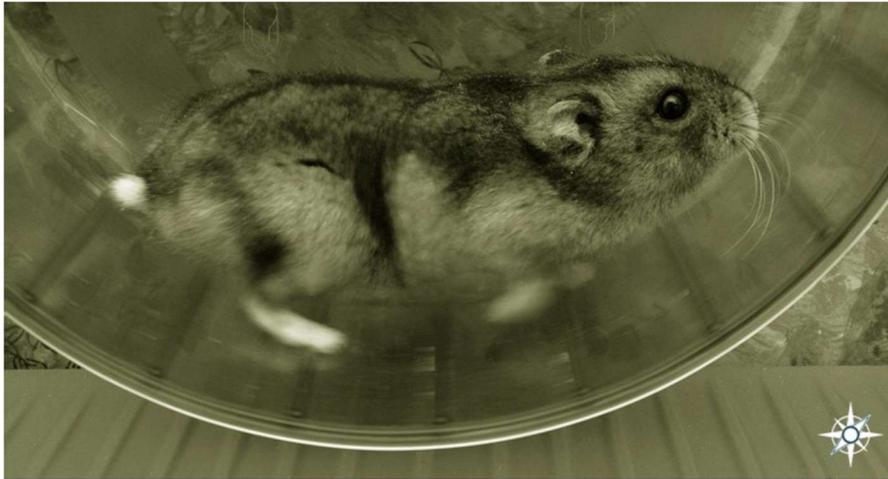


Being Productive May Be Making You Ineffective

How Calendaring Your Energy Can Increase Your Effectiveness



You know that feeling: when there's more to do than time to do it? When you have to power through to check off something big your list? And you wake up after your most productive day ever, realizing you have to do it all again just to keep up?

The Issue

I agree and affirm that stuff needs to get done. But in a marketplace that virtually idolizes productivity, productivity has become our metric of choice for personal and professional success. It's easy for productivity to shape our identity: more productivity = more value and relevance.

We get pushed outside of attentive effort, trying to do more in less time — which is ultimately unsustainable, and exasperating. Operating inattentively, outside of flow, we're easily distracted into mistaking activity for achievement, and productivity for effectiveness.

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The Outcome

If you're like me, you've probably tried lots of productivity methods. I've prioritized my to-do's, color-coded and ranked them, categorized them in a 4x4 important-urgent matrix and used the GTD method. I've tried both hand-written journals and electronic tech. I've lost count of the productivity apps I've tried.

With all this, I've still ended up feeling like a hamster. In the wheel. Running. As hard as I could.

Furiously going nowhere fast.

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So how can we be effective without sacrificing our soul on the altar of productivity?

The Light Bulb Moment

I recently realized that all those approaches toward managing to-do's are doomed to fail because they're managing the wrong thing.

Think of it this way: Let's say you have a pipe, a pump and a large volume of water to move. Managing to-do's is like focusing only on the water, instead of focusing on the mechanisms that *move* the water.

The pipe's diameter is fixed. The pump has a max horsepower rating and can't run continuously without maintenance. At some point you're going to hit a maximum rate of X gallons/minute — you can't pump it any faster. And if you run the pump too long it'll overheat and break — and no water gets moved.

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So I've shifted my approach. Instead of starting with what seems most urgent and important (the water), I start with my calendar — the pipe. After all, there are a fixed number of hours in a day to get stuff done.

Then I focus on my energy, and how I use it — the pump. I'm most creative and clear in the mornings, and the afternoons work well for me to do calls, meetings, admin stuff or tasks that don't require creativity or critical thinking. By dinner time, I've got very little juice left to do any meaningful work. In fact, experience has taught me that working late often takes twice as long and produces half the quality — meaning I have to do it over the next morning.

Calendaring my energy first brings the most profound benefit: Hyper-clarity on ...

1. What are the MOST important priorities to work on, and
2. How can I do my best work.

It forces me to ask some deeper questions:

- What projects align with who I am, how I'm wired, gifted and motivated?
- How can I best influence others?
- How can I work more efficiently?
- How can I stay more focused on my priorities?
- What disciplines and boundaries do I need to avoid the distraction of life's noise?

- How can I stop comparing myself to others (who operate differently than me) and be mindful of leveraging my unique gifts, talents, insight and experience?
- Who can I collaborate with so I'm not trying to work in isolation?

Calendar my energy has helped me realize I was trying to pump water I didn't need to be pumping, and trying to pump it like everyone else — many of whom have different energy cycles than me.

It's forced me to say no to certain initiatives because they weren't my top priority and I knew I couldn't get them done well. I'm becoming much more effective in how I'm getting things done.

It's improved my focus. My work matches my available energy. I hit flow faster, and stay there longer. That equates to better and more productive work on the stuff that's truly important — which in turn brings more gratification and satisfaction. I no longer see myself according to my productivity levels; I see myself as ... me.

...I was trying to pump water I didn't need to be pumping, and trying to pump it like everyone else.

The Invitation

I encourage you to stop managing your to-do's and start calendar your energy. It may sound like a subtle shift, but it's proven to be anything but. It's taking me months to transition away from old habits. It's hard developing new levels of focus. The work environment is never static. There's lots of inertia from all the habits I've picked up over the years. And so many people are still using the standard productivity approach, so there's pressure to conform back to managing to-do's.

I started off 2022 with the idea of calendar my energy, though I didn't really understand what I was doing. Eight months later, I feel like I'm just now hitting some kind of stride. I've by no means mastered this; if anything, I have more awareness of how I can get better.

So give it a try, but don't be alarmed or discouraged if you can't implement it overnight. Just get started, see what you discover and where it takes you.

The Choice

Obviously, your mileage will vary with a different environment (kids, fluid and fast-paced work environment, non-traditional working hours, commuting, etc.). And if you're a night person, your energy levels may be opposite from mine.

Calendar your energy isn't a silver bullet, because living our lives and getting stuff done is an ever-fluid thing. But you have nothing to lose in trying it out, except perhaps the stress, frustration and lack of fulfillment that comes from being a hamster on a wheel.

And remember: Though the machine may tell you otherwise, the prize doesn't always go to the fastest hamster. It goes to the one who's most effective at leveraging their talents, gifts and experience to the fullest — in a way that aligns with their purpose and calling.

If you are pursuing an identity of being able to get more things done, then you're doing yourself a disservice. You're approaching your life with an outside-in strategy that's dependent upon your environment to define you.

If, instead, you ...

- Understand who you are
- Recognize how you're wired
- Know your strengths and weaknesses
- Become aware of how you can maximize your impact, and
- Pursue the highest level of collaboration with others ...

Then you are approaching life with an inside-out strategy that brings your ideal — and ever-improving — self into your environment. Instead of being influenced by your world, you're now best positioned to influence your world.

Your move...

Want to know more about inside-out vs. outside-in — and how faith, in particular, informs how we see ourselves and how we can best influence the world around us? Check out the details on my upcoming book, [Are You Who You Want to Be: How Knowing Your Identity Lets You Live Your True Purpose](#).

