



**SMART
PRODUCTIVITY**

SMART WORK

**How to Increase Productivity
Achieve Balance and
Reduce Stress**

DERMOT CROWLEY

WILEY

It is great to see that Dermot has finally published a book! His ability to help individuals and teams transform their work practices is second to none!

— **Ed Box**, Banking and Finance Executive

I first met Dermot in 2002. At that time Dermot was an expert in managing time and priorities using a paper-based system. Over the years Dermot has evolved into the leading coach in utilising devices, Microsoft Office and systems to manage time and priorities. Thirteen years after first meeting Dermot I still use his principles and we use him in coaching our teams to become more effective. The skills Dermot teaches are life changing and I have no hesitation in endorsing Dermot and this book.

— **Scott Boyes**, Vice President Operations,
Accor Hotels

Smart Work is the upgrade we needed to have. Triage your life and read this book.

— **Matt Church**, Founder,
Thought Leaders Global and author of *Amplifiers*

Learning to work productively in the digital age is the critical business challenge of our time. Dermot Crowley has taken a seemingly insurmountable problem, distilled it down to three key concepts, and provided a step-by-step process to revolutionise productivity. What David Allen's *Getting Things Done* did for the noughties, *Smart Work* is set to do for our technology-driven time. Dermot's work has had a profound impact on me and my team, and transformed not only the way we work, but also what we even consider possible. If you want to achieve more, stress less, and spend more of your day doing work that matters, *Smart Work* is for you.

— **Peter Cook**, author of *The New Rules of Management*

The brilliance of the techniques that Dermot teaches is that they are so simple — and yet so incredibly effective. Anyone who has ever felt overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information in their daily workload should read this book.

— **Nick Dempsey**, Head of FICC Compliance,
Macquarie Bank

If you have ever answered ‘Busy’ to the question ‘How are you?’ then this book is for you. Dermot provides insights, solutions and practical tips for anyone who needs to manage their time, technology and energy better. In an age where we are constantly asked to work smarter . . . *Smart Work* shows us how.

— **Gabrielle Dolan**, author of *Ignite*

Smart Work is a great read for any busy executive who is struggling to stay focused on the important work in a workplace driven by urgency, meetings and emails. Dermot’s approach to productivity is practical, relevant and smart.

— **Susan Ferrier**, National Managing Partner,
People, Performance & Culture, KPMG

Dermot’s work is magic. The ideas in this book will add hours to your day and weeks to your year. So! Liberate yourself from draining, dumb and defunct ways of working — discover how to work smart today.

— **Dr Jason Fox**, motivational scientist and author of
The Game Changer and *How to Lead a Quest*

They used to say ‘If you want something done, give it to a busy person’. In my opinion, this maxim should read, ‘If you want something done, give it to Dermot Crowley’. Dermot is, without question, the master of productivity and doing what works.

— **Dan Gregory**, CEO, The Impossible Institute and
co-author of *Selfish, Scared & Stupid*

Life is as busy as it has ever been. Effort is key, but time is of the essence. We have to adapt, we have to improve, we have to be more efficient and work smarter. Dermot Crowley is Australia's thought leader on this extremely important subject — working smarter. He has positively impacted captains of industry, executives, executive assistants, and so many other people in so many ways, enabling them to simply focus on what's important and to have a lasting impact. This book will enable and guide you to do exactly that.

— **John Karagounis**, Managing Director and CEO,
The CEO Circle

This is a very simple, easy to follow book that promotes great productivity tips beyond the high level concepts by providing practical day-to-day recommendations that integrate into the tools that we use all day, every day. Well worth the read!

— **Caleb Reeves**, General Manager,
Customer programs, Commonwealth Bank of Australia

Dermot helped me make fundamental changes to the way I use technology and organise my time. I always recommend him to people who are looking to become more efficient, effective and productive.

— **Michael Rose**, Chief Executive Partner,
Allens

I have worked with Dermot for over three years. He has been my personal productivity coach and also trained more than 500 people for me. In both my own experience and for many who adopt his ideas there is a big 'ah-ha!' moment which makes you realise you have become a slave to the urgent and have lost sight of the important. Worse still, the tools for your own productivity were in front of you but you see them as the problem and not the solution.

Once you adopt his methods you suddenly feel in control and your stress levels will drop. I have had people tell me ‘It saved my life!’ as they felt they were drowning at work from information and contact overload. Another moved from 5000 emails in their inbox to having white space in it!

It’s not easy as you have to change from old but well established bad habits to new ones. However, with persistence and the odd relapse, I promise these ideas and this book will change your working life.

— **James Sheffield**, Financial Services Executive

Dermot Crowley is one of the most important people that I have met in the last 25 years. This importance has not come from anything specifically that he did, but in the way he empowered me to act in an organised and proactive way each day. Dermot’s approach to staying in control of our increasingly complex daily lives through the intelligent use of technology is easily implemented and actually works! I have followed his approach to personal productivity for the majority of my working life and I could simply not imagine working any other way.

If you wish to produce a higher quality more consistently; if you wish to have more time to actually think throughout the day and most importantly; if you wish to have more control over the balance between your work and personal life, then *Smart Work* is a road map to assist you in achieving this and more.

— **John Slack-Smith**, Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer, Harvey Norman

Dermot’s book sets the benchmark on how to get the most out of yourself and every day by focusing on the behaviours that are required to build the successful habits that lead to good outcomes—not just the technology. Applying his approach has helped me gain greater control at work, generate better

outcomes and create more balance between work and personal goals. I recommend it highly for anyone who is looking to master their agenda and get the absolute most out of their time.

— **Angus Sullivan**, EGM Retail Products & Strategy,
Commonwealth Bank of Australia



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About the author

Dermot Crowley is a productivity author, speaker, trainer and thought leader. He was born in Dublin, Ireland, and moved to Sydney, Australia, in 1993.

He has more than twenty-five years' experience working in the productivity training industry and has run his own business, Adapt Productivity, since 2002.

His passion for helping workers, leaders and teams to work in a more productive and balanced way has led him to work with many leading organisations around the world such as the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, PepsiCo, Walmart, Citi, Westpac, Deloitte, Allens Linklaters, Allianz and KPMG.

Dermot lives with his family in sunny Sydney. When not training or writing, he can be found in the kitchen practising his other passion — cooking.

Acknowledgements

Being the revised and updated edition of *Smart Work*, there are even more people to thank for their hard work and support. There was a raft of people who helped to bring the first edition to life. Many of these people are still my support squad and I thank you all. A few deserve a special call out.

Tony, Matt and Chauntelle are the team that organise and deliver our training for thousands of clients every year. You guys are amazing, loyal and always working to ensure the Smart concepts make a real difference for people. Your support allows me the space to write books like this. Thank you.

To my crew at Thought Leaders, a huge thank you for inspiring me with the quality company I keep. Matt and Lisa continually push my thinking and encourage me to level up. I am so lucky to be in a community that gets me and helps me. Thank you all.

To my family. Vera, I am the luckiest man in the world to have met you and to have built our life together. My son Finn, who was a baby when I first dreamt of writing this book, and is now

a man, and my closest friend. My sister Margaret, who always cheers me on from home. I love you all.

And finally, my clients, who buy my books, attend our training and support our boutique business year after year. I get to do the work I love with the people I like every day. Lucky man. Thank you all.

Preface

I started writing the original *Smart Work* draft over seven years ago. How time flies! I believe it has had a huge impact in the workplace, both as a book and a training program. Since it was published in 2016, many tens of thousands of people have been exposed to the Smart Work methodology and are hopefully seeing and feeling the benefits. I have gone on and written two other books in the series since then, *Smart Teams* published in 2018 and *Lead Smart*, published by Wiley in 2023. In the middle I wrote *Urgent!* as a part of a personal odyssey to dial down the unproductive urgency in the modern workplace.

So back to Smart Work — why the need to rewrite something that already works?

Well firstly, when you write a book and then deliver it as a training program over a number of years, your ideas naturally evolve. The conversations you have with clients, the issues that you see in their workplaces and the insights that you make when delivering content like this shape new thoughts and ideas. It felt like a great opportunity to refresh content that is still relevant, but make it even more relevant with fresh ideas and strategies.

But the big driver for me has been the shift in our workplaces over the past few years. In 2020, COVID blindsided us and changed how we work and live. We have all gone through this together and, at least at the time of writing this, are still going through it together. We can all remember those first few weeks of COVID when it felt like everything stopped. My team at Adapt Productivity were faced with every bit of work booked in for the year ahead cancelling. None of us knew what was going to happen. The streets were empty, our offices silent, and our heads were trying to calculate how much worse things could get. They got much worse, but then they started to get better.

Many organisations put in plans to help their teams to work from home. We all got used to Zoom meetings, and then MS Teams meetings. Zoom trivia was all the rage on a Friday night until we all got sick of that. Slowly but surely work started to get back to some sort of normal, albeit a remote normal. During this period my team and I were very fortunate. We spent three months adapting our programs for online delivery, and our clients started to book work again. Productivity training was high on the list of priorities for many organisations, as people needed to get their heads around being productive from home and needed to learn how to harness the power of their productivity tools like MS Outlook and OneNote, as these tools had now become the umbilical cords between each member of the team.

We had so many learnings during this period and worked to incorporate these learnings and the new strategies we developed into our training programs. I want to share these with you now, as I believe you will benefit from a productivity system that has been forged by the necessity of our time.

And now we move into a new phase, where workers are coming back into the office again. But not all of them or 100% of the time. We are moving to another ‘new normal’; the hybrid workplace. We cannot ignore the positives we all felt when working from home. More flexibility, less travel time, less distraction, more time to really focus. Most of us missed catching up with our colleagues and collaborating face-to-face, but we didn’t want to lose these benefits and go back to our old way of working. So many businesses are trialling hybrid workplaces, where workers can work from the office or home. There are many models of what this looks like, and it will take another couple of years for the best models to rise to the top of this evolutionary tree, but we will move forward into this new way of working, make no mistake.

But we need to be productive now, whether we are in the office, at home, onsite or online. So, this version of *Smart Work* will take all of the strategies that still work so well in this new environment, and complement them with new strategies that have evolved in the face of the productivity issues created by our changing circumstances.

In the preface to the original *Smart Work* I talked about the fact that my company name, Adapt, was also my core aim in life. I help people to adapt in an ever-changing workplace. This is just another opportunity for all of us to adapt and evolve. My wish for you is that *Smart Work* helps to bring you a sense of control over your work, a sense of balance in your life, and a sense of satisfaction and achievement in your work.

Read this book from cover to cover if you are interested in a comprehensive approach to personal productivity using technology. Or dip in and grab an idea or strategy that you can

implement straight away. But know this: if you do not adapt, you will be left behind, drowning in unprocessed emails, overwhelmed by your workload and feeling like you are getting nowhere in this brave new world.

It is time for smart work.

Introduction

The workplace has changed. How we work has changed. The pace of business has changed. How we communicate has changed, and the tools we are using to organise ourselves have changed. It stands to reason that we need to adapt our work practices to deal with these changes.

I wrote these words in 2016. Little did I know things would change even more. I should not be surprised, as it now seems obvious that every few years there will be major issues, or major breakthroughs, that shift how we work. The trick is to be adaptable and to embrace the positives of these changes, while at the same time developing new strategies to overcome the new workplace issues we face.

Productivity in the 21st century

From a productivity standpoint, our workplaces have seen massive changes over the past 50 years. Since the 1970s, we have moved from a traditional workplace to a digital workplace, and now to a hybrid workplace. We are no longer chained to desks and cubicles, or even tied to working in an open plan workspace in the office. Many of us are free to work from the

office or from home, and can split our week into time spent working from both locations.

Over the years, the tools we use to organise our work have shifted from paper diaries to personal desktop organisers to sophisticated group scheduling systems. We have progressively moved from a paper-driven workplace to an electronic workplace with a computer on every desk and handheld devices to help us stay organised. Over the last few years, most knowledge workers have been furnished with laptops to enable remote working, and have access to all of their data and work information in the Cloud.

The challenges we face to stay productive have also changed. Many of us are now working in a global workplace, with colleagues and clients located all over the world. Even though hybrid working has meant that many of us have reclaimed travel time back into our day, we are working longer hours to keep up, and may be experiencing the dissolving of boundaries between our work and home life.

The workspace too has changed, from individual offices and cubicles to open plan for all and *activity-based working* where we don't even have our own desk. When working from home, some are lucky to have good workspaces set up for remote working, but many are faced with setting up in the bedroom or on the dining table to work. Not ideal.

Those of us that have experienced working remotely or working in a hybrid situation will have felt the disconnection that comes with working in a team that is geographically dispersed. Managers are challenged with staying close to their team, creating alignment and building the culture. Workers are challenged with the increase in the volume of emails, chat and