

THE 5 CHOICES

The Path to Extraordinary Productivity

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MAIN IDEA

Today, being productive is something of a paradox. It's simultaneously easier and harder than ever before to become highly productive and feel good about your life and career.

The three basic challenges which everyone faces today are:

- 1 Decisions
- 2 Attention
- 3 Energy

1. Every day, you face an overwhelming number of decisions which have to get made.
2. Your attention is under unprecedented attack from all quarters.
3. You can feel your personal mental energy ebbing away as you deal with trivial stuff.

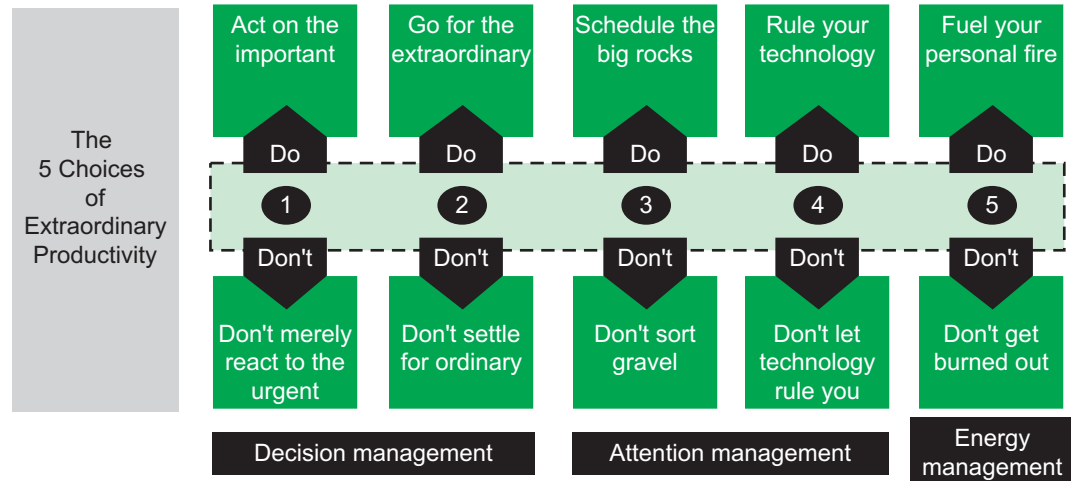
Despite that, everyone (you included) is capable of doing extraordinary work. The way to achieve that is to make five do/don't choices which will enable you to manage your decisions, your attention and your energy – so you rise above the chaos and do great work.

The 5 Choices of Extraordinary Productivity



"The 5 Choices are anchored in the timeless principles of human productivity that we and others have taught at FranklinCovey for thirty years. They also draw on the latest thinking in brain science, biology, technology, and performance psychology. They have been vetted by tens of thousands of practical experiences that people have been applying in numerous situations and organizations around the world. They are proven and they work."

– Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill and Leena Rinne



Choice #1 – Act on the important; Don't merely react to the urgent Pages 2 - 3

The first choice you can make to become extraordinarily productive is to become more discerning and less reactive about how you use your time. Maximize the amount of time you spend every day working on activities which are important but not urgent.

Choice #2 – Go for the extraordinary; Don't settle for ordinary. Pages 3 - 4

To maximize the amount of time you spend in Q2, you have to figure out what makes you feel satisfied and accomplished. This is a matter of clarifying the roles you play and deciding what would constitute extraordinary performance in those roles.

Choice #3 – Schedule the big rocks; Don't sort gravel. Page 5

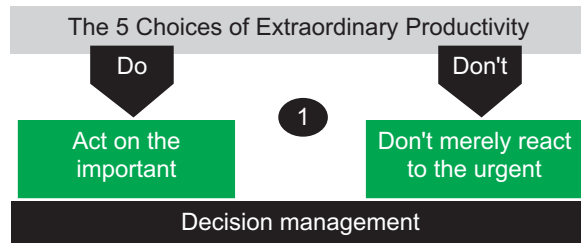
You'll never become extraordinarily productive until you decide what is most important and start proactively scheduling those activities in advance. You have to create some Q2 time zones where you can make significant progress towards your key goals.

Choice #4 – Rule your technology; Don't let technology rule you Pages 6 - 7

Today's technology can accelerate the inflow of gravel into your life if you're not aware. Don't let that happen. Have systems in place so you rule your technology and use it to boost your productivity. Be savvy and smart when it comes to technology.

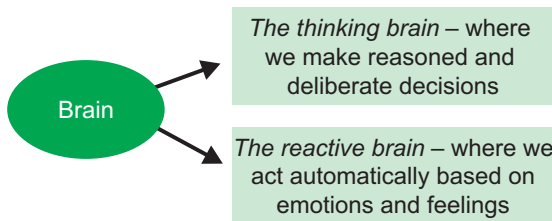
Choice #5 – Fuel your personal fire; Don't get burned out. Page 8

In a world where knowledge work creates great value, you have to keep your brain fueled and fired up. Draw on the energy generated by a clear and motivating purpose and do things to stay healthy so you have the energy to act consciously and deliberately each day.



The first choice you can make to become extraordinarily productive is to become more discerning and less reactive about how you use your time. Maximize the amount of time you spend every day working on activities which are important but not urgent.

The human brain has two distinct sections:



Scientists have concluded the reactive part of your brain has evolved to ensure the survival of the species. As a result, decisions made in this part of the brain are quick and take little energy or effort on your part. This is where the fight-or-flight reflex resides. Interestingly, much of today's advertising is designed to appeal to the reactive part of your brain.

The thinking brain, by contrast, takes more time and energy to access but when you do, you can start making better decisions about what to do. It's in the thinking brain where you plan, make deliberate choices and rise above knee-jerk reactions.

Neuroscience now shows that it's possible to deliberately rewire your brain with practice so you use your thinking brain more and your reactive brain less. Put another way, one of the keys to becoming more productive is to find ways to become more conscious and intentional about the decisions you make. Do that and you can achieve more.

To use the thinking part of your brain more consistently, you need a framework and a process for making better decisions. A good framework is Stephen Covey's Time Matrix and a good process is Pause-Clarify-Decide.

Covey's Time Matrix places activities in four quadrants:

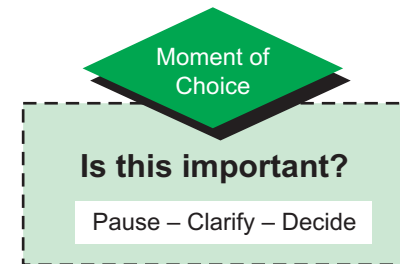
IMPORTANT	Q1 NECESSITY Things which need to get done now or there will be consequences	Q2 PRODUCTIVITY Things which make a real difference in the results you genuinely want
	Q3 DISTRACTION Interruptions where you can confuse motion with making progress	Q4 WASTE The things you might do when you're burned out and want to hide
NOT IMPORTANT	URGENT	NOT URGENT

- *Quadrant 1 activities are urgent and important* – like crises, hospital visits, last-minute deadlines and unforeseen events. These have to be done immediately or there will be consequences.
- *Quadrant 2 activities are important but not urgent* – this is where you take charge and do things which move you towards the various goals you have set. This is where you want to maximize the amount of time spent.
- *Quadrant 3 activities are urgent but not important* – these are distractions like emails, irrelevant meetings, phone calls, status posts, etc. Here you can spin your wheels if you really want but you don't end up achieving anything useful.
- *Quadrant 4 activities are not important and not urgent* – this is where you waste time on trivialities like watching mind-numbing television or aimlessly surfing the Internet. You can stop thinking when you're in Quadrant 4 which is why sometimes productive people end up here when they are burned out and hiding from their responsibilities.

You will always do your best and most creative work when you're in Quadrant 2. That's why the key to achieving more with your time is to always keep looking for new and better ways to maximize the amount of time you spend in Quadrant 2.

When you look at what puts you into Q1, Q3 or Q4, you will probably notice the triggers tend to be reactive decisions. You might feel like you only do good work under the pressure of a looming deadline or that you end up outside of Q2 because of the demands of your boss. You might also become addicted to urgency and make poor decisions solely because you're trying to make quick decisions.

The real key to staying in Q2 is to move more of your decisions about how you allocate your time from your reactive brain to your thinking brain. You do this by using a process called Pause-Clarify-Decide or PCD.



When someone asks you to do something, the Pause-Clarify-Decide process means you pause and consciously ask: "Is this important?" Just asking that question and figuring out which quadrant the planned activity is in will improve your ability to discern and increase the odds you will make a better decision.

"Is this important?" is not the only question you could ask as part of PCD. Other equally helpful questions which you could ask would include:

- When does this really need to be done?
- How will this impact the project which is our top priority?
- Is there a better or more efficient way to do this?
- Where does this fit relative to all the other priority tasks I am working on at present?

"The key to getting into Q2 is to pause your Reactive Brain long enough to clarify what is coming at you, then decide whether it is worth your time and energy. When something comes up, you can ask yourself, Which quadrant is this in? Then you can make a better decision about what to do with it."

– Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill and Leena Rinne

Your organization will have a culture, and so the real challenge to staying in Q2 more of the time will be to get your boss, your coworkers and your direct reports to help you do that. In other words, you need to create a Q2 culture around you where everyone understands the Time Matrix, Pause–Clarify–Decide and what you're trying to achieve.

So how do you do that? The steps are:

- 1 Get everyone up-to-speed with the Time Matrix and the benefits of productive Q2 work
- 2 Encourage everyone to use the language: "Isn't this a Q1 activity? I'd rather be staying in Q2."
- 3 Have everyone use Pause– Clarify–Decide when they are trying to decide what to do

If you're the boss or the leader of the team, you have an obligation to help your people focus on what's most important. You should take the time in a team meeting to explain the Time Matrix and Pause–Clarify–Decide. Challenge people to take responsibility to maximize their Q2 time. You then have to follow through and make sure you're not the reason why people are getting sidetracked into Q1, Q3 or Q3 activities.

Ask yourself:

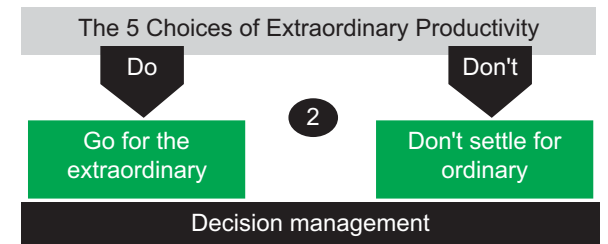
- Are my team's goals and priorities clear-cut and known by one and all?
- Am I doing things like failing to plan which inadvertently puts people into crisis mode?
- Am I making sure my best producers are not burdened with Q3 activities others should be doing?
- Do we have any outdated reports, processes or systems which take up people's time without really adding any value?

- Have I created a safe environment where people can challenge and change what they do in order to be more productive without getting my OK?
- Do I regularly encourage the people on my team to Pause–Clarify–Decide before plunging into anything new?

If you're not the boss, there are still a few things you can try to create more of a Q2 culture among the people you work with. Some ideas:

1. *Keep a Time Matrix chart handy* – and whenever your boss lobs new assignments at you, bring out your chart and ask: "Can you help me determine the priority of the tasks you're assigning to me. Perhaps we can use this chart as a way to categorize what needs to be done first."
2. *Use a common language with your boss and your team members* – talk about which tasks are genuinely Q2 and which are not.
3. *Every morning, identify your most important Q2 activities for that day* – and write them down. At the end of the day, see if you have got them done. If not, figure out why and discuss with your team members.
4. *Once a week, take a good look at how your time got used the previous week* – and identify a few Q3 distractions you feel for. Make a strategy to deal with them in the future. Find time you can invest in Q2 activities.

IMPORTANT	Q1 NECESSITY _____ %	Q2 PRODUCTIVITY _____ %
	Q3 DISTRACTION _____ %	Q4 WASTE _____ %
NOT IMPORTANT	URGENT	NOT URGENT



To maximize the amount of time you spend in Q2, you have to figure out what makes you feel satisfied and accomplished. This is a matter of clarifying the roles you play and deciding what would constitute extraordinary performance in those roles.

"To harness your brain's power, it needs direction and vision. It needs a blueprint."
 – Daniel Amen, brain expert

To get into and then stay in Q2, you need to decide what is important to you. Only then will you be able to correctly figure out where your time, attention and energy can be best applied in order to make your life "exceptional" or "extraordinary."

"Let's define what we mean by extraordinary. It's about going to bed at the end of each day feeling satisfied and accomplished. It's about accomplishing those things which add the most value to your work and your life."
 – Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill and Leena Rinne

A good way to visualize the concept of being extraordinary is to identify the important roles in your life. Most people think in terms of roles when someone asks what you do for a living. You might say: "I'm an engineer," or "I am a doctor." Roles are fundamental to your feelings of self-worth and identity.

At any one time, you will be filling multiple roles and keeping them all in balance will be a challenge. For example, you roles might be:

- Project manager
- Good friend
- Happy wife
- Keen sports person
- Daughter

To maximize the amount of time you stay in Q2, you first need to clarify and define for yourself what success looks like in each of those roles. It's important that you articulate this so your brain has something specific to go after every day.

It's also vital that as you identify what extraordinary performance looks like in these roles you specify a combination of outcomes and activities which make sense to you. This won't be the work of five minutes spent brainstorming but instead will take time to come together. Furthermore, what you come up with won't be final but will continue to evolve and change as you get further down the track.

"These role statements do not go on a shelf or in the back of a book, filed away to be reviewed once a year. A Q2 Role Statement is a living, breathing document of your life today. It captures what is important to you now and what accomplishment looks like to you now. The more you engage with this statement, get excited by it, tweak it, and make it real, the more your brain will have the clarity and anchors to make the right decisions to get the most important things done every day."

– Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill and Leena Rinne

Make sure how you define extraordinary is truly your own thinking and not someone else's. It's only going to be genuinely motivational to you if you put down what you believe.

Also keep in mind you have to create balance between your various roles. Today's communications technologies make it possible to have an always-on, ever-accessible-for-work lifestyle which can burn you out over time if not carefully managed. You have to create some boundaries and sometimes negotiate with others to shape those boundaries before they will work. The goal really is to have a harmonious and sustainable relationship between your various roles.

The more specific you are in specifying your goals and criteria, the more your brain will engage and get to work figuring out how to become extraordinary in each role.

"We often are reluctant to set very meaningful, difficult goals for ourselves. But well over a thousand studies show that when people set difficult and specific goals for themselves, they are vastly more successful and vastly more satisfied and happy with their lives than when they just say, 'Well, I'm gonna do my best.'"

– Heidi Halvorson, researcher

Clarifying what extraordinary looks like in each of your roles will focus your attention and energize you to add as much value as feasible each day. Doing this will tap into your heart and spirit.

"In business, we tend to obsess over the how – as in 'Here's how to do it.' Yet we rarely discuss the why – as in 'Here's why we're doing it.' But it's often difficult to do something exceptionally well if we don't know the reasons we're doing it in the first place."

– Daniel Pink, author

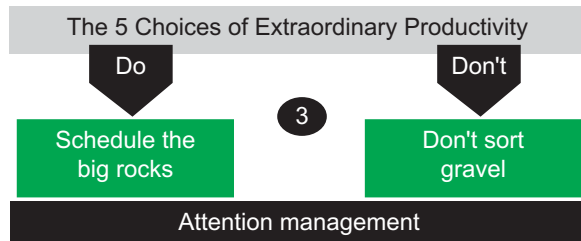
"Clarifying our roles and goals taps into the deepest purposes we have in our lives. Our roles embrace our most significant relationships, our most profound joys, and our highest contributions and aspirations."

– Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill and Leena Rinne

"The science shows that the secret to high performance isn't our biological drive or our reward-and-punishment drive, but our third drive – our deep-seated desire to direct our own lives, to extend and expand our abilities, to make a contribution."

– Daniel Pink

My Roles	What does "underperforming" look like in this role?	What does "average" look like in this role?	What does "extraordinary" look like in this role?	What is my current rating in this role?	What are my plans to raise my performance in this area and by what date will I do that?
→					
→					
→					



You'll never become extraordinarily productive until you decide what is most important and start proactively scheduling those activities in advance. You have to create some Q2 time zones where you can make significant progress towards your key goals.

"Big Rocks" represent the important Q2 activities you want to fill your days with. This is productive time spent on building key relationships, progressing important projects and so forth. Big rocks are those activities which will generate the extraordinary achievements you're after in your various roles.

"Gravel", by contrast, is all the little stuff which soaks up your time – answering emails, making phones calls,

doing your laundry and housecleaning, etc. You've got to be careful that you don't end up spending so much time dealing with gravel that you never get around to scheduling time periods where you can focus on getting big rocks done.

The key to true productivity is not to try and get more things done – that is, not to sort gravel faster – but to schedule more time for big rocks. It's not about trying to do more with less but doing more about less. You need to schedule time for the big rocks which make up your Q2 activities and then give them your best attention and energy. You need to get those key Q2 activities done in the midst of the gravel which inevitably arises.

To schedule time for Q2 activities on a regular basis, use a written Master Task List where you link your roles with specific time which is dedicated to Q2 activities. The basic rule is whenever a new task comes along, it either goes on the list or it gets dropped. By doing this consistently on paper rather than in your head, you free up your mental capacity to focus on what really adds value. Your working memory is applied productively and decisions get made quickly and decisively when you use the list.

"Q2 planning is a process where you take some time to quiet your mind and work from the Thinking Brain to consciously and intentionally load the Big Rocks into your weeks and days first, to make sure they get accomplished. We want to make you a promise: If you spend thirty minutes each week and ten minutes each day in Q2 planning, you will dramatically increase your ability to be and feel accomplished at the end of each day. It is a process that will transform the way you approach every other hour you spend."

– Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill and Leena Rinne

Every week, you should:

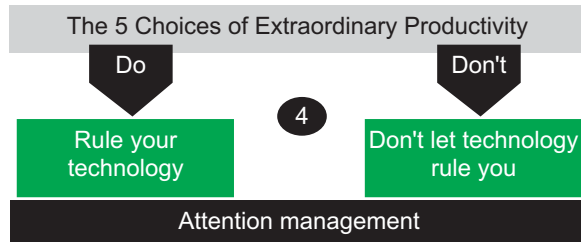
1. Review your roles and goals
2. Schedule the Big Rocks
3. Organize Gravel around your Big Rocks

Then, every day you should:

1. Evaluate how you've done on Q2 activities
2. Identify tomorrow's "Must-Dos" and schedule them
3. Organize everything else around those Must-Dos

If you can get into the habit of doing this each day on paper, studies have shown your personal productivity will rise by 200 percent to 300 percent.

My Roles	What are my plans to raise my performance in this area and by what date will I do that?	What are my Must-Do weekly Q2 activities which will raise my productivity in these areas?	When specifically will I schedule time to get these Q2 activities done?
→		1	
→		2	
→		3	
→		4	
→		5	
→		6	
→		7	



Today's technology can accelerate the inflow of gravel into your life if you're not aware. Don't let that happen. Have systems in place so you rule your technology and use it to boost your productivity. Be savvy and smart when it comes to technology.

Today, the ways people can reach you are pervasive:

- Sticky notes, documents or letters
- E-mail
- Videoconferencing or teleconferencing
- Text messaging on your cell phone
- Through wireless devices connected to the Internet
- Through messages on social media sites

What's important to bear in mind about this veritable flood of messages, tweets, requests and demands is the philosophy of Choice #1 – you want to act on the important rather than merely react to the urgent and most shrill. With that in mind, you should use technology to help you be productive in a Q2 way rather than letting it waste your time in Q1, Q3 or Q4.

To rule your technology and stay in Q2, there are four basic principles or master moves involved:

- 1 Keep everything in one place
- 2 Try to win without fighting
- 3 Turn it into what it is
- 4 Find ways to link to locate

1 Keep everything in one place

The first step in ruling your technology is to get everything together in one place rather than having bits here and other bits somewhere else. To tackle the inflow of information, you need to be able to see the big picture and manage it. That will only be feasible if you centralize it in one place.

It really doesn't matter whether you use a paper-based system or a digital system for doing this – whatever works for you is fine. You'll probably end up with a blended system which is part paper and part digital. That's fine as long as you bring everything digital to one central place, everything paper-based to another and handle both using the same methodology and approach.

When you look at your incoming information, you'll soon notice it really breaks down into four categories:

1. Appointments that you make and need to keep.
2. Tasks that you want to get done or which are assigned to you.
3. Contact information about other people you don't want to lose.
4. Notes and documents with helpful information.

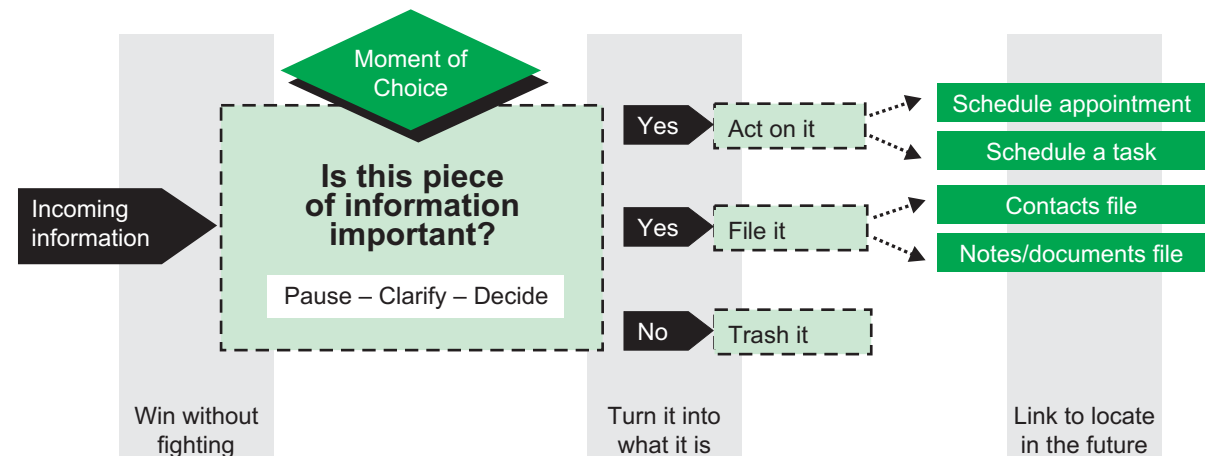
2 Try to win without fighting

One of the best ways to rule your technology is to set up some rules which act as filters for new information coming into your system. If you can cut out the junk before you even waste any time reading it, you'll always be further ahead.

For example, if you set up some good automatic rules for incoming emails, the system should be able to discard about 30 - 40 percent of that incoming email automatically. Most people never get around to learning how to do this and end up wasting time doing this manually. Use your technology to help you master your technology.

You can also look at setting up a different ring-tone on your cell phone for important people. That way you can take their calls but let everything else go to voicemail.

If you have someone you can delegate a project to – which is another older form of automation – you can then have email which relates to that project automatically forwarded to them. You might even have an assistant who will take the first pass at your email and flag what you need to read and what you don't. That will help you be better organized and save time for Q2 activities.



3 Turn it into what it is

Your next master move after culling your email down to manageable levels is to immediately turn each email into what it is. This involves you skimming the email and deciding whether you want to act on it, file it or trash it. The key is to make an immediate decision and process that email rather than leaving it in your inbox.

To touch each email once and only once:

- *If the email details an appointment:*
Add the appointment described to your calendar, reply to confirm and then move that email to a folder marked "Appointments."
- *If the email details an important task:*
Add the task to a running list you keep of tasks to be done and move the email to a folder you have marked "Tasks."
- *If the email contains important contact information:*
Learn how to use your email software to turn the sender into a contact and then move the email to a folder marked "Contacts."
- *If the email contains information you want to keep:*
Move the email to a folder marked "Notes."

The whole point is you need a consistent system which keeps your inbox free and uncluttered. If you read something which you don't want to schedule or keep for future reference, delete it with relish. Turn everything into what it is and act accordingly.

Admittedly, you can get carried away in this system and delete everything just because you can. That probably won't help you spend more time in Q2. Maybe have a 5-second rule where you pause before you delete just to check your gut first. But above all, stay organized and focused on Q2 as you deal with email.

"Having an uncluttered inbox gives you an uncluttered mind. There is nothing more peaceful than seeing your number of messages reduced to just a few and knowing that everything is where it belongs. You make your inbox work for you rather than the other way around."
 – Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill and Leena Rinne

"The supreme art is to subdue the enemy without fighting."
 – Sun Tzu, military strategist

4 Find ways to link to locate

Searching for the information you need before a meeting is a real Q1 drain on productivity. To avoid that, you should add some hyperlinks to the information you store in your system so you can bring together everything that relates quickly and cleanly.

There are three ways to add links:



- If you keep your appointments in an electronic calendar, the software should let you insert documents or emails into that appointment. That way when it's time to go to the meeting, you click on the appointment to bring up everything which has been linked to it.
- Some electronic calendaring systems also allow you to create an active hyperlink right in the document being stored. When you put that link in another document, all you have to do is click on it and the original file is opened. You can copy and paste hyperlinks to the material you will need into an appointment.
- If you have a paper based system, you can put a text-based link into your materials to remind you where you have stored the information linked to that appointment or presentation. You can use any format you like and which makes sense to you. The link won't be clickable but you will at least know where to look to find everything you need.

Social media sites also use hashtags to organize and connect information. You can easily create a hashtag which relates to your upcoming meeting and then post social media messages to yourself using that hashtag which reference the documents you will need at that meeting. That's another way you can use technology to stay organized and to maximize your Q2 time.

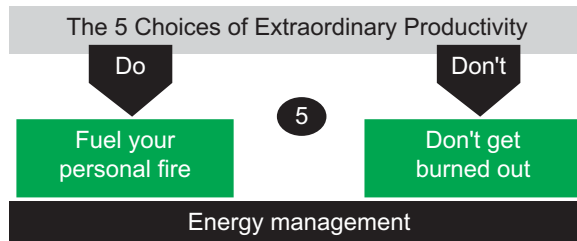
If you're seriously buried in email and have a bulging inbox, you may feel slightly overwhelmed by the enormity of the idea of cleaning your inbox to get this system operating. Some suggestions which might help in that situation:

1. Create a new subfolder called Detox.
2. Move everything from your current inbox into the Detox folder except for say the last two hundred messages.
3. Review those remaining emails and either trash, act on or file each item as per your new system.
4. Treat all new incoming email with your system.
5. Either set aside time to work your way through your Detox folder gradually or simply leave those items sitting there. You will still be able to access them if required but they won't be cluttering your inbox.
6. Get into the habit of marking any emails you send to your team members with Q1, Q2, Q3 or Q4 designations in the subject line.
7. Have set times when you respond to your email and let everyone know when that is. That way they won't be sending you copies every fifteen minutes just to check if you have received it. (That's a Q3 activity if ever there was one.)

You should also have a good look and see what kind of apps are available and ready to use as productivity accelerators. There are inexpensive or free apps available which can do some amazing stuff. Just make sure you don't fritter away your Q2 time looking for apps which may or may not help. Treat apps just the same way as you do all your technology.

"The master can continue to win the battle as technologies change, because her strength is in her knowledge of the underlying paradigms and principles. The specific tools and technologies are secondary."
 – Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill and Leena Rinne

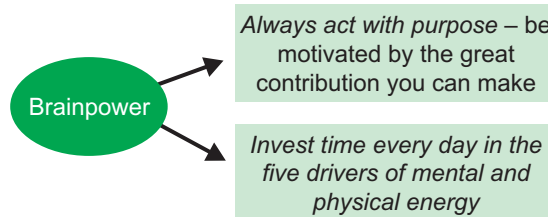
"Sometimes we get caught up in the idea that if we just have the right tool—the right software, the latest gadget, and so on—then all our problems will be solved. But this is wishful thinking. No external device can replace our own minds."
 – Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill and Leena Rinne



In a world where knowledge work creates great value, you have to keep your brain fueled and fired up. Draw on the energy generated by a clear and motivating purpose and do things to stay healthy so you have the energy to act consciously and deliberately each day.

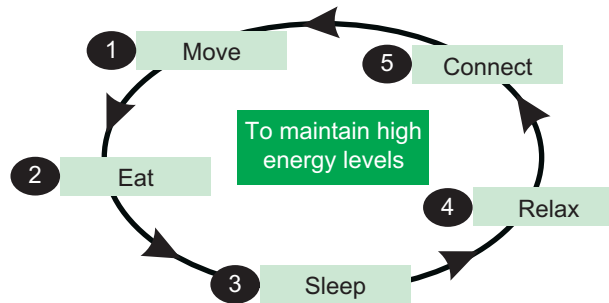
Staying extraordinarily productive takes lots of mental energy. Your brain is your number-one business asset and as such you should invest some time each day in optimizing your mind and brainpower.

To do this, there are two keys:



Having a strong sense of purpose will generate tremendous energy but over the long run, you'll hit a wall unless you have a well-cared-for mind and body. To maintain the energy level you'll need, you have to do five things consistently:

1. *Move* – you have to keep moving around to think clearly. Like it or not, the human body just isn't designed to sit in one place all the time. It isn't healthy – you have to move. Research shows that if you have a good and consistent exercise regime, you will optimize your brainpower and enhance your physical well-being.



2. *Eat* – fueling your mind and your body with high-quality calories is vital. The right food will supercharge your energy and make you smarter whereas high-fat high-sugar food will make you sluggish. The simple ideal is to fuel up with whole-natural foods at regular intervals through the day so your brain will have a good supply of glucose and other nutrients which will optimize its performance.

3. *Sleep* – you won't be able to perform at a superior level unless you get enough sleep. Sleep is where your brain consolidates your learning, subconsciously solves problems and works to improve your memory. To sleep well, you need to be exercising enough, limiting your intake of alcohol and caffeine in the evenings and getting into a good routine and an environment which facilitates sleep. You won't feel clear-headed unless you get enough good quality sleep every night.

4. *Relaxation* – high performers understand they can't be going all the time and stay at the top of their game. Instead, they deliberately turn off from time to time so they can come back refreshed and ready to perform. You need to do the same. To keep your energy high, you need to be relaxing periodically by pursuing a hobby, taking a break to talk to someone interesting or even just switching to a project which is in a different field. Schedule some times when you can be relaxing and recharging your batteries.

5. *Connect* – the human brain craves positive social connections with others. These connections can generate huge amounts of positive energy which then flows into all other parts of your performance as well. Spending time and effort to build quality one-on-one relationships with the important people in your life is a worthwhile investment in your ongoing personal productivity.

Each of these energy drivers are powerful in their own right but when combined, you can and will get immediate benefits. If you consistently and regularly allocate time to these energy drivers, you'll feel better about yourself, have a clearer mind and become more receptive to new ideas. You'll feel optimistic about your prospects and energized to get there.

The great thing about choice #5 is you can start with some simple things and build from there. For example:

- Pick one idea which will increase your movement at work and start doing that at least once or twice a week.
- Buy some healthy snacks like fruit or vegetables and put them in your desk drawers so you have something healthy to snack on.
- Get to bed fifteen minutes earlier each night.
- Do something fun this week which makes you relax.
- Spend some extra time strengthening a key relationship in your life.

"The most important contribution management needs to make in the 21st century is to increase the productivity of knowledge work and the knowledge worker."

– Peter Drucker

"More than anything, extraordinary productivity is a question of being conscious in the moment. And it doesn't take much to change the equation. It's taking small steps each day to cultivate this habit in our lives. It's being aware of our surroundings, the people we work with, and the opportunities for high-value decisions about where we spend our time, attention, and energy."

– Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill and Leena Rinne