

Remote Ready



Strategies for Productivity



Metanalysis studies conclude that working remotely makes you a **more productive employee**. Many interwoven factors, both positive and negative, are at play. Meeting pliancy, impromptu conversations, and long commute times are just some of the many related variables.

Nevertheless, you will encounter a steep learning curve as you navigate the transition from an in-office to an at-home or otherwise remote working environment.

This PDF is broken into four sections, each detailing strategy to **maintain and even boost your remote work productivity**.



[The Power of Pomodoro](#)



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The Power of Pomodoro

1. The Power of Pomodoro

The Pomodoro Technique is a time management strategy that originated in the late 1980s.¹ The premise is simple: grab a timer to set for 25 minutes. The original was shaped like a *pomodoro*, the Italian word for tomato. Start the timer and work with unyielding focus on a single, predetermined task. When finished, take five minutes to relax, breathe, step outside, or even daydream - anything to reward yourself for the previous batch of work. Every four pomodori recompense you with a longer break (often 30 minutes) to genuinely decompress.²

Your gut-check reaction to Pomodoro may be: “I’m a hard-working and focused professional. Not only do I not need the Pomodoro technique to be productive, it would actually be a waste of time to take all of these 5- or 30-minute breaks.” This sentiment is understandable. Busy lives and long to-do lists may make Pomodoro appear frivolous. Please first consider this exercise:

Take a 25-minute segment to focus on a specific task. This could be answering email, working on a project, or completing any other singular task. Focus only on the job at hand. In doing so, keep a pen and paper at your side. **Write down every thought unrelated to the assignment that enters your consciousness over the next 25 minutes.** Be honest with yourself...this exercise serves no purpose if you are not.

If you find your page filling up, I hope you begin to internalize how persistent and ever-changing distractions scatter our ability to focus. Look into making Pomodoro part of your daily routine.³ The premise is simple, but the results are powerful.

¹ Staffan Noteberg. *Pomodoro Technique Illustrated: The Easy Way to Do More in Less Time*. 2009. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Jg9QDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT12&dq=pomodoro+technique&ots=dTL3iVfLB0&sig=MqC5qr6eowK5kp22wCXR2a0rKBo#v=onepage&q=pomodoro%20technique&f=false>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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Scheduling to Succeed

2. Scheduling to Succeed

The Pomodoro technique incorporates the most widely recommended productivity tip: scheduling your day. While scheduling may not excite you, it appears in virtually every book, manual, or self-help website you will encounter.

There is a reason for its unanimous endorsements. For the Greek philosopher Seneca: “To be everywhere is to be nowhere.”

In a society that condones and implicitly substantiates multi-tasking, ease up. Slow down. You cannot and never will do everything at once. Here are some useful suggestions:

- **Schedule in the smallest increments possible.** Working calendars tend to utilize 30-minute calendar increments. 30 (or even 15-minute) segments force you to break a larger task into smaller, bite-size increments. While a three-hour time block may be necessary for a larger project, it indicates that you have not broken it down into specific, actionable steps. Your mind will drift to the entirety of the task at hand without a step-by-step gameplan.
- **Don't limit yourself to your job.** Schedule your mornings, evenings, and weekends to reap similar benefits in your personal life. Doing so may understandably stoke fears of being overly mechanized: “Where's the spontaneity?” First, maintain spontaneity by adding larger, blank chunks of time to your agenda. Second, consider the implications: certainty in everyday decision-making, confidence for what's next, and prioritization of the most important things. For me, it's an easy decision. Don't leave your personal time to happenstance.

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Scheduling to Succeed (continued)

- **Print your daily work calendar out and keep it on your desk.** While you may need to change items during the day, a printed reference will encourage you to stick to your plans. You can also refer to your scheduled progress (or lack thereof!) at any time without clicking around on your computer, which can too frequently tempt you toward your email inbox.
- **Schedule preordained times for email throughout the day.** Speaking of your inbox, recognize that 99% of email messages are not critically time sensitive. The world will not end if a few minutes becomes a few hours. The other half of this challenge entails managing your colleague's expectations. Stress to your co-workers that truly urgent issues merit a phone call. Constant work in your inbox pulls you between tasks and becomes a proxy for productivity: "Why not jump over to my inbox for a quick check?" Batch your email; schedule a few times to complete it throughout the day.

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Your Workspace

3. Your Workspace

Explore the type of workspace that functions best for your preferences. A cluttered workspace is often a dysfunctional workspace. Your general surroundings may also hamper productivity:

- **Physical materials.** Keep a clean desk. Remove superfluous work items (irrelevant folders or papers), unnecessary duplicates (the 15 pens that no longer work), and general clutter. Just as mental tasks tax your brain, physical materials subconsciously divert your attention from whatever you would otherwise focus on.
- **The teleworking environment.** Your working space should reflect what you do in that space. A kitchen reflects cooking, a bedroom rest. Your office space should be associated with the work you do there. You may be able to take your laptop to a dining table, couch, or bed, but will find the life compartmentalization you so rely on will start to scramble. Writers are well-known advocates of uninterrupted focus, seeking extreme solitude in locations only associated with their work. Henry David Thoreau wrote the classic *Walden* in a desolate forest cabin over the course of several years.⁴ We may not all have this luxury, but the point remains! I will touch more on the remote 'office' in the final section.
- **Your new coworkers.** In the remote world, old co-workers may be replaced by partners, children, and pets! While you will invariably be dragged into some household matters, set clear expectations with those around you. Consider setting aside specific time to play with children or help with chores. Close your office door, if possible. Be deliberate with and protective of your time. Lastly, stress that the quicker your work gets done, the sooner you can substantively return to personal obligations!

⁴ Henry David Thoreau. *Walden*.

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The Two P's

4. The Two P's

The two P's refer to principles referenced by Timothy Ferriss in his popular book *The 4-Hour Workweek*.⁵ *The 4-Hour Work Week* caught fire in the early 2000s as the first foray into the hacking of productivity to hit the mainstream market. Let's take them in turn.

Pareto's Law is known colloquially as the 80/20 Law: "80% of the outputs result from 20% of the inputs."⁶ This curious phenomenon takes root across various disciplines: sociology, biology, history, etc. For example, 20% of drivers cause 80% of accidents, a phenomenon roughly consistent across time and place. Ferriss turns this principle towards his personal and professional life to weed out *inefficiencies*. He postulated that if 80% of profits are driven by 20% of customers, one should place a disproportionate amount of her/his focus on those 1/5 of buyers. Turn your work time toward those who are most impacted by or impactful to your organization's success.

By contrast, Parkinson's Law states that "a task will swell in perceived importance and complexity in relation to the time allotted for its completion."⁷ While this scenario may evoke nightmares of last-minute exam prep or essay submissions, it's broader implications are profound. To be most productive, you must permit yourself the narrowest deadline possible; doing so will force you to focus on the essentials. Furthermore, your deadline must be absolute. If you even subconsciously believe that your due date is self-constructed, your sense of urgency will weaken, and your productivity will fall.

⁵ Timothy Ferriss. *The 4-Hour Workweek*. 2007.

⁶ Ibid, p71.

⁷ Ibid, p77.