Time is the great and constant equalizer because every single person has the same amount.

Some are better than others at utilizing their time and accomplishing more, while some, who are just as smart and talented - are far less productive.

And it doesn’t have anything to do with work ethic or dedication.

Here are 10 enemies of productivity and their solutions...

1.) WE DON’T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN: Often times, we know what we want to accomplish, but it feels as if there are a million different ways to go about it. The result of which can lead to ‘paralysis analysis’.

Solution: Create a list with the end in mind. What are your goals and what is your time frame? From there, work backward and piece together the tasks that will need to be accomplished. Keep going till you get to the beginning.

Related, it might be a good idea to list potential roadblocks (or materials/services/help) that you’ll need later on, so you’ll be aware and prepared to handle them when you reach that point.
2.) **TIME MANAGEMENT:** If a project is important, sometimes we’ll spend more time than is necessary to accomplish it. This is usually when we move past our natural concentration window, and though we keep slugging along, we don’t actually make much progress.

**Solution:** The Pomodoro technique is a great way to manage your time and your results. You basically use a timer, and work in 25-minute intervals (called ‘Pomodoros’), then take a mandatory 3-5 minute break. When you’ve reached 4 Pomodoros, take a longer break (15-30 min).

At the start of each week, identify the time you have available. Understand what you can realistically achieve, while leaving enough time for things you absolutely must do.

3.) **IMMEDIATE GRATIFICATION:** Just like how a diet can sometimes be hard, many of us are quick to opt for the cookie equivalent of tasks. Rather than tackle the critical tasks, it’s often easier to do what’s fun/easy.

**Solution:** Just like instilling healthy eating behaviors, becoming aware of what we’re doing is key. Like a food journal, a time log is a great way to track what we’re doing with our time.

However, if keeping a consistent time log sounds daunting, just do it initially to see where the biggest time leaks are occurring. Then be mindful to start plugging those leaks. It may help to identify and write down the unpleasant consequences of NOT completing the task.
4.) WORKING ON THE WRONG TASKS: Sometimes we start projects by wanting to tackle the first thing we think of. However, the tasks that grab our attention are not always the most important. Or they may be important, but they might require other steps to be completed first.

Solution: Breakdown the list from Step #1 into smaller steps with a corresponding priority number. Then start each day by prioritizing the day’s tasks (with performance benchmarks).

Using your list to optimize your time and focus on top priorities will help shed light on what’s truly important and how much time each task warrants.

5.) FEAR: It’s human nature to be anxious about (and even dread) difficult, new or challenging tasks. And once you add a feeling of being overwhelmed or unprepared (whether it’s true or not), it’s easy to see how procrastination can result.

Solution: Consult your list. Just like how it can help with time allocation, it can also help alleviate your fears. Breaking a project down into steps takes the imagined result and puts it into small actionable items that you can feel confident in tackling.

Related, it may help to write out the specific behaviors you intend to do, including details such as when, where and how you are going to take action.
6.) INTERNAL CONFLICTS: Besides just a fear of failing or being overwhelmed, sometimes we’re reticent to start because we (secretly or not) fear the potential success, or we’re waiting till just the “right” mood or moment (perfectionism).

**Solution:** As difficult as it may be, face your difficult tasks earlier rather than later (Brian Tracy talks about ‘Eating your frog or most difficult task first thing each day’). However, some believe simply getting started and building momentum is the most important step.

Whichever method works for you, make sure your steps are tangible (rather than keeping them in the abstract). So instead of ‘thinking about an outline’, you would ‘write out’ your outline.

7.) INCONSISTENT WORK HABITS: Some days we’re more productive than others. But if the less-productive days start to outnumber the others, there might be a problem with consistent work habits.

**Solution:** Establish routines and stick to them as much as possible. While crises will arise, you’ll be much more productive if you can follow routines most of the time. Pick a time and place that will work for you and not against you.

It might help to ask a friend or colleague to check in with your progress.
8.) BEING TOO AVAILABLE: Sometimes well-meaning family and friends can be a drain on your time.

Solution: It may seem a little juvenile, but you might need to utilize a white board with a message of "Working/studying, please come in if it’s an emergency". Another strategy might be to create standard ‘office hours’ (like a college professor).

9.) POOR HEALTH HABITS: Poor health habits can be surprisingly impactful on your productivity. If you don’t get enough rest and/or nutritious food your body, brain and energy cannot function at its optimal level.

Solution: Much like strategically planning your tasks, it might be a good idea to take the same mindset when it comes to food and sleep. Making sleep, nutrition, exercise and ‘down-time’ a beneficial priority will improve your energy, productivity and allow you to get more accomplished in the end.

10.) LOSS OF MOTIVATION: Sometimes it’s just difficult to keep working towards our goal.

Solution: Create rewards for completing each necessary task (e.g., starting, completing steps, completion of tasks).

Be aware and feel good about your progress - even if it’s small. The more action and progress you make, the more you’ll believe you can succeed, which will inspire you to keep going.
Good luck on your next successful project! Have faith in yourself and you will succeed.

Sources

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