

How to start your day rite (and right!)

What's the first thing you do at work every morning? Most people start by checking social media and email. That eats valuable minutes and perpetuates a cycle of engaging in low value work right away. The problem with this is that before you know it, the morning is gone and you haven't accomplished anything meaningful.

While everyone has their own way of prepping for the day, and no two people may approach it in exactly the same manner, if you don't take the time to make yours work for you, chances are you won't function efficiently or be effective.

Because it sets the stage for the rest of the day, the first hour is crucial. Here are 8 suggestions for making that first hour count:

1. Movement

Before you stumble from the bed to your shower, take a few minutes to move and wake your body up. Light exercise, a few minutes deep breathing, a few stretches and another five minutes of something that gets your heart rate up will do you a power of good.

2. Eating

Coffee can be great to wake you up. But remember, it's a drug and easy to become addicted to. So use carefully. The easiest way to see how habituated you are is to take a break from it.

You know yourself whether you're a breakfast person - if you are, have breakfast. If you're not, don't get hung up on the 'breakfast is the most important meal' idea. The simple truth is that the vast majority of people in the West eat too much and too often. You're not going to suffer by skipping breakfast, if that's your thing.

The important thing is to do what suits you, your lifestyle and what you want to achieve.

3. Grooming

Even if you're working from home, there are huge benefits from showering, grooming and dressing at the start of your day. Clean, crisp clothing chosen for work underscores that this isn't a day off, that you're getting ready to achieve your goals. It's much easier to be motivated when you feel good.

4. Social Media

Avoid starting your day with your phone. Social media is the last thing you need when you're trying to set yourself up for a productive, successful day. Few people would think of starting the day with a shot of whiskey or a line of coke. Hard to believe, but social media interactions are more addictive than coffee and hard drugs. They're designed to trigger a dopamine response that gives you an instant 'hit'. The problem with that is all highs are followed by equal or greater lows.

5. Email

Starting with your email inbox is another easy path to not achieving your goals. You may begin with good intentions but by the time you're halfway through, you've probably strayed far from your priorities.

There is a time and place for email. Imagine email was snail mail, and the post was delivered once a day. How would you handle it? Try these tips:

- (a) check email once a day - when you've completed your top priority tasks.
- (b) empty your inbox every day - move anything that needs action or response to a separate folder, delete everything unimportant (unimportant to you, should be minimum 80% of what comes in) and archive the rest.
- (c) review your for-action/response folder and deal with what requires action or response today. If there is anything in the folder more than one week old, why is it there?

(d) educate your colleagues/suppliers/customers that you only check your email once a day and to allow up to 24-48-72 / 1-2-3 working days for a response. The easiest way to do this is to set up an autoresponder.

(e) Teach people how to flag items as urgent. Reinforce your message with those who 'false-flag' emails.

6. Phone calls

Never answer your phone. We forget that the phone is a tool for our convenience. Its purpose is to facilitate communication. It allow us to talk directly to people, to send and receive voicemails and text messages. Just because it has a 'bell' or notifies us of an incoming call or message, there is no obligation on you to answer it.

So unless you have absolutely nothing to do and have completed your agenda for the day, never answer the phone. Instead, stick to your agenda and priorities.

There is a special place in hell for people who call and don't leave a message, or who text asking you to call them. In general, when replying to someone, use the same medium they did. So if they leave a voicemail, ring them back. If they text you, text them back.

Also, there will be a very small group to whom these rules don't apply, e.g. spouse, boss (possibly). You will find though that these are the ones least likely to waste your time or make unnecessary demands.

7. See the wood and the trees.

The first hour is a good time to look at the big picture. See where today fits into your overall scheme of things. That will help you evaluate what's important both today and for tomorrow and beyond. It's much easier to do this before you get caught up in the detail and micro tasks.

8. To-do lists

Love 'em or hate 'em, it's hard to beat 'em. Your to-do list should be long enough to include what you want to do today and short enough to get everything on it done today.

There is a huge difference between thinking today about all the things you have to do and thinking about all the things you have to do today.

The key characteristic of a to-do list should be that it evolves into a DONE list before the end of the day. You could call that a to-do-today list or simply a to-day list. Anything that's not for today can be pushed to another list – this week, this month, this quarter etc. It's a good idea to review these from time to time and dump what's no longer necessary or no longer a priority.

Conclusion:

Try some or all of these suggestions and see whether they work for you. Pay attention to how you feel, and changes in your energy and stress levels. You may want to keep a diary or journal. When you find things that suit you, help you get going and get things done, include them in your morning routine.

I will be running a workshop in July '22 on self management around making best use of our time, including how the time we 'work' to differs from clock time, how to speed time up and slow it down and how to eliminate unnecessary and unhelpful activities and tasks from our day.

If you'd like to find out more, click here to join my newsletter. You'll be automatically kept up to date and can unsubscribe any time you like.