

Boost productivity for free

Introduction

The development community are constantly bombarded with new technologies that promise to make their development lives easier and raise productivity. New languages, new frameworks, new plug in components, and so on.

However this focus on new gadgets to increase productivity is often done without getting the basics of effective time management in place.

Flow - Science of Distraction

You've probably had situations where you've had your head down and worked solidly for hours, almost in trance, not even noticing the hours go by whilst you get lots of work done.

This trance like state is what psychologists call *flow*. When you are in flow your productivity is at a maximum.

However, it takes 20 minutes to get yourself fully immersed into this flow like state so your are working at maximum productivity.

Disturbances

Disturbances and distractions can knock you completely out of flow, requiring immersion again to get back up to productivity speed.

You've probably experienced this time and again as the phone goes off, an email alert pings up in front of you, or a colleague drops by to discuss the weather. Noisy offices in general are not the best environments or remaining in flow.

Continual distractions throughout the working day can result in very little high productivity immersion time and therefore very little getting done. You've probably experienced this also.

Self Infliction

Many of these distractions are self inflicted and can be avoided:

Do you really need to answer every email or phone call as soon as it is received? How many emergencies have you had to respond to recently as a result of an email or phone call?

Probably very few, yet many workers react immediately to email alerts and phone calls, disrupting their flow.

Switch off

When managing teams of developers in the past I used to do a deal with them: They would switch off their emails and phones for 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the afternoon whilst they got their heads down for some solid work. In addition they would answer all emails with a phone call. Outside of that time they could do as they pleased.

The productivity increases were always significant. In fact far more significant than teaching new skills, buying new tools and gadgets or asking for overtime.

Real emergencies rarely surfaced, and if they did people found a way of contacting the team, often via the project manager or by walking over to the visit the team.

Better communication

No only does more work get done due to a reduction in distractions, but further gains are made by the higher quality communication.

Other colleagues get used to the fact that if they need to speak to the team then they need to wander over to your desks or leave phone messages. They can email, but they won't get an immediate response.

The best communication is face to face, and if no possible then a phone call. Better to encourage those methods and discourage everyone from spending hours writing letters to each other on email.

In summary

Turn off your phone and email for two three hour sessions each day and watch the increased results in productivity – for free.

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