

Hello All,

First this article is way too long, I tried to make it as shorter but not everything fits into one a4. I advise you to print out the article. On the computer you might have difficulties going through the whole piece.

I would like to share "the winning habits" AKA **WH** in greater detail as talked about in one of the Quantified Self Conference sessions thanks to a push from Ioan Mitrea.

The **WH** ensures flow with minimum effort to have a great day. The book "The four agreements" says "everyday is a war and you are a warrior". In other words, you are faced with daily tasks you have to defeat. These tasks can be small like choosing what to wear in the morning or what to have for breakfast to big like writing a progress report. Common sense would say, you would want to save up most of your energy for the important tasks that help you move forward. You don't want to waste too much time on decision and problems that are not of high value.

Let me start with some small frustrations:

- 1- The shirt I wanted to wear is dirty. I spend 10 minutes mindlessly with my morning brain searching for a replacement shirt that still needs to be ironed. (so expensive right!)
- 2- No more yogurt at home, what am I going to have for breakfast? You find yourself buying breakfast outside for three times the price and you are still hungry!
- 3- I don't have time to go to the bathroom because I need to catch the bus. Can't have a peaceful bus ride where I can read or listen to audiobook since I am distracted ;)
- 4- Why am I always cooking the same things? I find myself making the recipes I have done a hundred times.
- 5- I really want to read that book, but I am spending too much time on Facebook in the evening.
- 6- Why I am sleeping at 1:00am tonight ... again?

The solution

The solution is a set of "winning habits". A list of *easy* habits you can check off at the end of your day. These habits are based on lots of books/ blogs on self-discipline, psychology of getting things done, getting into a good state and my experience as a student and expert procrastinator. My main motivation for using them is having a good fun day and working daily towards my goal.

Why would you want to do the winning habits?

The pain

Realizing you have not made a lot of progress makes me less inclined to relax once I get home. I feel a bit guilty for wasting time and for some reason I don't enjoy dinner as much, feel slow and tired, and part of my mind is still at work deciding what I am going to do to get back on track and questions why I spend so much time doing nothing. It is not a very pleasant feeling. In those days, you don't feel as good and as a result you don't go to bed as early. It is a viscous cycle, because the next day you are tired and you get more behind on your work.

The Pleasure

When you have a good day, everything seems to be better. Food tastes better, you call your friends to meet up and chill out, and you enjoy the book you wanted to read for quite some time. Even going to bed early is fun, since tomorrow you get a chance to have another good day. In the morning you feel energized looking forward to a tasty breakfast and going to work afterwards.

It is crucial to keep in my mind and in heart the feeling of a good day. It is almost like "Eating Freshly made Hummus" and canned Hummus. Once you have fresh hummus you can't go back, you can but it will leave a bad taste in your mouth.

The method

The **WB** is a simple excel sheet with 30 action items / habits that will make your life easier. Note that it is important that you customize it to fit your lifestyle and desires.

I will explain the WB needed for my lifestyle:

My important priorities during the week (replace them with yours here)

- 1- Good Food (as you might have guessed)
- 2- Productive day at work
- 3- Good Rest / Fun

These three empower each other, creating a strong positive cycle.

So let's break it down

Morning Part

The morning starts already in the evening:

-Selecting and ironing your clothes + running clothes if you plan on running. Netherlands weather is pretty predictable either it is really cold or really cold and rainy.

-Making sure you have breakfast ingredients at home

This will ensure that the moment you wake up, you don't need to make silly decisions or lose time going the supermarket.

When you wake up, wake up. No SNOOZING, no 5 minutes, no 1 minute. Get up, a slow start will somehow stretch to your whole day.

When I get up I do 20 situps and 20 pushups, so I can't get back to bed. Go to the shower directly, STAY AWAY from the phone & computer, I repeat stay away. There is no such thing as 5 minute computer checking. Cool now you're clean, slip into your already prepared clothes. That felt really easy right?

Go downstairs, and start preparing breakfast. I put on audiobooks in the morning to get in the mood of working and get an inspirational push. Topics can be about: Psychology, Personal Finance, Discipline, Organization, Negotiation, spirituality... Now when you eat, don't turn on the TV. Just eat, enjoy the food and optional listen to your audiobook. TV & the news are noise, unless you work in journalism or a specific business knowing what is on the TV does not help you, and it is usually only about negative things. Random people that died, another bankruptcy, floods, stuff does not brighten your day. After breakfast you might want to use the bathroom, make sure you have planned enough time before leaving to work. Step outside to the fresh air and catch the tram / bus / train / car or better the bike. You can still be listening to the audiobook or you can reward yourself with some of your favorite music to add a positive vibe to your already very productive day. Note that you might have already listened to 30 minutes of audiobook this way you could finish a book in 2 weeks.

Work part

There is a lot of literature on how to do your work effectively so I won't go into detail. I recommend Getting Things Done by David Allen. Most of the important tips are:

Eat the frog – Brain Tracy

Do the most difficult thing first. This gives you a tremendously energy boost, remember the moment you do this. You'll love the feeling.

Four Agreements - Don Miguel Ruiz

Keep your word ... always

Getting things done – David Allen

Break it down into tiny task, have vision and work daily towards your goal.

Practice OKR Objective and Key Results – CEO Zynga

It requires that you set 3 goals every week. 3 Results you write down Sunday and check against them Friday. Here is the complete article:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/31/business/31corner.html?scp=1&sq=mark+pincus&st=Search&pagewanted=all>

Allow yourself to procrastinate for in small sessions 4x15min for example

Nourish your spirit with some fun if you are tired. Funny YouTube films, call a friend, walk to the coffee machine and back.

Don't overwork your limits.

If you work from 9 to 21 today, you will only be able to work from 12-18 next day with lowered productivity and fatigue. A workday from 9-6, 8:30-7, consistent over a week will allow to get so much done. It is ok every now and then to do an all-nighter but it is really not cool that you slept only 5 hours for the past week. I used to brag with my lack of sleep, till I found out it had to do with poor planning skills and imbalance between my body and mind.

Work in small time intervals using the Pomodoro technique.

It means you work for 25 minutes nonstop and rest for 5 minutes. It is extremely effective and rewarding. Pomodoro has multiple benefits you memorize more what you have done, you are not tired at the end of the day. You are more aware of your body. Ioan Mitrea recommends [Focus Booster](#) as a great free tool.

Afterwork

Now depends on what you like to do after work, I like to cook. When I cook, I cook at least for two days, so the next day I can either eat it as lunch or dinner. It is important you have dinner at least 2 hours before going to bed or falling asleep will be much more difficult. It also effects the day after, when you wake up you don't feel hungry and you don't feel like having breakfast right away. Moreover breakfast does not taste as well.

I like watching one of my favorite TV series afterwards: Dexter, Breaking bad, The Daily Show, Louis Theroux, Southpark, and Simpsons.

Now here is a *golden tip*, I only want to watch one or two max of those TV series and not spend the rest of the evening emailing and Facebooking. The only way I found out how to do it, is

Leave your laptop charger at the office. I have a crappy HP laptop so they don't last longer than an hour with Wi-Fi and video playing. Just in time to watch an episode. I can't risk checking emailing because than I can't see what happened with Dexter! For more energy efficient laptops, Corina Duijndam recommends limiting internet using program "Freedom" or "StayFocusd".

Afterwards I can read light literature and novels, practice an instrument, go out for a walk or call friends. Now is probably a good time to prepare your clothes for the next day.

In the cooldown you can check off the checklist, must feel great having all those Xs. Don't worry, I rarely get all of them. Instead I get the most important ones and even if I fall off balance, I know I have to do an effort to get back on the ship. The beautiful thing is you start building momentum, when you have been putting x's next to Prepare clothes for 10 days, you don't want to break the chain the 11th day, so you still follow through.

Now we come to a very interesting topic important for productivity, mood and energy. Since you have made it so far down in the text, let's talk about masturbation and sex. There is little useful information on this topic and the advice, but the main consensus is that masturbation makes you slower the next day, less energetic especially if you are using [porn](#). Scientific research has showed that porn overstimulates the brain till exhaustion. Professional boxers withheld from the act for up to 2 -3 weeks before a big fight, Miles Davis before playing a gig, and the Taoism talked about managing desires to improve overall health.

It is impossible to reduce desire to zero with so many sex triggers around us, but you can be strategically smart about it. Any thoughts about this please share?

Sex on the other hand is great, evening or morning it is a great power booster and gives you a great feel with a good vibe in the beginning of the day. A friend of mine compared masturbation and sex as watching sport on TV and playing sports, one leaves you with a coach potato feeling and the other energetic. Then for some people, the opposite is true. Advice on this topic boils down to: reflect on what kind of effect it has on **your** day and then take the necessary actions ;).

Final Words

So in short what the excel list does it prevents the snowball effect, by setting up a routine / game with small and easy tasks. You can reward yourself with points, book, movie, fun you name it.

The small and easy tasks are part of a larger goal. **Sleep early** is not a habit but a combination of

1. Eating dinner 2 hours before sleep (3 hours for a heavy meal)
2. Shutting the pc 1 hour before sleep
3. Cooldown
4. Prepare clothes
5. Plan the day (otherwise you'll think about it in bed)

Same applies to having 1 hour of exercise, losing weight, or reading 30 minutes. Create the ideal situation around the task that makes it so easy. Preparing your running clothes, socks, shoes, after shower towel and clothes, reduce the chance of having second thoughts in the morning because everything is already there.

You can create the habits you want. Whether it is meeting up more often with friends, or making sure you get a 15 minute practice session every two days, it is all possible.

Don't worry if you fall off the wagon. Just make sure you get back on as soon as possible. Samer Helou says be fault tolerant so even if you did get up on time for work, still have breakfast. Without this breakfast you would not be as productive. Always notice the effect it has on your life. Don't let any single unimportant item ruin your day. The funny thing about the list, anytime I can't seem to check as much boxes on my list it usually something is not going smooth:

- 1- Relationship issue
- 2- Work issue
- 3- Personal issue

The fact I am not able to follow the list, means something is disturbing me at the moment. Could be very small, a argument with a friend or pressure at work, they all have an impact; Time for a reflective moment.

You also get to relax during the weekend, no lists. Make sure that Sunday you eat early and go to bed early so as not to upset the routine next week.

I hope this helps, as it definitely has helped me. On the next page is one year worth of data from a productivity measuring program called Rescue Time. You manually type in what you consider very productive (working in word with documents related to graduation, Excel, Matlab), very distracting (Facebook, Reddit, Hotmail) and neutral (work email).

I started using these habits around September. You can see highs and lows, this is completely normal.

Productivity by week (Mon-Fri 6am-8pm)

(954h 35m total)

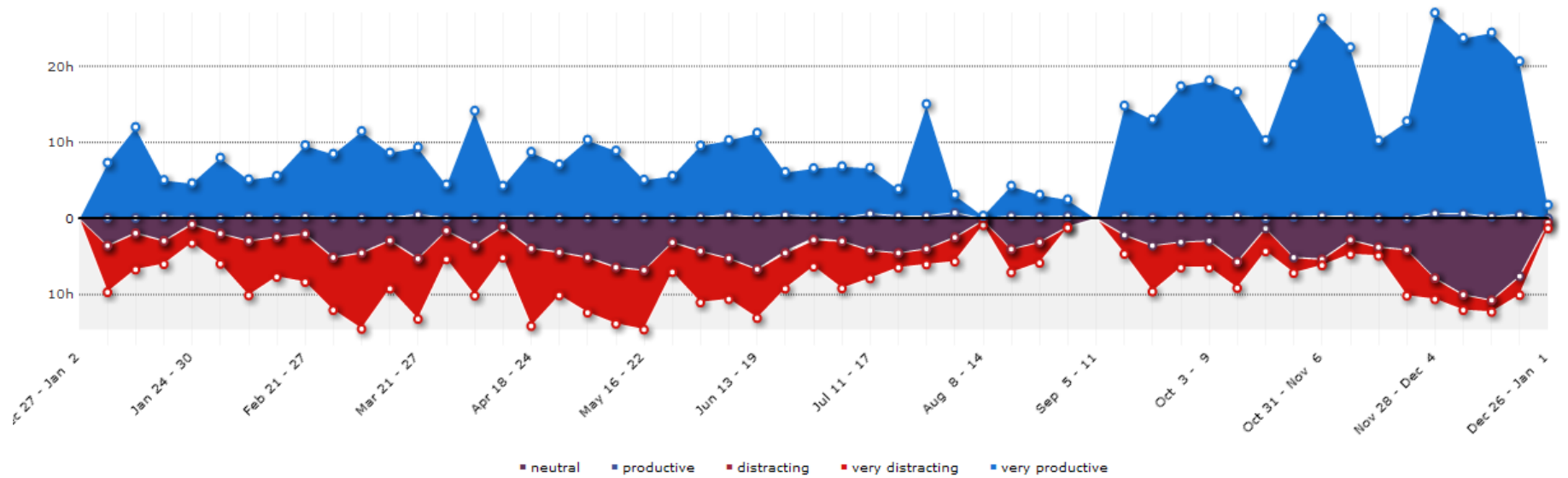
[Home](#) > [Overview](#) > [Productivity](#)

◀ Jan 1 - Dec 31, 2011 ▶ 🔍

show current: year month week day Mon-Fri 6am-8pm

productivities

by week



(I have not made use of the productive or distracting setting, only very productive & distracting)

Special thanks to Julia Farre, Ioan Mitrea, Samer Helou, Omar Halawani, Aisa Essed, Jett Dadswell, Corina Duijndam, Zoa Moeniralam and Laurina Hildering-Lith for taking the time to give feedback and advice.