



Your Best Just Got Better

Work Smarter, Think Bigger, Make More

by Jason W. Womack
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Take-Aways

- Visualize your ideal working day to improve your time management.
- To become more productive, undertake three imperatives: “work smarter, think bigger and make more.”
- First, to work smarter, use all the available time in your schedule, identify your top priority tasks, pare your task list down and maintain your focus.
- Identify your “Most Important Things” (MITs).
- To work better, change your work habits, even if your existing habits brought you success. Slow down and schedule some relaxation time.
- Second, to think bigger, believe in yourself and what you can accomplish. Spend time with supportive people, expand your social network and eliminate distractions.
- Track how you use your limited resources: “time, energy, focus, and systems and tools.”
- Third, to make more – more money, time, opportunities, memories or anything else – create a continuous cycle of improvement.
- To continue improving, “focus to finish” each task and ask for feedback.
- Remove obstacles and focus on what you can do right now to achieve your goals.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
8	9	6	8

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) How to improve your workflow, 2) How to implement change in the way you work and 3) Why focusing on improving your efforts is important.

Recommendation

Most people can imagine their ideal day, but what would it take to make your perfect day – or parts of it – come to life? Jason W. Womack, an executive coach and workplace performance trainer, tells you how to change your habits and make your ideal day a reality. Womack identifies some commonsense ideas about how to “work smarter, think bigger and make more.” While few of his ideas are revolutionary, they add up to a compelling prescription for breaking through barriers that hold you back. *getAbstract* recommends Womack’s well-constructed collection of sound, practical, life-improving advice to anyone seeking increased efficiency and productivity.

Summary

The Best Day Ever

Imagine your ideal day. What time would you get up in the morning? What would you do first? What would you accomplish? Who would you be with? Visualizing your ideal day and committing that vision to paper will help you “work smarter, think bigger and make more.”

Part 1: Work Smarter

A day consists of 96 blocks of time that are 15 minutes long, so each 15-minute block is about 1% of your day. You can dramatically increase your efficiency by managing the time on your calendar in blocks of a quarter of an hour. When you suddenly have an extra 15 minutes, such as when a meeting ends early or when someone you’re expecting is late, be prepared to use the time to your advantage. Carry the tools you need to complete some of the small tasks on your to-do list, like making hotel reservations, listening to your voicemail, writing thank-you notes or outlining a writing project.

No one can create more time, so, to accomplish more with the time you have, learn to work smarter. Begin with the “IDEA elements”:

- **“Identify a very specific area”** – Decide what in your life or work you want to fix.
- **“Develop strategies”** – Determine what steps to take and what methods to use to achieve your targeted improvements.
- **“Experiment”** – Try different approaches to “generate bursts of momentum.”
- **“Assess the value the effort has created”** – What have you accomplished, and was it worthwhile?

With so little time in the day, follow a three-step process to achieve your targets: “set a goal, be consistent” and “take action.” Identify your “Most Important Things” (MITs) – the top goals you want to address during a set time period. How will you break down these goals? Some people make to-do lists, using nouns, like “book launch.” Others prefer lists of verbs, like “find bookstores for book promotion.” Brainstorm a list of nouns that

“Wherever I am, no matter what I am doing, I need to focus on the task at hand.”

“More ideas come to you every day than you can possibly manage to accomplish. So take them a few at a time.”

“A completely defined, clear and objective goal has one more benefit: In addition to getting you where you want to go, it helps you say no to the things that keep you from getting there.”

“Proactively perceived and appropriately applied, feedback offers one of the fastest ways to make your best better.”

“You’ll find it absolutely amazing what happens when you put a boundary around what you call a workday.”

“Right now, you need to slow down – way down.”

summarizes your goals. Then use verbs to identify “action steps” that you can address within the next four days.

Think about the tools you need to be productive, the conditions that allow you to focus during each 15-minute block on your schedule and the time of day you work best. Limit your focus to a few projects during any given period. Then, address them at the right time of day and under the right circumstances for peak focus and performance.

Working smarter requires setting a pace you can sustain over the long haul. Consider marathon runners who train to maintain a steady pace throughout a race. If they start too fast, they will run out of energy and “hit the wall.” The same is true of work. You need to slow down to work smarter; schedule time to relax and regroup.

Focus on a pared-down to-do list and commit to giving those tasks your complete attention. Start the day by setting the alarm for the time you actually get up; don’t build in time to press the snooze button and fall back asleep. Gather the tools you need to work more efficiently, but use as few tools as possible and learn to handle them expertly so you can be more productive. Most hardware and software offerings have lesser-known features that can save precious work minutes.

Three factors affect how you manage your time and your productivity:

1. **“Homeostasis”** – Like most people, you tend to keep doing what you have always done. What you have been doing thus far has taken you to where you are now, so your routines probably seem successful. But to achieve more, you must do more, and that means changing your routine.
2. **“Context”** – This is the environment in which you work. Do you waste time looking for what you need? Do your tools and devices work properly? Are better tools available? Does your workspace inspire you to do your best? If you gave a negative answer to any of these questions, change your context to help you work smarter.
3. **“Network”** – The people surrounding you greatly influence the choices you make, even if you don’t realize it. This includes people you physically interact with, as well as those in your social networks. To change your habits, change the people around you who influence you; add a person or two whose work style you admire.

Part 2: Think Bigger

Your beliefs determine your success. Remember, “If you think you can, you can.” Thinking bigger involves building “self-efficacy” – the belief that your actions will succeed. Self-efficacy can be hard to maintain when you have more priorities on your to-do list than you have time to complete, so reduce your daily priorities. Boost your efficacy by attending conferences and seminars. And, repeat these statements to yourself to emphasize your ability to succeed:

- **“I did it before”** – Recall a recent success and think through how you achieved it, step by step, “from start to finish.”
- **“They were able to do it”** – Notice successful people around you and in the media. Draw inspiration from those who have achieved great goals. Surround yourself with models of success – via biographies of people you admire, how-to books, and so on.
- **“They think I can do it”** – To gain confidence, think of the belief other people have in your abilities. Really listen to your supporters; accept their encouragement.

“When you’re working on your MITs, you’re working on your great work.”

“Some friends and colleagues can have such a strong perspective about what cannot be done that they can cloud your vision of what can be.”

“Some people...focus themselves into a mess, and other people...are adept at using focus to reach even higher levels of success.”

“To make your best better, you need to show up, do good work and stay in touch.”

- **“I know I can do it”** – Remind yourself of your successes. Build your confidence based on the knowledge that “you’ve worked, prepared, rehearsed and anticipated success...as you move toward your goals.”

Tap the power of your social network – the web of people with whom you are connected. Your social network existed long before the advent of Facebook or Twitter. List the people you admire, those you want to spend more time with and those you’d like to be around less. This categorization will show you the people who are most important to you. For a given project, construct a “mind map” of “Team You” – the people you can rely on to give you ideas, feedback and support.

Expand your social network at every opportunity. Move beyond the standard networking questions that everyone asks – “What do you do?” – and ask in-depth, memorable questions, like, “What is interesting to you these days?” or “How can I help you?” These questions help you start new relationships and add worthy people to Team You.

Changing the way you work requires gathering data, something that most business professionals understand. To reduce interruptions and to make sure you do your work when you are at your best, monitor your work habits and record any changes. For example, if you want to increase the number of outgoing calls you make to your contacts, first log your current calls and calculate your call volume. Then, track the changes you want to make. For instance, place a stack of coins by your phone. For every call you make, move a coin to the other side of your desk – a memorable visual symbol that shows how your actions can translate to money.

Tracking allows you to see how you are using your limited resources, including “time, energy, focus, and systems and tools.” For example, dedicate a two-day period to monitoring how you use your 15- or 30-minute blocks of time. To keep tabs on how your energy comes and goes throughout the day, jot down your activities and feelings as the day moves along. To observe your focus, log the times of day when you can truly multitask and then contrast those periods with the times and tasks that require a single focus. Tracking your use of systems and tools can be as simple as listing the various paper-based and digital tools you utilize during a single day.

This kind of record keeping will help you stay focused on your goal. “Compare what you originally wanted to accomplish in your work and in your personal life against what, currently, is actually taking your time, energy and focus.” This will help you focus and refocus on your MITs. Create “so that” statements. Make a declaration about each of your MITs, and follow it with “so that.” For example, you might train for a triathlon, so that you can challenge yourself physically. You might attend a conference, so that you can share ideas with people you respect.

Once you’re focused on your MITs, cut out the activities that drain you. For example, if you are the first person in your office and the last one out, or if you work from home and feel like you never escape work, bracket your day with a start time and an end time. Over the course of a few days, you will shrink the number of hours you work. Make a “stop doing” list of the tasks you plan to quit, so you can focus time and energy on your MITs.

Part 3: Make More

Making more – money, time, opportunities, memories or anything else – requires creating a continuous cycle of improvement. One powerful way to continue improving is to ask for feedback. Tracking your actions will provide six kinds of feedback:

“Would you know a great day if you saw one?”

“When you take on something big, it can be daunting to think, ‘Okay, I’ll just do it.’”

“When you redirect your focus, your perspective changes, and when that happens, you have a significant option: You can begin to make things better.”

“If you would like your life to be different, then it’s very important to get started.”

1. **“Results”** – At the end of a set period of time, consider how the matters you want to change are going now, compared with how they were going at the beginning of the period. This is a subjective evaluation that provides you with valuable information on your progress.
2. **“Experience”** – This is how you feel your life is transpiring. Take a moment to savor the completion of a task before you rush on to the next.
3. **“Contribution”** – “Who said thanks?” View others’ appreciation of your contributions as an assessment of your effectiveness.
4. **“Measurement”** – This is objective data, like the amount of money you saved or the number of clients you landed during a particular period.
5. **“Service”** – Consider whom you helped lately and who helped you. This gauges the extent to which you serve other people and the health of your social network.
6. **“Habits”** – Building good habits helps you reach your goals. Reflect on the habits you created that make you more effective.

Solicit feedback – whether formal or informal, objective or subjective feedback – from someone who you trust and who understands your goals. Find a partner who will commit to attend brief meetings with you over the next two months where you can take turns discussing the progress you have each made. Always remember: “If you can track it, you can change it.”

“Focus to Finish”

To make more, you have to focus to finish. Two techniques can help you maintain your focus, though they have varying degrees of effectiveness. Use the “stop and do” tactic when a task should take so little time that it makes sense to just go ahead and do it. This approach can lead to a busy day in which you make progress toward your MITs. Employ the “stop, think and bunch and then do” method when you feel you need to accumulate all your necessary tasks and group them into categories of activities that you can dispatch all at once.

Clarify Your Workspace

Arrange your workspace with care: What visual and auditory distractions break your focus? Visual distractions might include piles of papers on your desk, a blinking phone light or any stimulus that draws your attention from work. Auditory distractions are prevalent in open plan offices.

Focusing to finish your tasks requires removing or blocking out distractions, paying tight attention to what you can accomplish right now to further your goals and letting other tasks go. Practice these behaviors by visualizing your new work patterns, rehearsing them in your mind over and over again and trying them out for at least five days. As you put new habits into action, add others to the list of ideas you visualize, rehearse and try. Soon, you will be working smarter, thinking bigger and making more.

About the Author

Jason W. Womack, an executive coach and trainer and the CEO and founder of the Jason Womack Company, has given more than 1,200 seminars on workplace performance.