

Introduction

When it comes to productivity “hacks”, on an individual basis any single tip can seem insignificant. But... if you will just implement even a few of these and stick to them, you will end up getting a lot more done in much shorter amounts of time.

Some “hacks” are techniques and tricks, and some are simply common sense ways to avoid wasting time.

These are in list format, so just go through them and use the ones that make sense to you.

Productivity Hacks

1. Study in the morning. Get up an hour earlier and knock out your core study session in the morning. Trying to effectively study after a full day of using your brain at work is just too much for most people. Then, you have your evenings free and you can spend all day feeling good about already having your study session done instead of dreading it all day while you're at work.
2. Keep your phone face-down for 50 minutes of every hour. When you see your screen light up with a notification, it's almost impossible to not pick it up and open it. This can lead to a 30 minute or worse time-wasting-session by opening an email, then a webpage, then ending up on CNN or Facebook or some other website. While getting distracted can be a coping mechanism at work, you cannot afford to let this happen during your study sessions. So keep that phone face down or completely off. Having no distractions while you study for 50 minute chunks is very freeing, and make it's much easier to focus and get much more done than someone who is constantly distracted.
3. Learn to say NO. This is one of those “common sense” tips that can save you a ton of time. For example, if you're in the middle of studying for FAR or REG, you need all the time you can get. So, if you're asked to join the employee committee or volunteer at this month's charity event, it's OK to say no. Learning to say no when you have a higher priority is something that a lot of people can't bring themselves to do.

4. Own your time. This is a phrase or concept that kept coming up for me during my study process. When I was just starting to study for the CPA exams, I would end up spending a lot of my core study time messing around or not paying good enough attention to the study materials. Then, I knew I needed to catch up sometime that day, but my wife would want to hang out or go somewhere, I would end up lashing out because I “don’t have any time”... when it was really my own fault for wasting my core study session. On that same note, when it is your core study session, you cannot let anyone or anything pull you away or distract you. No one can go in and pass the exams except you, so you cannot afford to waste the precious hour or two you have each day to study.
5. Keep your study area clean. And the room you study in for that matter. It’s amazing how pleasant it is to sit and study in a room that’s very clean and tidy. It’s also amazing how crappy it feels to try and study in a messy room at a messy desk. You’ll find that you keep looking at objects or papers, picking them up, and just that your mind will feel as cluttered as the desk is. Clean it off and clean the room you study in, and it will be much easier to just sit down and “get in the zone”.
6. Keep your blood sugar levels balanced. I’m not a nutritionist, but I heard this advice in a birthing class with my wife (of all places) and it has made a huge difference in how I feel each day. The idea is simple: by eating small, healthier meals and snacks throughout the day, you keep your glucose levels balanced, which has a ton of benefits such as reduced frequency of afternoon headaches, no more crazy cravings so that you eat a gut bomb at lunch and then feel sleepy the rest of the day, and most of all you feel light and energized throughout the entire day. The way I do it is that I just have a bag of raw almonds with me at all times and I eat a handful in between breakfast and lunch, and then again in the afternoon.
7. Get more sleep and/or more high quality sleep. This is another thing that people rarely think of when they feel crappy during the day. A lot of problems with motivation/energy/willpower come back to lack of sleep, or lack of quality sleep. Go out and buy a nice pillow- you’ll be surprised how much of a difference this can make. It’s also proven that it’s easier to fall asleep and stay asleep in colder temperatures. Having a small fan that

blows on your feet works like magic as well as provides a perfect white noise that makes it easy to fall and stay asleep.

8. Know your “robotic loops”. I can’t remember where I heard this but this hit me like a ton of bricks once I realized I totally do this. So what happens is, when a person zones out while working, they usually do a very predictable “loop” of robotic actions that are the same thing every time. For example, one of my loops was to go to ESPN, then my email, then Facebook, and mindlessly scroll forever- pretty much without even realizing it. And when my procrastination was really bad, I could literally do this sequence for hours at a time just like a zombie. So, being aware of your “loops” and recognizing when you are defaulting to one is the first step in not doing it anymore.
9. Take advantage of dead hours. A dead hour is like a sunk cost: if you commute 1 hour each way every day you automatically have 2 hours a day that you cannot possibly be productive... or can you? This is where you need to take advantage of otherwise “lost time”, by listening to audio notes and/or pulling out your phone and reading review notes. After you pass you can substitute the audio notes and review notes with audio book or books that will help give you additional skills and strengths at work.
10. Consider getting rid of Facebook. This one is a nuclear option, but it is one I chose to do and my life has been better ever since. I realized that I was both spending a ton of time looking at Facebook, and simultaneously being extremely annoyed by everyone’s updates. It also creates an entirely separate venue for people to get offended and get their feelings hurt by being blocked, unfriended, or not getting “likes” from certain people about the stupid stuff they post, which they can then whine about in real life. Just consider it, or maybe try it for 2 weeks and see how you like it.

There you have it... some of my personal favorite productivity hacks. The main takeaway is that for every time-waster you can eliminate, you save yourself much more time in the long run but getting your most important activities done faster and more efficiently.