

10 SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE **PRODUCTIVITY HACKS** FOR PROGRAMMERS



INTRODUCTION:

An urge to procrastinate and inability to focus that arises from it are perhaps two most important barriers that programmers encounter on a regular basis. Every software developer has to deal with these things at one point or another.

These things prevent you from fulfilling your full potential as an IT professional, negatively affect your performance, and slow down your career progress. Therefore, the better your ability is to address these issues - the better your career will be.

But making yourself more focused isn't rocket science.

This guide contains 10 tricks that will help you to become a better programmer.

All of these techniques are simple to both comprehend and implement. You can even try them all out as soon as you've finished reading this guide.

So let's begin.



1

ELIMINATE ALL DISTRACTIONS FROM YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Mental focus is something that is difficult to obtain and easy to lose. Perhaps you can recall a situation where you were working on some challenging problem and almost worked out the solution in your head, but then someone came over and called your name, which made you completely lose your focus.

Therefore one of the most effective productivity hacks you can perform is eliminate all distractions from your environment.



Organize your work desk and make it as plain as possible. Make your computer desktop background as neutral as possible. Tell people not to bother you while you work. And, while you work, put your phone on silent.

Of course, it's not always possible to eliminate all distractions from your environment.

If you have to work from an open-plan office, you can't prevent people from talking within your earshot. Same applies if you work from home and have little kids. But you can still eliminate as many distractions as you can. And you will see big improvements in your productivity soon enough.

2

DON'T USE THE SAME DEVICES FOR WORK AND FOR ENTERTAINMENT

One of the major reasons why we procrastinate is because of our awareness that we could have been doing something more fun than programming.

Doing something fun is easier than doing work. And our brain prefers what is easy. After all, it was built for survival rather than success.

The awareness of fun activities would be even a bigger problem if those activities are regularly being performed on the same device you are currently trying to write some code on.

Your brain would already have learned to associate this particular device with fun, so you would just automatically want to open YouTube or double-click on a video game icon.

The urge to procrastinate would be much easier to deal with if you have a separate device for work. If work is all you ever do on that device, then you will condition your brain to treat it purely as a work machine.



DON'T USE THE SAME ROOMS OF YOUR HOUSE FOR WORK AND FOR ENTERTAINMENT

Even though working from home has many benefits over commuting to the office, one benefit that office has over working from home is a clear separation between work and everything else.

Office is the place we associate with work, so it is much easier to focus on work while you are in the office. Unless, of course, you have an open-space office and a lot of loud colleagues.



But you don't have to commute to the office if you want to focus on your work. If you can set up a room in your house as an office and only ever do work-related activities from that room, your brain will learn to associate this room with work and it would be easier to maintain your focus while in that room.

Of course, not everyone has the luxury of setting up their own office room.

But even if you don't, you still can set your environment up in such a way that there is a clear separation between work and non-work activities. You can do as little as just not working from the same room where you have your gaming consoles and wide-screen TV.

Or, at the very least, just make sure that any entertainment devices you own are not in your view while you are working.

4

UNINSTALL ALL UNNECESSARY APPS FROM YOUR WORK

DEVICES

The best way to provide a clear separation between your work-related devices and any other devices is to make sure that all your work-related devices only have things installed on them that are directly related to work.

It would be easier not to think of playing a video game while you code if there isn't a Call of Duty icon looking at you from your desktop. It's easy to resist the temptation to watch YouTube videos if you don't have a YouTube app installed.

But better yet, perhaps it would make sense to not even use your personal login in the browsers installed on work devices. You can use a separate user name dedicated to career-specific resources. And just delete all other accounts from your work devices.

Accessing your social media timeline then won't be so easy, so it will be a much smaller distraction.



Procrastination occurs because of our brain's tendency to follow the path of least resistance.

Therefore the urge to procrastinate is hard to fight if the pleasant activity you would rather engage in is within an easy reach. But if it isn't - it's much easier to convince yourself to just get back to work.

But things get better from here. If you have been working on a device with only work-related stuff installed on it for long enough - you will have conditioned your brain to associate this device purely with work. And this is when you will start having fewer and fewer distracting thoughts.

5

SWITCH OFF ALL UNNECESSARY NOTIFICATIONS ON YOUR DEVICES

It is a good practice to put your phone on silent while you work, so none of its notifications would distract you and break your focus.

But you can go one step further than that and just completely disable all notifications on the apps that don't require an immediate response.

This way, you will remove the temptation to occasionally look at your silent phone to see how many new things have happened on various apps that you use.

To see any new events on any specific app, you would need to physically open the app and click on its notification bell (if it has one). And this activity involves too much effort to just be a casual distraction.



But the practice of removing notifications from the apps doesn't only serve you to minimize the potential for casual distractions while you work.

Many apps that use notifications were specifically designed to hijack as much of

your time and attention as possible. A casual notification may lead you into the rabbit hole of mindless scrolling, which will use up time that you could have spent either on productive activities or some recreation that you truly enjoy.

6

SPLIT YOUR WORK INTO SMALL ATOMIC TASKS

Very often, a desire to procrastinate comes when you are faced with some large task, especially when you don't even know where to start.

And this is not an accident.

Remember that our brains were built for survival and not for success. To the brain, a large task is interpreted as something that would use up a lot of your energy. And this is why it will do everything it can to prevent you from doing such a task.

But there is a trick you can apply to fool your brain. You can split the task that you are about to do into a series of small tasks. Each of these tasks needs to be meaningful enough that it produces some visible outcome. But at the same time, it needs to be as small as possible.



All you will then have to do is look at the next task you are about to do. To your brain, it's an easy piece of work, so it won't interfere much

with it. There might still be some urge to procrastinate, but it would be so weak that you will probably be able to manage it.

You just need to tell yourself that, if you want to take a break after completing any of these tasks, you can do it guilt-free.

This will make each task look even smaller and easier to your brain. But once you get going through the list of the tasks, you may find something interesting. You may get into the state of flow and manage to complete quite a lot of these microtasks in one go.

7

PRE-PLAN YOUR WORK

This technique goes hand-in-hand with splitting your work into a set of atomic activities. Working with microtasks is much more effective if you pre-plan them in advance.



This way, when the time comes to start working on them, you won't have to think about what to do next. You will already know what to do, so you can just start doing it.

Planning tasks and working on them are two different types of activities. And when you switch between different types of activities while you work, **it's known as context switching.**

Context switching is what drains your mental energy, so, if you want to optimize your performance as a programmer, it's best to eliminate as much context switching as possible.

And one of the ways you can do it is to have a session dedicated solely to planning and then have another session dedicated solely to the implementation of the plan.

8

NARRATE YOUR THINKING PROCESS WHILE WRITING CODE

There is a very popular technique that has been used in the Japanese railway industry for decades.

It's known as Shisa Kanko, which roughly translates as "pointing and calling". The purpose of this technique is to make sure that workers remain as mentally engaged as possible while doing mundane and repetitive tasks.

It doesn't matter how exciting your programming job is, it's inevitable that you will be occasionally doing mundane and repetitive tasks.

You might have to write some boilerplate code. You might have to do some refactoring. You might have to write some unit tests to improve the code coverage. And this is where Shisa Kanko can help you maintain your focus.



This technique is all about pointing at the objects you interact with and narrating your actions.

For example, when a Japanese train driver wants to check the speed, he or she would point at the speedometer and say something out loud along the lines of “the train speed is 30 miles per hour”.

You can do the same as a coder. You can point at the piece of code that you are looking at. And, while writing the code, you can say out-loud what code you are writing and what is this code intended to achieve.

Using multiple body systems, like hands and speech, will anchor you in the process. And it will crowd out distracting thoughts, so you will be fully focused.

Of course, there are environments where you won't be able to talk out loud. For example, you might feel too embarrassed to do it in the office. But even then, you can narrate your actions by whispering or even by talking in your head.

It would still be an effective tool to keep you focused.

9

USE POMODORO TIMERS

Just like we can trick our brain that the task is much smaller than it is if we split the task into small atomic chunks, we can trick it by splitting our work into short chunks of time.

This productivity hack has been tried and tested many times and found to be extremely effective. This is why the Pomodoro technique, which is based on this principle, is so popular.

The Pomodoro technique consists of relatively short rounds of highly focused productive work with short breaks in between.



Normally, the round of productive work would be 25 minutes long, while the break would be 5 minutes long. One productive round is known as one Pomodoro. And, after four Pomodoros, you would normally take a longer break of at least 15 minutes.

You don't have to stick with the prescribed durations of the Pomodoro rounds.

You can do some trial and error and figure out what round duration works best for you.

It's the overall principle that makes the technique effective rather than any specific rules on its implementation.

Your brain will be tricked into thinking that you are only going to work for a short duration of time.

And it won't protest much against it. So, even though there are breaks in between the productive rounds, you will probably be able to achieve more than you would have been able to achieve otherwise. Each of these productive rounds will be a round of concentrated focus.

You will be able to squeeze the maximum out of it.

PRE-PLAN YOUR RECREATION AND GUARD IT WITH YOUR LIFE

Sometimes, the reason why we can't focus at work and just want to procrastinate is because we are just tired. And this is why recreation should be a very important part of your life.

You can't fulfill your full potential in your professional life if you don't take sufficient breaks from it.

Mindless scrolling of social media doesn't really count. In fact, it may even make you even more mentally tired than you were before. But if you don't plan your recreation properly, then activities like mindless internet browsing is most likely what you will end up doing while you aren't working.

The only way to take a sufficient break from your work and get fully rested is to engage in those recreational activities that you truly enjoy. And to do so, you need to schedule those activities.

Also, you need to be able to completely switch off from your work for a period of time. While you are engaged in recreational activities, there must be no room for any work-related activities.

No answering emails from your co-workers, no taking calls from your boss, etc.



You are entitled to spend your free time the way you see fit. And if your employer doesn't respect your personal boundaries, then perhaps it's the time to change your employer.

Trust me, if you do it now, it will pay big dividends in the future.

THANKS FOR READING



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