
The Single Most-Effective Productivity Strategy

Excerpt from *Leaders Lab: 66 Ways to Develop Your Leadership Skill, Strategy, and Style* by Jane Moyer

The Challenge: Making Sure the Right Things Get Done

The Question: How Can Make the Very Best Use of Your Time?

Consider This

“Action expresses priorities.”—Mahatma Gandhi

Try This: High-Impact Activities First

All Activities Are Not Equal

Remember the 80/20 Rule? It applies in many realms, including your personal productivity. You may be a very busy person, but all of your activities aren't created equal. About 20% of your activities probably produce about 80% of your results. We'll call those your “High-Impact Activities.”

Determine Your Highest-Impact Activities

Start by thinking “big picture.” Consider your overarching purpose and most significant goals. Using a longer-term time horizon (e.g. yearly or more, quarterly, or monthly, depending on your role), ask:

- *If you could only achieve a few things during this time period, which would be most important?*
- *Which activities have the most overall impact?*

Write down your three “Big Picture” Highest-Impact Activities:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Then consider a more immediate timeframe (e.g. monthly, weekly, daily).

- *Right now, which 1–3 activities will lead you most directly to accomplishing your major goals?*

Write down your three “Daily” Highest-Impact Activities:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Schedule Your Highest-Impact Activities First!

Keep High-Impact Activities at the forefront for all of your planning:

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- As you write your yearly, monthly, and weekly goals, identify and focus on Highest-Impact Activities that will move you most directly toward reaching them.
 - Every evening, write down your 1–3 Highest-Impact Activities for the next day. Schedule these as the first activities in your day.
 - Post them where they will be visible to you throughout the day.
 - Let other less important activities work around them.

High Impact First Today!

Work on your Highest-Impact Activity first thing each day. Your productivity will increase immensely if you undertake the most important activity BEFORE other things come up. (Yes, this may mean putting off all but the most urgent e-mail in the morning!)

But...

... **I'm NOT a morning person!** If you are “not a morning person,” put your Highest-Impact Activity off until your personal “Prime Time,” your most productive work time, ONLY IF you can firmly schedule it and avoid interruptions later. Otherwise, it's likely the day will get away from you.

... **what about my colleague's urgent project?** If something “urgent” comes up, test it to be sure it is truly urgent and at least as important as your Highest-Impact Activity before “bumping” your priority. If you must stray, immediately plan a time to get back to your Highest-Impact Activity.

... **I'll just do something easy first to warm up.** Often the Highest-Impact Activity is also a difficult one. If it seems overwhelming, try breaking the activity down into smaller steps and taking it on one step at a time. Often the momentum from a smaller action will drive you forward.

... **I think I'll wait until a better time.** For some activities, especially those that involve others, right timing can be imperative. If you find yourself putting something off until “a better time,” test that impulse. How likely are things to improve if you wait? Sometimes waiting until the time is right or more information is available can make a big difference. Often, though, it's an excuse to procrastinate.

Try this strategy and see how much you accomplish!

Keep a log, noting your progress on Highest-Impact Activities. Review it regularly, noting successes, as well as anything that may have distracted you. Celebrate your successes and make any needed adjustments to improve your record. Review your overall results on a regular basis to know where your efforts are paying off; then adjust your High-Impact Activities list as needed.

Apply & Evaluate: What Do You Notice?

Identify your Highest-Impact Activities. Schedule your top one first thing in your day for 3–5 days.

Then notice:

- *How did your overall productivity level change?*
- *What would be the impact if you continued to do this every day?*
- *What pulled you away or might distract you from your High-Impact Activities? What can you do to maintain High-Impact Focus?*

Take Action: Now What?

It's likely that everything on your “to do” lists won't get done. Make sure the most important activities get your priority time and best attention.

For many people, adjusting their “to do” list and schedule to guarantee focus on their highest results-producing activities will dramatically improve their productivity. Try it yourself for a month or so. If you stumble, keep going. Make adjustments to make the strategy work for you. If you find it beneficial, consider how the strategy might be applied within your team to achieve greater overall productivity and results.

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