

FIFTY WAYS TO RADICALLY IMPROVE YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE, INCREASE YOUR PRODUCTIVITY, AND FEEL FULFILLED

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All successful people are highly fulfilled and productive. They are good time managers and are well organized. They get a lot more done than the average person. This workshop will focus on fifty ways to radically improve your success and productivity, i.e., to get your life in balance, to focus on what's important, to get more done, and to get it done faster.

- I. **Rethink your life**
- II. **Set goals and create a personal mission statement**
- III. **Plan**
- IV. **Take action**
- V. **Some final thoughts**

I. Rethink your life

1. **Rethink your life.** Improving your success involves more than ridding your life of time wasters like poorly run meetings, interruptions, and gossip. Radical gains in success and productivity come from ceasing to pursue a course of action (a job, a contract, a career or a relationship) that is wrong for you. Don't waste years of your life working at something that you don't particularly enjoy and which you think is basically stupid and trivial. If you are unhappy or feel unhealthily stressed, you may need to rethink your whole life rather than trying to make relatively superficial improvements.
2. **Find out who you really want to be and what you really want to do and then align that with work you truly love.** This is the key to having a happy and successful career. It will unleash untapped creative powers within you and lead to a leap in productivity that will astonish you.
3. **Don't let time, money and fear stop you. What can you imagine doing if time, money and fear were not obstacles? What would you do if you knew you could not fail?** If you had all the money in the world, what would you do for free? What are you passionate about? What fascinates you? What drives you onto your soapbox?
4. **Focus on what matters most to you in your professional and personal life. Is there alignment between how you spend your time and what is important to you? Or are**

you spending time on projects and relationships that in the long run don't matter to you? When there is congruence between how you spend your day and what matters most to you, then you increase both your inner sense of peace as well as your productivity. You feel happier, more effective and more fulfilled. You will have both ambition and serenity.

5. **Identify the challenges you face in achieving your goals. To repeat, do you see a significant gap between how you spend your time and what is most important to you?** What are the things in your personal and professional life that are stopping you from spending time on the issues, relationships and projects that you care most deeply and passionately about? What is missing in your life right now?
6. **Create a list of the ten steps you can take to begin to overcome the challenges you identified in answering the last question.** A few examples might be: get a coach; identify a role model; stop smoking; eat more vegetables; be less anxious; have a weekly date with your spouse; exercise every morning; enrich your vocabulary; read deeply; be more patient with your kids; get home every night for family dinners; join a cycling club; clear the mess off your desk; be more loving; get out of debt; lose weight; watch less TV; be more curious and creative; speak up more in staff meetings; get more sleep; invest in a home security system; eat less junk food; volunteer for a local non-profit; stop to smell the roses; spend more time outside; take art lessons; smile more; keep the promises you make; make more offers; and seek help more often.
7. **List the top ten things that deeply matter to you and that are most important to you.** Possibilities include: values like kindness and consideration for others; certain relationships; your health; enough money to support your family; feeling useful and appreciated; living to your full potential; finding a partner; being more knowledgeable; changing the world in some way; changing yourself in some way; working with colleagues who are decent, moral and trustworthy; saving the environment for future generations; having more fun; being more playful; developing your sense of humor; feeling more joy in living; feeling safer and more secure; balancing your work and personal life better; getting in better shape; securing a qualification of some kind; discovering something you feel passionate about; being better organized; transforming an embittered relationship into a loving one; caring for someone you love dearly; getting out of the rut you feel in; feeling less lonely and isolated; being more expressive and demonstrative; and feeling more grateful for all you have.

II. Set goals and create a personal mission statement

8. **Make one of the roles in your life “Self-development/Renewal.”** You have to take care of yourself before you can take care of anybody or anything else. Self-development/renewal is the vital process of enhancing your capacity to make you a more effective and fulfilled person. There are four dimensions to self-renewal: physical, social/emotional, mental and spiritual:
 - **Physical** includes fitness, exercise, strength, flexibility, endurance, eating healthily, getting enough sleep and deep relaxation.

- **Social/emotional** includes love, friendship, connecting with others, volunteering, helping someone and having a sense of belonging.
 - **Mental** includes learning, studying, reading, visiting museums and science centers, solving puzzles, writing and developing intellectually.
 - **Spiritual** includes finding a purpose and meaning in your life through: service to others, art, contemplation, poetry, going on a personal retreat to reflect on your life, creating a Personal Mission Statement, being-at-one with nature, identifying long-range goals, studying your family history, leaving a legacy or whatever ways that create joy and passion for you personally.
9. **Identify the most important roles in your life. By roles, I mean your key responsibilities and relationships.** For example, sister/brother, husband/wife, mother/father, son/daughter, grandparent, friend, mentor, role model, team member, communicator, educator, volunteer, manager, lobbyist, community activist, yoga instructor, soccer coach, learner, artist, athlete, entrepreneur, environmentalist and so on. Pick no more than seven. By identifying your roles, you create a variety of perspectives from which to examine your life to ensure balance.
 10. **For each of your roles, identify the people who are most important to you. Nothing is more important in our lives than the relationships we build with other people.** Relationships are everything.
 11. **Select one person with whom you have critically important relationship.** What are the assessments you would like this person to make about you at your funeral? What character traits and behaviors would you like them to praise and be grateful for?
 12. **Create your own unique “Personal Mission Statement.”** Your Personal Mission Statement helps you decide at critical moments in your day what to do with your time and energy. It describes what kind of person you want to be and what you want to achieve in your life. It can be as short as one sentence and it doesn’t have to be perfect. There is no “correct” way of doing it and you can revise it as often as you want. Without a Personal Mission Statement, our lives can sometimes seem chaotic, overly busy and adrift.
 13. **Keep your life in balance. The main reason for becoming more productive is so you can spend more time on what is really important to you.** It is tempting to become so preoccupied with work that we lose sight of why we wanted to become successful at work in the first place. Keep your life in balance by being aware of all your important roles in your life (not just your roles at work). Having a happy home life should be among your highest goals in life. However important your work is to you, there are things in your life outside of your work which need a lot of your time, including your spouse, your kids and your health. Restorative rest, relaxation and leisure are important. Athletes don’t train all day every day.

14. **Give your life purpose and meaning.** Having a Personal Mission Statement that is deeply meaningful to you will give you a sense of purpose and meaning. It will help you figure out what you want to do and then integrate it into your daily life and decisions. Don't expect an epiphany as you think about your purpose in life. It often takes time to find the words for a Personal Mission Statement that inspire and excite you.
15. **Write the story of your life.** In creating your Personal Mission Statement, you are beginning to write the story of your life. What gives your life meaning? What should you do with your life? Who do you want to become? Who are you? What do you stand for? What is your life fundamentally about? What matters deeply to you?
16. **Set goals. This is a powerful process. Without goals, our lives are essentially drifting without focus.** Goals turn our dreams into reality. They cause us to stretch and grow in new ways. In fact, what you *get* by achieving a goal is less valuable than what you *become* by achieving that goal.
17. **Put your goals in writing. Your goals are of little help unless they are in writing.** Putting your plans on paper makes a goal more concrete, meaningful and real. It is much more likely that you will exercise integrity and fulfill the promises you make to yourself and to others.
18. **Articulate your long-range goals in your professional life, your personal life and in the four "self-development/renewal" areas (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual).** This is a critical step if you are to align your daily activities around what is most important to you. Incorporate your long-range goals into your Personal Mission Statement.
19. **Subdivide each of your long-range goals into more manageable shorter-range goals. Begin to think of these short-range goals as commitments, i.e., goals you are committed to achieve.** These commitments must be expressed in such a way as to meet the SMART test, i.e., they must be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-sensitive. For example, if one of your long-range goals is to write a book on your family history, then a few of your commitments could be: to interview your mom and dad by June 1, to find a coach who can help you by July 1, to find all the photos in your parents' home relating to your grandparents and their parents by August 1 and so on.

III. Plan

20. **Plan weekly, not daily.** Planning daily is problematic because it is too easy to get caught up in the minutiae of urgent activities and lose the connection between your commitments (your important strategic goals) and the daily rush of meetings, phone calls, e-mail, etc. Have a regular time once a week (I do it on Sunday evening) when you review your Personal Mission Statement, review your commitments and actually block off time on your calendar when you commit yourself to work on them. In this way, you put the "big rocks" on your calendar first, so they don't get squeezed out by the unimportant "pebbles." For example, if one of your commitments is "to repair a strained

relationship with a colleague,” then at the start of the week, you would schedule time (perhaps for lunch) with that person. In this way, you can begin to spend more time on those relationships, projects and goals that matter most to you.

21. **Incorporate your commitments (including those relating to renewal) into your weekly schedule.** I am repeating the previous point but it needs to be repeated because so many people underestimate its importance. What are the commitments you want to add to your schedule as you do your weekly planning? Select commitments from each of your roles (including “self-development/renewal”) and make a specific appointment with yourself during the week with a determination to make massive progress on the task/relationship/project you’ve selected. These “rocks” will form a solid foundation on which to build your weekly activities and help keep your life in balance. As things come up during the week, prioritize and schedule around your goals.
22. **Get a planner or notebook in which you can keep your Personal Mission Statement, your roles and key relationships, your long-range goals, your commitments and your schedule.** Identifying what you are passionate about and committed to achieving in your life and then keeping those commitments is deeply satisfying. A planner or notebook of some kind can help. Label your notebook or planner “My Life Plan.” Mastery of the principles taught in this workshop can be applied to any productivity tool of your choice.
23. **Don’t be a slave to your plan.** It isn’t always necessary to follow a plan exactly. A plan is there to keep you *headed in the right direction*, not to deprive you of all spontaneity. In fact, one of the benefits of planning is to free you up to be more spontaneous and to enjoy life more. A plan gives you an option to choose from.
24. **Remember that each day is important and should not be wasted. Each day that passes means you have one day less to live. The secret of your life and your future lies hidden in your daily routine.** Derive what you are committed to do on a daily basis from your commitments in your Personal Mission Statement rather than from the torrential flood of e-mails, meetings, interruptions and so on that tend to distract you from keeping focused on what matters most to you. In this way, you can live each day by being true to your values, goals and passions. Your goal is to make daily decisions consistent with your commitments. You have integrity when your daily actions are consistent with your Personal Mission Statement.
25. **Strengthen your self-respect and integrity by making and keeping promises to yourself and others.** Making promises that are kept (or at a minimum effectively managed) is a characteristic of successful people. Take all your commitments very seriously, however small. When you agree to do something – do it, and do it when you said you would in the way you agreed to do it. Develop the habit of attaching great importance to the commitments you make to yourself and to others.
26. **Don’t let urgent matters displace important matters.** A Personal Mission Statement helps to prevent this from happening. Unimportant but urgent matters (e.g., interruptions,

some meetings and phone calls, other people's minor issues and so on) should never be given priority over important yet not urgent matters (e.g., planning, preparation, preventing crises, getting feedback, building relationships, reflection, learning, personal development, seizing new opportunities and so on.)

27. **To repeat, don't confuse urgent tasks with important tasks.** Occasionally urgent tasks are important. More often, urgent tasks are not important and important tasks are not urgent. This is why important tasks, such as building a relationship with your spouse, often get neglected.
28. **Listen attentively and actively to other people. Most of us have never learned how to listen so that we deeply understand another human being from that individual's own frame of reference.** Listening in this way is hard work. It means listening with the intent to understand rather than reply. Listening empathetically in this way doesn't necessarily mean you agree but simply that you understand. Because the other person's need to be understood is satisfied, you are more likely to be listened to and understood.
29. **Don't blame others when things go wrong, but instead focus on how you contributed to the breakdown. Take responsibility.** When something goes wrong, it is tempting to look for someone or something to blame. A better first step is to ask yourself, "How did I contribute to this breakdown? What did I do to help bring about this state of affairs?"

IV. Take action

30. **Relentlessly take new actions.** In order to be successful in any field, you must relentlessly take new actions. Your enthusiasm can energize you to take action, but taking action can also increase your enthusiasm. Many of us are stuck in "inaction" because of fear or some other reason. Overcoming fear and taking action can change our mood from one of resignation and despair to one of ambition and serenity.
31. **To repeat, overcome fear and take action, no matter how small.** Taking action, even if it is only calling a friend for advice or visiting a website, gets you out into the world where good luck is more likely to happen. Jefferson observed that the harder he worked the more good luck he seemed to have.
32. **To repeat yet again (because of its importance), take initiatives constantly. Highly productive people are intensely action-oriented.** Be constantly in motion. Relentlessly take initiatives to get the job done and to move continuously towards your goals. Remember Lincoln's frustrations with General George McClellan in the Civil War. Lincoln complained McClellan had "the slows." Don't have the slows. Be action-oriented. Seize opportunities quickly. Make requests, promises and offers as often as possible. Take the initiative. The faster you move, the better you will feel.
33. **Move quickly and develop a reputation for speed and reliability.** Take important phone calls immediately. Complete all small jobs (under a couple of minutes) immediately. Respond quickly to requests from people with whom you have important

relationships (your spouse, your boss, your kids and so on). Pick up speed. Hustle. Do it now. Develop a fast tempo.

34. **Ask yourself the following question over and over again: What is the best use of my time right now?** This is a key question if you are interested in improving your productivity. Discipline yourself to work only on the answer to that question. Reminding yourself that the answer is not “refreshing my Facebook newsfeed” or other time-sucking activities will help you remain productive on the computer.
35. **Apply the 80/20 rule, i.e., 20 percent of the things you do will account for 80 percent of the value of all the things you do.** Your job is to identify those few activities that are so vitally productive and spend more time on them.
36. **Always think on paper. Don’t work out of your mind. Work from written lists.** Whenever you have a new task, add it to your list. Don’t keep it in your head. This will sharpen your thinking and increase your effectiveness and productivity. Crossing off items one-by-one will motivate you to keep going, give you energy and elevate your mood.
37. **At the start of each day in the office, don’t check your e-mail. Instead select the most important and valuable strategic task you are facing and work on that until it is finished.** This will energize you for the whole day and make you feel like a winner. By starting your day tackling the biggest challenge you face, you will set yourself up for the rest of the day to storm through it brimming with self-confidence and enthusiasm.
38. **Don’t waste time starting and restarting a task. Select the most important thing you have to do on your list (the one that will make the biggest difference to your life and career) and then focus on it with energy and concentration.** Keep only that task, and nothing else, in front of you. Discipline yourself to stay with it until it is complete. When it is complete, you will feel a rush of good feelings (high self-esteem, joy, well-being, optimism, tranquility and high energy) that will reward you for your self-discipline.
39. **Learn to decline requests from others. Sometimes the best time-saver of all is the word “No.” Learning how to decline a request without damaging a relationship is a learnable skill.** Identifying activities in your life that are not important to you (or no longer important to you) is key to improving your productivity and happiness. What can you stop doing so you can free up time to do more of the things that are really important to you?
40. **Organize your work space. People who claim they work better from a messy desk are deluding themselves.** Studies show this not to be true at all. Work from a clean desk and clean work space.
41. **Handle each piece of paper once. Don’t pick it up and then put it down aimlessly on your desk. Toss it, refer it to someone else, take action on it or file it.** When in doubt,

throw it out. If you haven't read it in six months, it is junk and should be tossed. The same rule applies to emails: respond, file, or delete. Do not let emails accumulate.

V. Some final thoughts

42. **Use travel time productively. Too many of us squander travel time needlessly.** Turn your car into a learning machine (i.e., a college-on-wheels) by playing tapes that teach you skills you need to succeed in your relationships or some other area in which you are striving to do better. On a plane, don't drink alcohol or waste time reading the junk in the seat pocket in front of you. Rather make every minute count by preparing for your upcoming presentations and meetings or by working on a high priority strategic goal.
43. **Resolve to be efficient and not to waste time. Commit to be highly productive and efficient in everything you do.** Become an expert in time management and personal productivity. Learn and practice the fifty suggestions in this workshop so they become habits. Become a model of self-discipline — the ability to make yourself do what you should do when you should do it whether you feel like it or not.
44. **Make a commitment to deepen your understanding of success and fulfillment. They are not the same.** Success and happiness are not goals to capture and hold. They happen incidentally while you are living out your own vision of life and living a life built on integrity, trust, courage, love, fairness, service, patience, self-discipline, responsibility, generosity, hard work and tenacity. Happiness is not a goal but rather a consequence of pursuing something deeply meaningful to you.
45. **Commit to dig more and more deeply into yourself to find out what you care passionately about and what matters most to you.** Implement a planning system for yourself that helps you spend more time on those relationships and projects that matter most to you.
46. **Twice a year, keep a time diary for a week.** Review how you are actually spending your time and compare it to how you would spend *like* to spend your time.
47. **Keep a personal journal.** This will help you become a more skillful observer of yourself and become more self-aware of the identity you create for yourself with other people. If you are unhappy about something or if you are pleased by something you have accomplished, write about it. When you gain an insight, put it on paper. Keeping a personal journal encourages you to constantly improve, to raise your standards, to live more purposefully, and to observe with fascination how much of behavior is “automatic” rather than intentional. Keeping a journal helps you to design and invent your own life rather than drift along under the influence of your genes and environment.
48. **Rid yourself of any duplicity in your life.** Fulfillment and duplicity are mutually exclusive.

49. **Reach out to friends and colleagues for feedback and coaching.** Everyone needs a coach. We all need help and guidance in the different domains of our life, including our personal lives. Without feedback, we stop learning and can become arrogant, isolated and prone to errors of judgment. Your coach (or a good friend) can hold you accountable for the promises you make. A coach is someone who poses questions for clarification, challenges and advises you, provides a different and fresh perspective, listens and understands you, offers a reality check, instills confidence and ensures that you follow up on your commitments.
50. **Reinvent yourself every year when you rigorously reevaluate and revise your Personal Mission Statement.** Thinking periodically how you would reinvent your life is crucial to radically improving your success, fulfillment, and productivity. Do you want to continue doing what you are doing? You are getting older and time is running out. Be bold in your thinking.

Question: What specific steps are you committed to take in the next 48 hours to start making changes in your life to implement what you have learned in this workshop?

Thank you for attending this workshop. Don't forget to do the homework!

If you have any questions, please call me (Chris Palmer). You can reach me at palmer@american.edu or by cell phone at (202) 716-6160.

Attachment 1: Examples of Personal Mission Statements

Attachment 2: Recommended Reading