

FIRED UP & FOCUSED

Hey there, Racheal Cook here, host of the Promote Yourself to CEO podcast and founder of the CEO Collective. Today we're talking about how to overcome procrastination and skyrocket your productivity. So let's think about it. There's something you know you've got to get done, something important that's going to move your business forward, but you're dreading it. So you procrastinate. Why do we do this? We all do it. Every single one of us is guilty of procrastination. So why don't we do this to ourselves? We know it's not going to get us where we want to go. Well, maybe you just hate the task. It could be something you really dislike doing and maybe something you're just not that great at yet. So here again, this is where we can go back to yesterday's challenge. It's all about figuring out if you could stop doing something or maybe systematize it, streamline it, or delegate it to someone else.

Another thing that might be happening is you're just worried about how big this task is, and it starts to feel like it will take forever. This happens all the time when there's a big project that you want to do, you know it's going to move your business forward, but it's a big undertaking. Maybe it's creating a new product, program, or service. It could be writing a book, doing something that has a lot of steps involved and you're just worried about how much time it's going to take. Another thing, we love instant gratification. Everyone wants to do something that we can check off the list really quickly. As entrepreneurs we've got to know that these bigger, more important things aren't easily checkoffable. They have a lot of small individual steps. So these bigger tasks, these higher level things don't give us that hit of instant gratification.

And when this happens, we might find ourselves saying, "I just can't focus on this big, important task right now. There's too much going on and I'm going to wait until later. I'm going to wait until the kids are asleep and work on it in the evenings, or I'm going to wait until the weekend when I don't have any client calls." But the problem with this is suddenly we're working seven days a week, and that is not how any of us really want to be running our business. That's not what successful CEOs do. Successful CEOs know that we need our evenings and our weekends to rest, to recharge so that we can come back and be at 100%. If we're working nonstop, if we're entertaining this whole hustle and grind mentality, then we're really not giving anything 100% because we cannot function as humans like that.

So it's important to learn how to focus during our regular work hours. I want to share with you a strategy that works amazingly, amazingly well. It's incredibly counterintuitive, but I have found this to be one of the secrets to how I'm able to get so much accomplished in the 25 hours a week I have to work. It all starts with a timer. This technique is called the Pomodoro technique. It was developed by an Italian graduate student who realized he was really struggling to study big and important pieces of information.

So he grabbed a kitchen timer, which happened to be in the shape of a tomato and Italian, that's a Pomodoro. So he set the kitchen timer, sat down and studied for 25 minutes. When the timer went off, he gave himself a little bit of a break, walked around, did something for five minutes and then came back, set the timer again and got right back into the zone. He was amazed and realized he could train himself to be super focused using this technique. As a result, he was able to do what he previously thought he could only do in long stretches of time in shorter focused bursts.

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So this technique is actually allowing you to hack your brain. It retrains the way that you focus on things. These short bursts of focus energy are really important because our brain does not like to slog through long periods of time with high, high level thinking. Our brain likes these short bursts of focused energy, but the key is focus here. You can't let other things distract you. This technique is all about progress. In 25 minutes, you're not going to write an entire book, you're not going to create an entirely new offer, but you will get into forward motion very quickly. It's all about making progress instead of just putting things off and putting things off or forcing yourself to try to do the entire thing in six straight hours of work.

It's a technique that allows you to get the most important things done first. So if you're struggling to get important things done in your week or you're feeling like you just can't focus your energy very quickly, this technique will allow you to train your brain so that you can get these tasks done first thing in your workday. And it really helps to train yourself to tune out distractions. We all get distracted so easily, so this technique is going to give your brain some cues, some triggers to tell it, "Hey, it's work time now. This is what we are focused on."

It might take a little bit of time for your brain to get used to this, but within a week or two, I promise you will find yourself doing so much more focused work in a shorter period of time. And again, it's about helping you get real work done during the workweek. I want you to promise me that you're going to give yourself some breaks. We're going to talk about the importance of breaks and rests in this challenge. So make sure you're in for the full 10 days. It's so important that you give yourself time each and every day, each and every week to rest. But it's also important to make sure that we're getting that real work done instead of procrastinating.

So here's how it works. Step one, we're going to start with our favorite procrastination activity. Now don't do it yet. This is your reward. So if you find yourself loving to get on Facebook, or Pinterest, or organizing something, that is your reward when you finish the activity, okay? This is the thing that you usually go to when you're wanting to procrastinate. Don't do it yet. Just know that that's what you get. Then close everything else. Now this is key. You will not get focused work done if you're having incoming text messages or notifications about new emails or Facebook right in front of you. So close all those tabs. If you have a phone, hide your phone in a drawer, set it on airplane mode. Don't answer it. Anything can wait for 25 minutes.

Set your timer for 25 minutes. Now you can use an old fashioned kitchen timer. You can use a timer on your computer. You can download all sorts of Pomodoro timers. It's a really popular app that you can find. So set your timer, get your work done. And then when the timer goes off, you can have your five minute break. Now, personally, I like to use this five minutes to get up and move around, and do something physical. I don't like to sit for too long. You might find that this is a great time to take a quick walk, to do a few stretches, to do five minutes of breathing exercises. The magic really happens though when you repeat the cycle a couple of times, so this creates what I call a round of Pomodoros. If you could do two or three Pomodoros in a row, then you can get a lot of progress on a bigger project or a bigger task.

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Once you get to a round of Pomodoros, maybe you've worked for an hour or an hour and a half, then you will probably need a break and some time away from your computer. So that's when it's a great opportunity to go get lunch, get in a yoga practice, get in some exercise, maybe even do some things around the house that you know need to get done, handling the laundry or making lunch for the kids, whatever it is.

So this is how it all looks as you break it down. Okay? You are working in shorter bursts. You're setting one round of Pomodoros for 25 minutes of work, five minutes of break, 25 minutes of work, five minutes for break, but you don't have to stick to my timeframes. If you want to do something a little different, that's totally fine. Maybe you actually like longer stretches of work. Great. So do 50 minutes with a 10 minute break or 60 minutes with a 30 minute break, or you could do 45 minutes work, 15 minute break. Really, the timeframes are up to you. The key here is the habit, right? It's implementing this habit so that you can focus and get real work done.

So here's how around a Pomodoros looked for me recently when I was batching some podcasts. I like to batch things, do more than one thing that's all similar at the same time. So I sat down and I wrote a couple of podcasts outlines in my first 25 minute session. Then I got up, took a break, recorded the first podcast and my second Pomodoro. And then when I sat down in my third Pomodoro, I recorded the next podcast. Then I had a nice break and I could come back and get even more work before my lunch break.

I encourage you to try this strategy out. Do a round of Pomodoros today. Try it each day of this week, so each day of this week. You've already got a to-do list. You've got things you've got to get done. Go ahead and try this technique out and see if it helps you to get more focused. Remember, this is a new habit, so it's going to take some practice and the more you practice it, the easier it will get. You will be amazed how much more you'll get done in these short, highly focused bursts. So make sure you're sharing with me your insights, your ahas. Head over to my Facebook page and leave a comment. Let me know how this strategy is working for you. I can't wait to see you tomorrow. We are going to continue with more habits to help you boost your productivity.