7 Habits of Highly Productive Developers

Keeping yourself focused and less distracted can be quite challenging. Different technologies/platforms are lurking in every corner and, sometimes, it's hard to resist them. At the same time, they can be productivity boosters and killers.

When you're working on the task, you want to be as productive as possible. Do as much as you can in a short period of time. Especially if the task has high priority.

However, everything can start perfectly, but, somehow, down the road, you encounter different disturbances that make you lose focus over and over again. In other words, you're often distracted.

In this article, I'll talk about habits you can embrace to improve your productivity.

1. Keep Distractions Away

In the past, distractions were useful since they could indicate we were in danger. Imagine yourself working in a cave, when, suddenly, you hear some noise. Maybe it's nothing, but, maybe it's a wild animal trying to find something to eat. In this scenario, we could say it's essential to lose focus and check your surroundings – you might be in real danger.

Fortunately, today, this is no longer the case, especially when we're talking about distractions in the workplace. They're part of every job. However, the way we handle them is up to us. We can do something about them or we can just sit and feel like the world is against us.

Studies have shown we need 10 to 15 minutes to get back to the state we were before distraction happened.

If you think about it, that's quite a lot. If you're distracted four times during work, you'll spend around one hour trying to get back where you left off.

When we're distracted, we tend to feel less productive. That's accurate since we need to shift our focus from one task to another. When repeated frequently, we may feel discouraged and that can further impact our productivity.

Problem

A smartphone is the most common productivity killer during work. And apart from work. Since we're developers, we'd need our smartphone on very rare occasions. If you think about it, how often do you use your phone for work? Almost, never, right? Maybe if you need to authenticate somewhere, but it usually doesn't take more than 2 minutes.

We often use our phones to distract ourselves – on purpose! We think, "Hell, I had enough of this code, I should take a break.". Sometimes, that's fine. But, if you use your phone regularly, then you aren't much productive. You don't need to answer your friend during work.

Internet browsing falls into the same category as smartphones. We check the news, watch non-work-related videos, and search up and down trying to find some entertainment. We're losing our precious time. And, again, we distract ourselves on purpose.

Solution

- Put the phone out of reach. This way, you'll still be able to hear if someone is calling you. However, you wouldn't be tempted to use your phone to distract yourself.
- Close messaging applications that are not work-related. If you put your phone aside but still have opened messaging services on your PC, you didn't do any good. You can still receive notifications when someone messages you. You can still be distracted. In fact, you just switched to a different distractor.

2. There's no Such a Thing as Multitasking

Now, how to keep focus? Truth be told, we could distract ourselves all day if we wanted to. In most cases, we distract ourselves with social media, smartphones, and different entertainment.

If we're distracted too often, our brain would figure out there is no point in trying to focus on something. As a result, we'll end up with attention fragmentation and unable to focus on a single task.

This way we train our brains to be distracted and without focus.

People who multitask often think they're accomplishing more. They think multitasking will improve their productivity. This is, unfortunately, far from the truth.

Studies have shown only 2% of people can actually multitask! For others, it'll do more harm than good.

With multitasking, all we do is teach our brains to be unfocused. We interrupt ourselves with different tasks so often, so it's easier for our brain to stay unfocused since, in the end, we'll switch to another task in no time.

Solution

- Devote yourself to one task. Try to complete one task at a time. This way, you'll prevent feeling overwhelmed.
- Practice focusing. Just like everything in life, we need to teach our brains to improve concentration. Turn off distractions. Set time limits. Start small.
- Use rewards. Small changes can make a big impact. Furthermore, we should often remind ourselves what outcome we desire.

3. The Power of Planning

As a developer, you want to be as efficient as possible. To accomplish that, you'll need to learn how to be organized.

If you plan your week ahead, you won't end up with spare time wondering what should you do next. You'll always know what are the next steps you should take. This doesn't apply just to your job.

"How you do anything is how you do everything."

Time management is an essential part of your productivity. Furthermore, good organization skills will help you perform your task without feeling overwhelmed. In addition, they will help you understand your priorities.

Solution

- Start the day prepared. Prepare everything you need a day before. If you're cooking, prepare the meal upfront. If your next task requires some research, find references you'd like to read.
- Keep your calendar up-to-date. Everything that occurs on a specific date and time should be on the calendar. You can set a reminder so you can be sure you won't forget them.
- Plan your week. Add tasks to your calendar that are more flexible, but have a due date. If you're unsure how much time you need to finish them, estimate them. This will give you a better sense of how much time you have left.
- Avoid unnecessary meetings. Have you ever been in a meeting and after the first few minutes you started to wonder "What am I doing here?". If so, you were probably at the wrong meeting. When you aren't a required attendee, you can skip the meeting, especially if you don't think it'll bring you any good.

4. Let's Take a Break

We, as developers, often feel like we need to work without taking any breaks to stay productive. What's more, some developers tend to stay after hours to finish their work. Even if they don't have a deadline

breathing down their neck.

Working without taking breaks can be counterproductive.

Working long hours without a break can cause burnout.

Consequently, it'll decrease your productivity. It slows your thinking process and clutters your judgment.

To conclude, break times are as much as important as focus time.

Solution

- Use small breaks regularly. It can help your mind to rest and recover. Hence, you'll be more focused after a break. 5-minute break every now and then can help you stay focused. During this time, you can stretch, make a coffee or tea, or take a walk.
- Work only after hours if necessary. If you agree to work 7.5 hours a day for an employer, stick to it. If you need more time to finish a task, maybe you should think about changing the estimate. Especially if this happens regularly.
- Use the Pomodoro technique. It's a technique that helps you stay focused for a specific time slot. Usually, it's 25 minutes. This time can be longer, depending on your desire. During this time, you should ignore all the distractions. You can find a simple timer [here](). When used regularly, it can help you reduce stress, because you'll feel more in control of your time.
- Close your email tab and set a "Do not disturb" status on communication platforms.
- Take a day off. If you feel overwhelmed, take a day off. Take a vacation. You have vacation days for a reason. Your mental health should be more important than your job.

5. Coffe isn't a Replacement for Sleep

Sleep deprivation can be a real problem when you need to stay focused at work. You don't want to be a zombie.

If you don't sleep enough, your body and mind won't get the rest they need.

You'll be more prone to act on distractions. Even the smallest ones. And no amount of coffee will fix this.

Solution

- Sleep regularly. You can define a sleeping schedule and stick to it.
- Don't substitute coffee for a good night of sleep. Instead of pouring an enormous amount of coffee into yourself, maybe you should consider sleeping a few
- hours more.
- Set up "Do not disturb" on your phone during your sleeping hours. This will help you have a night of sleep without unnecessary interruptions.
- Exercise regularly. Exercise can help you boost your energy, reduce stress and improve concentration. Furthermore, it can help you fall asleep more quickly.

6. Don't Shop Without the List

If we go grocery shopping without the list, what would happen? We'll end up buying whatever catches our eye, even if we don't need it. Additionally, we can easily forget about the products we really need. It would be a real bummer to go back home without the groceries we need to prepare our next meal.

"The sooner you start to code, the longer the program will take." – R. Carlson

The majority of developers, when having a task, often just start coding without giving any thought to it. They think, in order to be productive, they need to write the code all the time. When they spend some time without coding, they feel guilty.

Software development isn't just about coding.

It's about planning and finding the best solution for the problem you're facing.

Solution

- Think before you code. Rather than jumping straight into coding, think about the problem you're trying to solve. It'll give you a better idea of the scope of the work and what needs to be done.
- Plan ahead. Breaking the task into smaller pieces can save you time. You're likely to think about features and how to implement them.

7. Good Environment

In the last few years, many developers started to work remotely. We feel comfortable working from our home. Nevertheless, even if remote work sounds good, it could just as easily become a hostile environment. It can become a real productivity killer.

Have you ever forgotten something after exiting one room, only to recall it when you return?

Our brain connects our thoughts to the environment we're in.

That's the reason why we sometimes forget things after exiting the room.

If we work in the same room we live in, we'll have mixed thoughts about our private and work lives all the time. Imagine you're working on some task, when, all of a sudden, the thought "I need to order food for my dog." pops in. Are you distracted? Will you leave everything you're currently doing and start browsing pet shops? Puf, just like that, the focus goes down the toilet.

The thing is, we're easily distracted in our homes since it isn't only the place we work in. It's primarily the place we live in.

Solution

- Set up the environment. I'd suggest you have an additional room you'll only use for work. This way, you'll set up an environment that will be apart from your daily life. If you don't have a spare room, you may consider separating your desk with a "visual wall", such as a bookshelf or divider panels.
- Use your workstation only for work and nothing more.
- Remove everything not work-related from the desk. Things that are not related to your work should be put aside. They will only distract you.

Conclusion

To sum up, you can't boost productivity overnight. You need to be patient and, most importantly, you need to stick to your plan.

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