

Gearing up for a Productive Fall

By Susan Schilke; September 4, 2017

So I'm one of those weird people who like Mondays and September. I love the collective focus that happens this time of year. Vacation season is winding down, the kids are back in school, and you can reengage in reaching for your goals. I've been investing time in exploring how to be most productive this fall, and wanted to share some ideas. Some are new, some are timeless, and all can have impact. Pick one and leverage it to achieve more in the final third of 2017.

1. **Connect your schedule and your top priorities.** The real measure of what's most important to us is how we spend our time. Keep your goals in front of you for alignment.
2. **Analyze how you're spending time.** Consultant & Executive Coach Carol Hull recommends her clients spend a week tracking what they do in a simple format. She then has them place the activities into Steven Covey's Time Management Grid. "They will find out very quickly if they are focusing on the right things and gain a great understanding of where their time is going," says Carol.
3. **Identify Your Top 3.** Know your main goals going into each day. List them at the end of the day before so you're ready to dive in first thing! And then...
4. **Eat that Frog.** In this classic book by Brian Tracy, he suggests you do the most critical and least appealing task first. Instead of putting off the thing you're dreading, get it out of the way first to fuel the rest of your day.
5. **Use a digital system.** Tap into an app like **Evernote** on all your devices.
6. **Use a written system.** Hand writing notes is proven to make you more fully process your thinking, generate creative ideas and remember better. And you're not subject to the distractions on your computer or phone. Use the '**Full Focus Journal**' from Michael Hyatt. Hyatt's process walks you through goal-setting and alignment. Or use a **Bullet Journal**. Start with a simple lined or dotted journal, and create your own index, tools and tracking. Part planning system, part diary, these are quickly gaining popularity.
7. **Put priorities on your calendar, not on a to-do list.** This concept from 15 Secrets Successful People Know about Time Management recommends creating time blocks for everything. First, block your most important things on the calendar - things like planning and fitness. Then instead of adding tasks to a to-do list, put everything into your calendar into a specific time block. Work from your calendar, not a to-do list.
8. **Schedule your email instead of letting it schedule you.** Come up with a structured approach to your in-box. The 3-2-1-0 approach suggests you handle email at 3 scheduled times, and spend no more than 21 minutes getting to 0 emails. Alternately, work in 50- or 90-minute blocks of focused time, and take 10-15 minutes for email at the end of each one. Use the 4D approach - Delete it or Delegate it immediately; Defer if it takes more than 5 minutes (put in on your calendar); or Do it!
9. **Stop making being busy your badge of honor.** It's become a thing - someone asks how you've been and your answer is 'Busy!' It's really doesn't matter if you're busy - and busy does not equate to effective. The value isn't how busy we are, it's the outcomes we achieve!
10. **Put a hard stop to your work day, and protect your personal time.** There will always be more to do - and we wouldn't want it any other way! Accept this, then learn to effectively set it aside each evening and on weekends so you can take time for you and your family. It will all be there when you're ready to reengage, and you'll have renewed energy to take it on!