

How I Start My Day: A Methodical Daily Start-up Regimen for Greater Focus and Less Distraction

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(As featured in his January 2014 *Timely Tips* E-Newsletter – see information on how to subscribe below.)

I've been doing a bit of one-on-one work with a local client that is having the same basic struggles nearly all professionals are dealing with now: too much "crisis-du-jour" management, too much distraction on e-mail and other inputs, not enough time on key, high-priority projects, and not enough time building and developing his people. I wrote up this little guide to help him get out on the right track at the start of the week and the start of every day, with the goal of finding more time for key actions, activities and his people, and also reducing distraction from e-mail and other inputs. I thought you might like it too!

Weekly: Review your key goals and projects list. Make sure that each individual key project or goal has at least one action item in either your task list and/or calendar. Goal time: 10-15 minutes MAX! *(Of course, you have to have your Goals, Projects, and Sub-projects already written out in some form of a note or document so they are EASY to review each and every week! I'm SHOCKED how few people have actually done this simple task that leads to much greater focus and prioritized productivity!)*

Now, Every Morning: BEFORE checking e-mail and other inputs, review calendar for next 1-2 weeks. Strategically block some time for key projects and activities. Also, add items into task list needed for upcoming events on your calendar.

Then, review today's calendar -- how much time is blocked? How much time is open? Then, review today's task list vs. the time you have available. Is it doable, or too much? If too much, move lower-importance and/or less urgent items to a later date. *The goal is to have a task list you might actually be able to fully complete THAT DAY.* Also, look at your delegations and follow-ups. Who do you need to bug today to keep things moving? Try to get these done early in the day, but don't do these until after you check e-mail and your other inputs -- that is next.

All of the above should only take about 5-10 minutes at the start of the day. If it is taking much longer, you are doing something wrong. The goal is to review your calendar and refine your task list before checking e-mail (but not actually start working on tasks!) This should be a quick process, giving you confidence of your day's goals and efforts.

Now, get into your e-mail. Quick ones handle right now. Longer ones should go on your calendar or task list (remember my "drag & drop" tip Outlook users?) Also, go through any new voice mails, "snail" mail, text messages, faxes, etc. All of these "new input" items are handled the same as e-mail: quick ones get done right away, longer ones go to your task list and/or calendar. Once items are done or tasked, they are filed or deleted, and if you don't have a good place to file, MAKE ONE and put it there! This process should take about 30-45 minutes at the start of most days, and once done, your quick items will be finished and filed/deleted, your longer e-mails and other inputs will be integrated into your task list and calendar (and your inbox should be close to ZERO!)

By going through your e-mail and other inputs, and turning many of those items into

tasks, you've likely made your task list too large again for today. **Once again, refine it down** by moving lower importance/urgency items to a later date, so you have a task list you feel confident with (and not too stressed about) for TODAY.

Now you are ready to get to work. **First, do your "delegations", "bugs" and "follow ups"**. You want to do those right after your first pass of e-mail/inputs each day, so you can keep things moving. *You want your people doing their work before you do your work!*

Once you've done this, assuming you don't have a meeting, **now it is time to start attacking that prioritized task list**. Hit that task list again and again *until it is time to check your e-mail and other inputs again*. Remember, **you want to check your e-mail regularly but not constantly throughout the day**. You want to work your task list all throughout the day (except for when you have meetings and other blocked time on your calendar), taking advantage of any "open blocks" of time to knock down the next most important/urgent item all day long!

Tomorrow, repeat again, until the weekend.

Weekly, repeat again until the next holiday.

Yearly, repeat again until you retire! ;-)

I hope you can replicate this relatively simple process (note that I didn't use the word easy – this definitely requires you to build some new habits and a whole new discipline when it comes to e-mail-related distraction.) But I think if you try this, you'll see your focus shift from "crisis-du-jour" management and "faux productivity", to perhaps some actual higher-level accomplishments. Let me know if this new daily/weekly routine works for you.

Randy Dean, MBA, The "Totally Obsessed" Time Management Technology Guy has been one of the most popular expert speakers on the conference, corporate, and university training and speaking circuit for several years. The author of the recent Amazon e-mail bestseller, *Taming the E-mail Beast*, Randy is a very popular and engaging time, e-mail, and technology management speaker and trainer. He brings 22 years of speaking and training experience to his programs, and has been very popular with programs including *Taming the E-mail Beast*, *Finding an Extra Hour Every Day*, *Optimizing Your Outlook*, *Time Management in "The Cloud"* Using Google and Other Online Apps, and *Smart Phone Success & Terrific Tablets*. Learn more at <http://www.randalldean.com>.

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