

## Ask SCORE

# HIGHLY PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYEES PRIORITIZE, MANAGE TIME WELL

Some people are productive. Some are highly productive. They accomplish more in the same time as others. Why? They have taken the initiative to identify and solve problems rather than waiting for instructions. They have adopted skills that differentiate themselves from others. Their work habits allow them to produce more at the same time, with the same energy as others who have not taken the time or interest to apply approaches that allow them to be highly productive.

They exceed expectations of their contribution to the work of an organization. Stephen Covey started thinking about what differentiates those who exceed in his landmark book 'Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.' Others have taken this topic to the next level. They all start with two key elements: goal setting and prioritization.

**Goal setting.** Those that are highly productive set clear, concise, focused goals. They learn the SMART concept of goal setting — Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely.

**Prioritization.** They break down their goals into actionable steps and prioritize

them effectively. They recognize that some of their goals and objectives are URGENT and others are just IMPORTANT. They prioritize their tasks, focusing on those that have the greatest impact on their overall mission. Highly productive personnel view their goals and objectives through an 80/20 lens. 20 percent of their tasks have the most impact and normally are the hardest to tackle.

**Management of time.** To be highly productive, they use time management techniques to block time using to-do lists to focus their activity. Highly productive people use timelines to block their time which increases their ability to focus. Another way to improve productivity is to minimize distractions so they can focus on whatever goal they are addressing by minimizing multi-tasking that is counterproductive. Maximizing one's focus on one task at a time concentrates one's energy before moving on to the next activity. By managing time individuals can take strategic breaks or make me-time for themselves so they can refocus on the task at hand.

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**Minimize distractions.** It has been quoted in the business press that the average person gets interrupted 13 times a day. To be a highly productive individual take steps to reduce or eliminate distractions. It might mean turning off email notifications, using website blockers, or creating a dedicated work time when you are not interrupted.

**Life-long learning.** They invest their free time in self-improvement and learning. They stay up-to-date on trends that impact their industry and adopt new skills that improve their ability to get even more out of every hour they are on the job.

**Work/Life Balance.** High productivity results from having a healthy work/life balance. This prevents burnout and lowers stress, allowing you to concentrate on what is urgent.

**Practice clear communication.** A productivity enhancer is practicing clear, concise, succinct communications that reduce the amount of time taken to deliver and receive messages and reduce the chance of confusion or misinterpretation that impacts productivity.

**Networking.** Building a strong network of professionals who can provide support in undertaking projects is a great strategy for achieving high productivity.

**Just say NO.** Highly productive people know that is OK to say NO. You can say no by saying YES. "Yes, I can help but not now.

How about this afternoon at 2 p.m.?" By always saying YES, your productivity is constantly being interrupted. And by always saying YES, you become overloaded with others' work or issues. Just say NO by saying YES.

**Automation.** When repetitive tasks are automated then productivity increases. Highly productive individuals look at technology as their friend and find ways to apply tools that allow them to focus on activities that cannot be automated. Another way to free up time to be more productive is to delegate. Let others take on tasks that are time usurpers.

**Personal health and wellness.** If you are going to be a high performer, you need to take care of yourself. Get enough sleep. Eat healthily, exercise regularly and maintain a positive attitude.

**Kaizen.** By reflecting and seeking feedback on your performance you can constantly be improving how you execute your work. When you get feedback you know what to work on next to become a higher performer. By adopting Kaizen, you also can review how you do your work and create more effective routines that make performance predictable and routine. Along with developing systems to make work more productive, it is mandatory to measure and analyze performance.

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