactions with other people. But it definitely requires exercise. We may have to push ourselves to get out and meet people beyond social media.

So there you have it: six habits and a seventh renewal process. They're Covey's key to becoming highly effective and they work. Millions of readers can't be wrong. Will you start today?



Essentialismby Greg McKeown

02

Essentialism

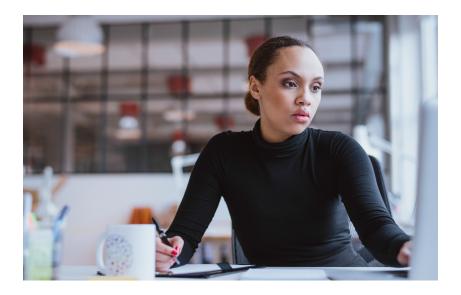
The Disciplined Pursuit of Less by Greg McKeown

Life is hard. There are endless demands on our time. There's a mountain of emails to respond to, a todo list that never seems to quit, social media accounts that need constant tending, and on top of that you need to actually get some work done.

It's a crazy world you and I live in, isn't it? How do YOU respond to the endless demands on your time? If we were to take everybody in the world and split them in two groups, we'd probably have the following:

In group #1, we have the people that try to do it all. Everything on their todo list is important, and they find ways to fit everything in. They say yes a lot, because successful people always find a way to get it all done. Sometimes they take on too much and tend to feel out of control, but who doesn't these days?





In group #2, we have the people who think that less is better. Only a few things on their todo list really matter, and everything else can wait, or maybe even never get done. They find themselves saying no a lot, which doesn't make them all that popular. But they feel in control, and seem to enjoy their work.

If you are like most people these days, you would probably identify the most with group #1 - which Greg Mckeown (the author of Essentialism) would call the Non-Essentialists. This is where most people spend their time, and I can certainly relate.

The people who truly make a difference, Mckeown argues, spend their time hanging out with group #2 - the Essentialists. These people believe that it's more important to make significant progress in a few things rather than making a millimeter of progress in a million directions.

Take inspiration from people who embody Essentialism

At the most basic level, an Essentialist gives themselves the permission to stop trying to do it all, so that they can focus all of their energy and time on the things that truly matter. In a world that demands more and more of you every day, this is a rallying call to learn how to start saying no.

Here are a few people you can take inspiration from...

Adaptive reflection question:

How do you prioritize essential items on your to-do list?

Steve Jobs was an Essentialist

When Steve Jobs came back to rescue Apple from the clutches of bankruptcy, he ruthlessly reduced the number of products they produced from 350, to 10.

When asked about innovation and why Apple rose from the ashes to become the most valuable company of all time, here's what he said:

"People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on. But that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully. I'm actually as proud of the things we haven't done as the things I have done. Innovation is saying no to 1,000 things."

Dieter Rams is an Essentialist

Dieter Rams, the famous designer, had a design criteria that could be summarized by three German words: Weniger aber besser. In English this translates to "Less but better."

A lot is captured in those 3 words. It's not enough to just do less. Anybody could cross a bunch of things off their todo list and say "I'm not doing those." It's another thing completely to do less and actually make more progress.

Richard Koch, the guy who made the 80/20 rule popular in business circles by writing the book The 80/20 Principle, sums this up well:

"Most of what exists in the universe - our actions, and all other forces, resources, and ideas - has little value and yields little result; On the other hand, a few things work fantastically well and have tremendous impact."

So, it's not that the Essentialists work less than the Non-Essentialists, it's that they spend a disproportionate amount of their time on the things that really matter.

All good things come in threes, so here's one more example to inspire you.

Jims Collins is an Essentialist

Jim Collins is the author of the business classic, Good To Great. One day, Collins was meeting with Peter Drucker, who told him that Collins could either build a great company, or build great ideas. In Drucker's opinion, he couldn't do both.

Collins chose the path of making great ideas, and continues to shape the discussion of business leaders around the world. To this day he employs only three people full-time, but their work together has inspired tens of millions of people around the world.

Essentialists are good at saying no

So here's the rub. If you want to become an Essentialist, you need to become good at saying no. And not only that, you need to realize that by saying no, you are making a trade-off. For everything that an Essentialist says yes to, there are many many things that they have to say no to.

Unfortunately, many of us end up stuck in the world of Non-Essentialists simply because we lack the skills to say no gracefully. It's funny to think of it that way, but it's true. There's no class in high-school or university that teaches you this skill, and it is literally preventing millions of people from reaching their potential in life.



Luckily for us, Mckeown gives us 8 responses we can use to say no to the unimportant, so that we can say yes to the vital.

- 1. **Use an awkward pause.** People hate silence, and if you pause long enough after somebody requests something of you, they'll eventually fill the void and find a reason to withdraw their request.
- 2. **Use a "no but."** Use this in situations where you don't want to take on a task now, but would consider it in the future. You can respond by saying "no, but I would love to help you a few months from now...can we connect on this then?" Most times you won't hear about this request again.
- 3. Use the "let me check my calendar and get back to you" method. This gets you off the hook for responding immediately, and if it's something that you ultimately don't want to do, you can simply say that unfortunately, you're not available.
- 4. **Use an email autoresponder.** If you are really courageous, you could set up an email autoresponder that replied to each of your emails letting people know that you aren't available to respond to email for a period of time.
- 5. Use the "yes, what should I reprioritize" method. This works especially well when receiving requests from superiors. By letting your boss or teammate know that you'll have to drop something else in order to get their request done, they'll frequently move on to somebody else who can squeeze the task into their schedule.
- 6. **Use a bit of humor.** This one is difficult to pull off well, but it's a good way to diffuse a potentially uncomfortable situation.
- 7. Use the "you are welcome to X. I am willing to Y" response.

 Mckeown gives the example in the book about his friend asking to borrow his car. His response would be "you are welcome to borrow my car, and I'm willing to make sure the keys are here for you." This way, he's let his friend know that he is able to take the car, if his friend is willing to pick it up. And it's clear that he's certainly not willing to take his friend himself.
- 8. **Suggest somebody else to do it.** It's much easier to say "I can't do it, but X might be interested" than it is to reject their request outright. You are able to come off as being helpful, without having to do the task for yourself.

Adaptive reflection question:

What are the vital things you are working on currently? How do you ensure less important tasks don't get in the way?



A Challenge

What you do with these newfound skills is up to you. But I want to give you a challenge. For the next week, whenever you are asked to do something for somebody else:

Respond with the "let me check my calendar" technique.

Then, take some time to reflect on whether or not the request is essential to your long-term success.

If it's not, respond to the person using one of the other techniques you just learned.

Continue working on the vital few things that will ensure you achieve everything you want to achieve in life.

Onwards and upwards!

Getting Things Done by David Allen

03

Getting Things Done

The Art of Stress-Free Productivity by David Allen

Quick – think about all of the things you need to get done today. Now think about all of the things you need to get done tomorrow. And the next day. And the next day. And then next week.

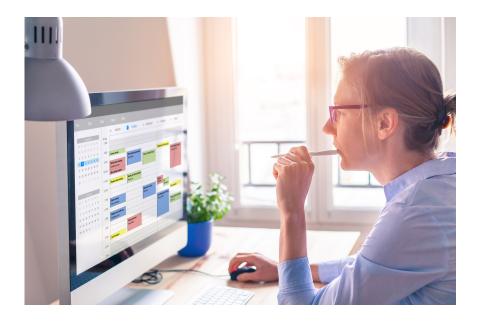
Now, answer this question: Are all of those things written down somewhere? If not, join the club - the overworked and underresourced club.

Here's the thing...this club is actually just a club we made up to make ourselves feel better about ourselves.

You see, when most people complain about the fact that they have too much work to do and too little time in which to do it, they are actually suffering from lack of control and organization in their life.

Adaptive Reflection Question: What tools or methods do you use to stay productive and ontask?





Fortunately, it is possible to have an overwhelming number of things to do and still feel in command of every situation you find yourself in.

In Getting Things Done, you'll learn two critical things:

- 1. How to capture all of the things you need to get done (both now and in the future); and
- 2. How do discipline yourself around the amount of "inputs" you allow into your life so you can take the appropriate next actions to get those things done.

What'll you'll end up with at the end this summary is a system to get control back over your life.

And that, my friends, is priceless.

So buckle up and get ready to learn the five-step process to making it happen: Collect - Process - Organize - Review - Do.

Collect

The first step is to capture information on the things that you need to do. The goal here is to free your mind from holding on to the lower-level task of what you need to do in the future. Just think about all of the time you waste trying to keep the things you need to do at the forefront of your mind.

Adaptive reflection question:

What "collection buckets" do you use? How do they help keep you organized? When we go out and collect things, we need a place to put them. We'll call these places "buckets." We are looking to collect 100 percent of the things that are "incomplete." The goal here is not to make decisions about whether or not we'll take action on them, or when we'll do them, but just to put them somewhere so that we can come back to them later.

For instance, your email inbox is an example of a "bucket" that operates without you having to do anything. But what about the rest of the things in your life?

Here are a few other things that can function as a "bucket" for you:

- a physical inbox
- notepads
- electronic note taking devices
- a voice recorder
- email

There are a few factors that will determine the success of your collection efforts. First, everything that is incomplete must be out of your head and placed into one of your buckets.

Second, you'll need to have as few collection buckets as possible. Pick the ones that you absolutely can't do without, and then never put in "incomplete" anywhere else.

Third, you must empty them on a regular basis so that you deal with the items in a timely manner. For instance, I use email and a pre-determined spot in my project management software exclusively as my inboxes. It's a struggle to only use those things exclusively at first, but once you get the hang of it, you'll be well on your way to peace of mind.

Process

The next step in the equation is to process the information.

Our goal in this step is to get those buckets down to zero. We won't necessarily do all the work right now, but we'll find a spot for all of the items.

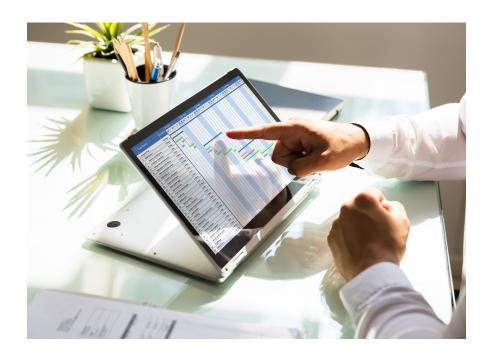
First, we'll ask a simple but important question: What is it?

This may seem incredibly simple, but taking a second to understand what the item is will greatly clarify what you can or should do with it.

Second, we'll determine whether or not it is an actionable item.

If you answered no to this question, there are three possible choices.

- It could be trash and no longer needed if so, get rid of it.
- It could be that no action is needed now, but that it might need action in the future – if so, incubate it in a "tickler" system that will tell you when you need to look at it again.
- It could also be potentially useful information in the future but you aren't sure if you'll need it – if so, put it in a reference pile that you can access later.



Adaptive reflection question:

How do you decide what projects and actions are worth your time?

If you answered yes, a few things need to be determined:

- First, what project or outcome have you committed to? If it's related to a project, you should have an open project list where you can place this item (more on this in the "organization" section). For instance, if you are planning a retirement party and you just got a call back from one of the catering companies you are getting a quote from, you'd put that information into the project bucket.
- Second, we need to determine what the next action is. For instance, the next action for the retirement party might be "show quote to Bob and get his approval".
- Third and finally decide what to do with that action.

Once you've decided on the next action, we have three choices:

- 1. We can do it. The general rule is that if it is going to take less than two minutes to accomplish and we can act on it now we'll just do it now.
- 2. We could delegate it.
- 3. We can defer it. If it's something that can't be done now or if it will take longer than two minutes to complete, put it into your tickler system so that your attention is brought back to it at the appropriate time. More on this in the next section.

Organize

In order to create the next steps and put everything into the appropriate buckets, you'll need a system of organization.

For non-action items, you can trash them, incubate them in a tickler system, or put them into a reference file. You should have separate buckets for each of these. For actionable items, things get a little more detailed.

For this you'll need a list of projects, storage areas for project plans and materials, a calendar, a list of reminders of next actions, and a list of reminders of things you are waiting for. How you structure these lists is up to you. You could use a software program – in fact, there are many options available that were built specifically using the "Getting Things Done" methodology. You could also use a paper based system like a leather bound planner. The key here is to find something you enjoy using and that works well for you.



Projects

You'll be surprised to find out that Allen defines a project as anything that requires more than one step to complete. So, it's likely that you are now the proud owner of many more projects than you previously thought you had.

These projects will range from writing a new book to cleaning up the garage and everything in between. Allen makes a great point about projects: You can't "do" a project, you can only do one action after another. So, we need to start getting specific about what happens next.

Next Actions

As we discussed earlier, a less than two minute items you'll do right now and anything you delegate will go into a tickler system reminding you to follow up. However, if you have a next action item that falls outside of that, we need to find a spot for it.

One of the places we can put a next action is on your calendar. This is appropriate when the next action needs to be done at a specific day and time (like an appointment), or even if it needs to be done on a specific day (i.e. shopping for a birthday gift). You might also want to put day specific information in there, such as directions to your appointments or birthday reminders. What else should go in your calendar? Absolutely nothing. This might run counter to other approaches you've been taught, but only the things that truly have to get done on a certain day should be put in your calendar.

All other next actions should be put on a list that you can refer to. If you have multiple projects and a lot of next actions to keep track of, they should go into separate lists so you don't get overwhelmed.

Review

Now that you've got your system in place, you need to consistently review it in order for it to be effective. So, what should you review, and when should you review it?





Things to review daily

The thing that you'll want to check most often – at least once per day – is your calendar. It will have the complete list of all the things that absolutely must get done today, and set your mind for the type of day you will have.

The next thing you will want to turn your attention to is your next actions list(s). This is where you'll find the set of actions that must be completed if and when you have discretionary time during the day.

Lastly, the projects, waiting for and other lists should be reviewed only as often as it takes for you not to worry or think about them.

Things to review weekly

If you are like most people, by the time the week is over there's a huge gap in what you thought would happen and what actually happened. No matter how good you are at getting things done, you'll never rid yourself of this reality. To deal with it, the one thing you need to build into your weekly schedule (put this in your calendar), is a weekly review session.

All of your lists – including the ones above – should be reviewed at least once per week and at the same time. This will allow you to make sure you have your calendar in order for the week to come, and that you have cleared all of your potential todo items out of your head and placed them into the system.

This will only work well if your review is systematic and complete. If it's not – like not checking different lists that you have – your review will be incomplete and things will fall through the cracks.

If you do your review session properly, it will feel a lot like the week before you go on vacation. You make sure that every loose end is cleaned up, and renegotiate any agreements that can't get completed by the time you leave. Like Allen suggests, instead of doing this yearly, you should make it part of your weekly routine.

Do

As you are working through your next actions list, and you are deciding what you should do next, think about the following four criteria to make your choice, in the following order: (1) context, (2) time available, (3) energy available, and (4) priority.

Context

Context is important because there are certain tasks that can only get done in certain circumstances. For instance, if you are stuck somewhere and for some reason you can't connect to the Internet, you'll need to do work without it. By tagging your next actions with context-specific information, you'll be able to pull-up lists of things you can do in that situation.

Time Available

Some to-do items in your next action lists will take 10 minutes, and some will take longer than an hour to complete. This becomes important when you find yourself let out of a meeting 20 minutes early, or if your plane is delayed by 30 minutes at the airport. Understanding what tasks you can complete in the amount of time you have available will make it much more likely that you'll tackle one of them.

Adaptive Reflection Question: Which of the 4 stages are you strongest in? Which one do you need the most work in?

Energy Available

It's a proven fact that your energy waxes and wanes throughout the day. Some tasks you need to complete will require a lot of mental focus and will only be possible when you have a high amount of energy. For instance, I find I have the most energy right after I go to the gym at lunch, so that's when I tackle items from my lists that require my mind to be at its sharpest. Other times, such as nearing the end of the day, my energy is at its lowest and that's when I tackle items that require less energy and focus like clearing my inbox.

Understand when you have the most energy, and pick items from your lists accordingly. You'll get much more done.

Priority

Now, and only now, should you be looking at priority. Of course, nobody is suggesting that you ignore emergency situations that require you to ignore this advice and go and put a proverbial fire out. But when you truly have control over what you do, this is the approach you should take.

Conclusion

So there you have it. Everything you need in order to get started with your very own system to getting more done in your day, while lowering your stress levels as much as humanly possible. Go out and get it done!

ABOUT ACTIONCLASS

ActionClasses are short interactive workshops on the Business and Leadership skill that matter most.

Based on 40+ critical leadership and soft skill competencies, ActionClass provides your team members with "no fluff," pragmatic, and action-packed workshops that put goals and objectives at the center of learning.

Our live, interactive workshops host leaders from all around the world, making them a great place to build your network and experience diverse perspectives on your most pressing business and leadership challenges.