
Rules for being more productive.

Fifteen rules for protecting your best hours from email, phones, interruptions and meetings without an end time.

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1 Set times each day to check email and voicemail.

Studies have found the average worker checks email around 30 times a day. Instead, let email batch up, and check it three or four times a day. Quit or close your email when you're working on important tasks. Read work emails only, delete the ones that aren't business-related, and unsubscribe from lists that don't contribute to client work. Thirty minutes should be enough to return all important emails and calls. Lunch is a good time for personal business and personal messages. Leave personal email, browsing and personal calls until your most important work is done.

2 Do not disturb.

With set times for email and messages, you'll find you have longer stretches to focus on critical tasks. Don't disturb others with random questions and social or personal matters. Save your work questions and either put them in one email or ask for a few minutes to meet. Stick to the point, and get back to the important task at hand. Clients depend on you for focused, quality work.

3 Don't spam clients or co-workers.

Email can save you time, but not if you abuse it. Only send and copy people in when it really matters. Take the time to write each email professionally and with clear direction. The reader will thank you for not wasting their precious time. Be considerate.

4 Protect time for important tasks.

Most people leave at the end of the day and wonder why they didn't get much done. Some say 80% of a day is lost to meaningless interruptions and tasks that aren't client-related. Guarantee yourself blocks of time for important tasks, and you can spend most of your day on important client business and feel great about what you've achieved.

5 Don't agree to meetings or calls with no clear agenda or end time.

If the desired outcome is clearly defined, with an objective and an agenda of topics or questions, no meeting or call should last more than 30 minutes. Ask for the agenda in advance so you "can best prepare and make good use of the time together".

6 Stay focused and on task.

Write yourself a note and put it on your desk: "What are you doing now? Is it on task?" If the answer isn't related to your critical work, stop what you are doing and get back to the scheduled task.

7 Batch similar tasks and do them all at once.

Good examples are email, phone calls, invoicing, coding supplier invoices, timesheets and work orders. You'll quickly find which tasks make the most sense to batch.

8 Meet in a meeting room.

It cuts down on distracting others, and keeps the meeting and its information to the people involved. Others are trying to focus on their work, and don't need loud talking pulling them off task.

9 Don't have a distracting browser home page.

Checking the weather, news and shopping is a waste of time unless you are researching for a client. Change your home page to something useful. Better yet, close your browser and only open it when you need it for work.

10 Don't answer calls from numbers you don't recognise.

Don't risk being surprised by an unwanted call. Let it go to voicemail and return it at your scheduled time.

11 Don't email first thing in the morning or last thing at night.

The first scrambles your priorities and plans for the day. The second stops you resting in the evening. Email can wait until your scheduled time.

12 Don't leave without setting one or two critical tasks for the next morning.

It keeps you focused on a critical task first thing the next day.

13 Don't let people ramble.

Control the conversation. Forget "How's it going?" when someone calls. Try "What's up?" or "I'm in the middle of getting something out, but I have a quick minute to help you." Get to the point, politely.

14 **Prioritise.**

If you don't prioritise, everything seems urgent and important. If you define the single most important task (or tasks) for each day, almost nothing else seems urgent. Define the few important things that can really make a difference to you or your clients.

15 **Don't carry your phone 24/7.**

Phones are a rude interruption to work and personal lives. People think that whatever they are doing, and whoever they are talking to, they have to take the call. Silence your phone and let it go to voicemail. You can return the call an hour later, or the next morning.

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**Don't seek to be a person of
Importance.
Seek to be a person of Value.**

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