



**Estimated Reading Time:**

6 minutes, 41 seconds

# INTRODUCTION

While some people have normal interests like sports, music, and cooking, as strange as it might sound, I have always been obsessed with becoming as productive as possible.

I can't remember when I was first bit by the productivity bug. It could have been when I picked up David Allen's canonical *Getting Things Done* book in high school, when I started diving deep into productivity blogs as a young teenager, or when I began exploring my parents' collection of psychology books around the same time—but I've been obsessed with productivity for the better part of a decade, and over that time I've brought that obsession to virtually every facet of my life.

In high school, I began to experiment with as many productivity techniques as I could find, which let me graduate with a 95 percent average while carving out huge swaths of time for myself. At Carleton University in Ottawa, I studied business where I did much the same thing, deploying my favorite productivity tactics to keep an A average while doing as little work as I possibly could.

While in school, I had the chance to experiment with productivity techniques at several real-world full-time co-op internships, including one yearlong job where I autonomously hired about two hundred students for a global telecommunications company, and another where I worked from home for a global marketing team, helping the team create marketing materials and coordinate video shoots around the world.

Because of my hard work (and productivity), my school awarded me their Co-op Student of the Year Award, and I graduated from the university with two full-time job offers.

## **THE POINT OF PRODUCTIVITY**

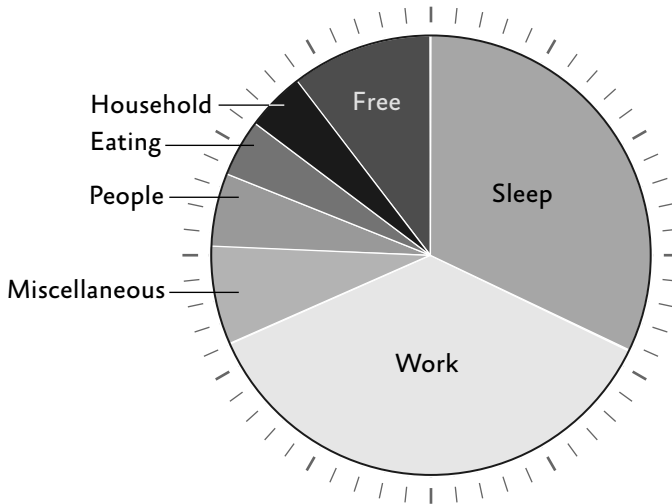
I don't mention what I've accomplished to try to impress you, but rather to impress *upon* you how powerful of an idea productivity can be. As much as I'd sometimes like to think so, I wasn't offered two full-time jobs out of college because I'm particularly smart or gifted. I simply think I have a very firm grasp of what it takes to become more productive and get more done on a daily basis.

Although the jobs and school were fun, at the end of the day I was truthfully much more excited that I had a chance to use both contexts as sandboxes to filter out the productivity tactics that work from the ones that didn't.

To see the profound effects that investing in your productivity can have, look no further than to how the average American spends his or her day. According to the most recent American Time Use Survey, the average employed person aged twenty-five to fifty-four with kids spends:

- 8.7 hours a day working
- 7.7 hours a day sleeping
- 1.1 hours a day on household chores
- 1.0 hours a day eating and drinking
- 1.3 hours a day caring for others
- 1.7 hours a day on "Other"
- **2.5 hours a day on leisure activities**

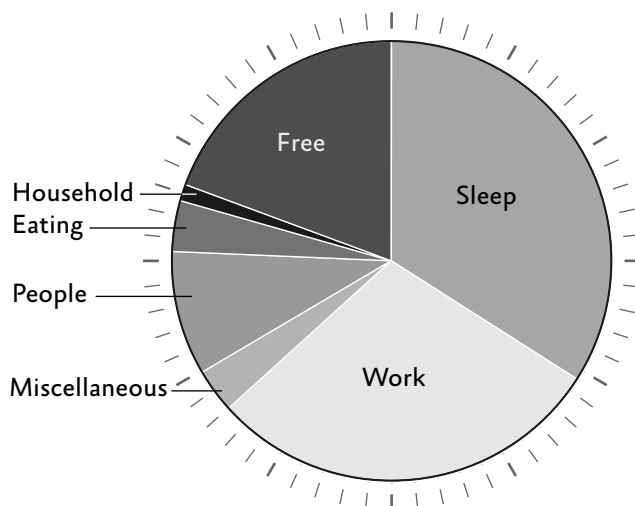
Every day we get twenty-four hours to live our lives in a meaningful way. But once you account for all the obligations each of us has, there really isn't much time left; a paltry two and a half hours for most of us, to be exact. I've converted the numbers into a pie chart to illustrate just how little time in our day that is:



**This is where productivity can come to the rescue.** I think productivity tactics—like the ones that I discuss in this book—exist to help you accomplish everything you have to do in less time, so you can carve out more time for what's actually important and meaningful in your life. Productivity is what makes the difference between someone who runs a company and the employees who work for her. It is also the difference between having no time or energy left at the end of the day and having a ton of time and energy left over to invest however you want.

Obviously you can use the tactics in this book however you want; my approach has always been one of striking a balance between carving out more time and energy for the things that are meaningful to me, and accomplishing more. This approach simply fits with the way I think. I like to accomplish and do cool things, but I also love having the freedom to spend my time as I please.

When you take the time to invest in your productivity, and use what you learn to carve out more time for what matters most to you, I think it's entirely realistic that your average day could look a little more like this:



At least, that's what I've found during my decade of intense experimentation with productivity.

## A YEAR OF PRODUCTIVITY

I was caught on the horns of a dilemma. Both job offers I had received had great starting salaries, promises of career advancement, and looked like a lot of fun on the surface. But as I began to think about each of them more deeply, I came to the realization that they weren't really what I wanted to do with my life.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not some spoiled dilettante obsessed with spouting eighteenth-century French poetry all day. I just didn't want to throw the limited time I had into a black hole that did nothing more than provide me with a paycheck every second Friday.

So I began to consider what other options I had—and suddenly everything fell into place.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the University of California at Irvine

was one of a group of universities that decided to build their campuses without any paths. (I went to school in Canada, but I love this story.) Students and faculty simply walked in the grass around the campus buildings as they pleased, without following a walkway that was already paved for them. A year or so later, once the school could see where the grass was worn around the buildings, they paved over *those* paths instead. The sidewalks at UC Irvine don't simply connect the buildings to one another in a predetermined way—they're mapped to where people naturally want to walk. Landscape architects call these paths "desire paths."

In a similar fashion, as I began to question the two traditional paths I had before me, I thought about what paths I had already carved out in my life that I actually wanted to continue traveling on. It only took me a few seconds to see that the thing I was most passionate about was productivity.

I knew I couldn't explore the topic of productivity forever. When I graduated, I had about \$10,000 saved up (Canadian dollars—equal to about \$30 US dollars, or \$1,500 in *Monopoly* money). After I ran the numbers, I figured it was enough money to continue traveling down my desire path for a year, or in other words, get me through one year of exploring the topic of productivity. I also had \$19,000 in student loans, so it would be a gamble. I would have to eat a lot of beans and rice, but if there was a time in my life when it made sense to make a big bet on my future, it was then. Sure, the idea of a yearlong project was a bit of a cliché, but that was simply a function of how much financial runway I had to explore the topic.

Shortly after I graduated in May of 2013, I officially declined the two full-time job offers to start a project of my own that I named *A Year of Productivity* (or *AYOP*).

The idea behind the project was simple. For one entire year, I would devour everything I could get my hands on about productivity and write about what I learned on my website, [ayearofproductivity.com](http://ayearofproductivity.com).

For 365 days, I

- Read countless books and academic journal articles on productivity, delving deep into the prevailing research on the topic.

- Interviewed productivity gurus to see how they live productively every day.
- Conducted as many productivity experiments as I could, using myself as a guinea pig to explore what it takes to become as productive as possible.

Although much of my time was spent on research and interviews to get to the bottom of what it takes to become more productive, my productivity experiments quickly became the most noteworthy part of my project—in part because I learned so many unique lessons from them (and in part because so many of them were batshit crazy). My productivity experiments included

- Meditating for 35 hours a week.
- Working 90-hour weeks.
- Waking up at 5:30 every morning to see the impact on my productivity.
- Watching 70 hours of TED talks one week.
- Gaining 10 pounds of lean muscle mass.
- Living in total isolation.
- Drinking only water for a month.

And many more.

*AYOP* served as the perfect framework to experiment with all the productivity tactics I was curious about but hadn't had the time to research or experiment with. The purpose of my project was to dive as deeply as possible into productivity for a year, and then share everything I learned with the world.

## **ABOUT THIS BOOK**

*The Productivity Project* is the crescendo for my year of intense research and experimentation. Over the last decade I've read about, researched, and tested thousands of productivity hacks to filter out the ones that work from the ones that don't. For *The Productivity Project* I have se-

lected the *twenty-five* productivity tactics that, among the thousands I've encountered, I believe will make the biggest impact on your work on a daily basis. I have personally experimented with and use every tactic in this book regularly—and I'm confident they will help you, too.

I won't spoil too much of what's to come, but in the chapters ahead I will reveal my favorite productivity tactics so that you can

- Identify the integral tasks in your work.
- Work on those tasks more efficiently.
- Manage your time like a ninja.
- Quit procrastinating.
- Work smarter, not harder.
- Develop laserlike focus.
- Achieve zenlike mental clarity throughout the day.
- Have more energy than you have ever had before.
- And much more!

If that sounds like a daunting list, don't worry—it'll be a blast, and we'll tackle it all one page at a time.

You ready? Let's do this.