

DERMOT CROWLEY

SMART

CENTRALISE, ORGANISE, REALISE

WORK

**HOW TO BOOST YOUR PRODUCTIVITY
IN 3 EASY STEPS**

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

SMART WORK

CENTRALISE, ORGANISE, REALISE

**HOW TO BOOST YOUR PRODUCTIVITY
IN 3 EASY STEPS**

DERMOT CROWLEY

WILEY

First published in 2016 by John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd
42 McDougall St, Milton Qld 4064
Office also in Melbourne

Typeset in 11/13 pt ITC Berkeley Oldstyle Std by Aptara, India

© Dermot Crowley 2016

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Creator:	Crowley, Dermot, author.
Title:	Smart Work: centralise, organise, realise / Dermot Crowley.
ISBN:	9780730324362 (pbk.) 9780730324386 (ebook)
Notes:	Includes index.
Subjects:	Management — Handbooks, manuals, etc. Businesspeople — Life skills guides. Time management.
Dewey Number:	658

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the *Australian Copyright Act 1968* (for example, a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review), no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, communicated or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission. All inquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above.

Microsoft, Project, Office, OneNote, Outlook, and Windows are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

Cover design by Wiley

Internal illustrations by Michael Fink

Disclaimer

The material in this publication is of the nature of general comment only, and does not represent professional advice. It is not intended to provide specific guidance for particular circumstances and it should not be relied on as the basis for any decision to take action or not take action on any matter which it covers. Readers should obtain professional advice where appropriate, before making any such decision. To the maximum extent permitted by law, the author and publisher disclaim all responsibility and liability to any person, arising directly or indirectly from any person taking or not taking action based on the information in this publication.

CONTENTS

[About the Author](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Preface](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Productivity in the 21st century](#)

[The integrated productivity system at a glance](#)

[Making the system work for you every day](#)

[The Smart Work roadmap — nine productivity skills](#)

[A note on leveraging technology](#)

[PART I: Centralise Your Actions](#)

[1 Consolidate your Work](#)

[Meetings vs tasks](#)

[Meeting tools — the shift from paper to electronic](#)

[Task tools — stuck in the 20th century](#)

[Centralise absolutely every action](#)

[Consider — Capture — Commit](#)

[Types of actions — hard to soft](#)

[Zoom in, zoom out](#)

[Use undated task lists](#)

[Capture mind clutter](#)

[2 Schedule it Forward](#)

[Decide *when* and schedule](#)

[Plan your time using a weekly workflow](#)

[Use action horizons](#)

[Focus on the start](#)

Balance your workload

Don't dilute your task list

Next steps only, please

Track it back

Information at your fingertips

3 Focus your Day

Start each day with a daily plan

Highlight the critical work

Manage the change

Update the progress

Key practice: Prioritising

PART II: Organise Your Inputs

4 Reduce the Noise

Reduce email noise

Turn off the alerts

Check email proactively

Batch information emails

Delete decisively

Tell them to SSSH

Reduce the disruption of interruption

5 Keep it Simple

Simplify your filing system

Learn to search

Make important emails easier to find

Take the pain out of archiving

File on the run

6 Process to Empty

Treat your inbox like your letterbox

[Clear the backlog quickly — the Mount Rushmore technique](#)

[Schedule email actions](#)

[Be decisive](#)

[Process all your inputs](#)

[Key practice: Processing](#)

[PART III: Realise Your Outcomes](#)

[7 Identify your Value](#)

[Clarify your critical roles](#)

[Reconnect frequently](#)

[8 Make Time to Plan](#)

[Build planning time into your schedule](#)

[Monthly planning](#)

[The Good, the Bad and the Great](#)

[Weekly ROAR planning](#)

[9 Fight for Importance](#)

[Make it visible](#)

[Watch out for the procrastination pixie](#)

[Blocking strategies](#)

[Delegate early and well](#)

[Key practice: Planning](#)

[Next Steps](#)

[Index](#)

[Advert](#)

[EULA](#)

List of Illustrations

[Introduction](#)

[Figure A: traditional to 21st century workplace](#)

[Figure B: integrated productivity system](#)

[Figure C: the Smart Work roadmap](#)

[Figure D: workload management in Outlook](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Figure 1.1: meetings and tasks](#)

[Figure 1.2: hard to soft scheduled tasks](#)

[Figure 1.3: activities in Outlook](#)

[Figure 1.4: undated tasks in Outlook](#)

[Figure 1.5: a sample mind map](#)

[Figure 1.6: mind clutter strategies](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Figure 2.1: the proactive zone](#)

[Figure 2.2: the proactive schedule](#)

[Figure 2.3: example of weekly workflow in Outlook](#)

[Figure 2.4: scheduling horizons](#)

[Figure 2.5: email-related task in Outlook](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Figure 3.1: the five-step daily planning process](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Figure 4.1: types of emails](#)

[Figure 4.2: SSSH](#)

[Figure 4.3: modes to manage interruptions](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Figure 5.1: three types of filing system](#)

[Figure 5.2: the risk/searchability folder matrix](#)

[Figure 5.3: refine search toolbar in Outlook](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Figure 6.1: Can Mount Rushmore help you with your email?](#)

[Figure 6.2: OneNote meeting actions](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Figure 7.1: what are your three BIG roles?](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Figure 8.1: bad, good and great work](#)

[Figure 8.2: ROAR weekly planning process](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Figure 9.1: the delegation matrix](#)

[Figure I: the integrated productivity model — \(iii\). planning](#)

[Figure J: personal planning framework](#)

[Next Steps](#)

[Figure K: the learning mastery curve](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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

His passion for helping modern executives work more productively with their technology has led him to work with many senior executives and leadership teams in organisations such as the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Citi, Deloitte, Allens Linklaters and KPMG.

Dermot lives with his family in sunny Sydney. When not training or writing, he can be found coaching cricket or playing over-35s soccer on the weekends.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So I have written a book. This is an achievement that I am enormously proud of. But as with anything, the great things that we do in life are likely to involve a support cast that inspires, encourages and pushes us. Here are my thanks and dedications.

To my partner Jane, who has always helped me to stay grounded and to cut out the BS. I could never have written this without your love, support and encouragement. To my son, Finn. You were a baby when I first dreamed of this book, and now you are taller than me. What took me so long, I hear you ask.

Tony, thank you for many years of support and inspiration. Thank you to my mentor and friend, Matt Church. Matt challenged me to write this book, and shone the light on the path for me. I will always be grateful. Thanks to Peter Cook, who helped create an environment that challenged me and many others to give it a go, without fear of failure. And thank you to all of my thought leader companions who are sharing the journey with me, striving to be the leading thinkers in their fields.

Michael, thank you for your patience and brilliance in bringing my ideas to life with your hand-crafted graphics. Lastly, thank you to Lucy, Chris, Jem and all at Wiley for trusting that I could deliver, and making my words and ideas bigger and better.

PREFACE

In July 2001 I excitedly (and nervously) started my own business, Adapt Training Solutions. I had a vision and was confident that I could make it come alive. Fourteen years later and I am still bringing that vision to life.

My vision was to help corporate executives to harness the power of their technology and to work more productively in a rapidly changing workplace. A workplace that was becoming busier, increasingly pressured and more and more urgently driven. The email workplace.

My business name, Adapt, had been suggested by a friend. It was short and snappy and seemed a perfect fit. I did not think too much about any deeper meaning. Adapt it was. Over the years I have thought hard about what I do, about the true value of what I bring to my clients. During that time I have come to realise that I could not have picked a more apt business name. Most people would place my brand of training, coaching and speaking in the categories of productivity, time management and email management, as I did for many years. I have now come to realise that my passion sits at a level above these labels. I believe that my calling is to help people to adapt. And we need to adapt now more than ever.

We are now at one of those critical turning points in the evolution of the workplace. We are working in what some have labelled the Third Industrial Revolution. The first was launched by the mechanisation of the textile industry in Britain. The second saw manufacturing techniques vastly accelerate due to the brilliance of the likes of Henry Ford. The third (also known as the Digital Revolution) saw computers change the face of the modern workplace.

Computers have made it so much easier to do many of our daily tasks, allowing us to communicate faster with more people and to expand our workplaces from local to global. But these changes have meant more pressure, tighter deadlines and more work for most of us. Recognising this, I decided that I needed to go beyond teaching the basic time management principles that were relevant in the workplace of old. I needed to help my clients to adapt to the new workplace, and that meant learning to harness the power of the technologies that were changing our world. It also meant working smarter in this challenging new workplace.

In *Smart Work* I explore how we can adapt to a new way of working and organising in the digital age. My aim is to provide a simple, practical guide to working productively in today's workplace. *Smart Work* delivers a practical approach to productivity and clearly addresses the issues that modern executives and workers face every day.

It does not set out to explain the psychology of productivity or base its recommendations on scientifically researched studies. It simply suggests a range of practical solutions that work, and attempts to link the theory of productivity to the technology that we are already using every day.

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.

Productivity in the 21st century

From a productivity standpoint, our workplaces have seen massive changes over the past 30 years (see [figure A](#), overleaf). 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.

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. We are working longer hours to keep up, and more is expected of us as we compete in the global economy. 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. Massive changes to how we work and stay organised have occurred — some good, some not so good, but all very different from what we have been used to.

<u>TRADITIONAL WORKPLACE</u>		<u>21ST CENTURY WORKPLACE</u>
Offices & cubicles	→	Open plan
Hierarchical structures	→	Flatter 'dotted-line' structures
Paper diaries	→	Electronic scheduling systems
Pen & paper	→	Laptops, tablets & smartphones
Face-to-face & phone	→	Email & instant messaging
Meetings	→	More meetings

Figure A: traditional to 21st century workplace

Many modern workers and managers face three key productivity challenges in this 21st century workplace.

Too much to do, too little time

Today we have way more to do than we have time in which to do it. Most organisations expect management and staff to get more done with fewer resources. They are downsizing their workforces, but not downsizing the work! Add to this the number of meetings we are expected to attend, and the volume of emails we have to wade through, and it seems hard to imagine how we will get it all done.

Of course, many people are throwing the only weapon they feel they have available at the problem — more time. We are working longer hours to cope with the increased workload. Many senior managers I work with are in meetings between 9 am and 5 pm, then catch up on emails and other tasks between 5 pm and 9 pm. We know that this is not the solution!

Information overload

As the volume of information we receive each day continues to grow, the pressure is becoming overwhelming. It is not unusual for me to work with managers who receive 300-plus emails per day. This is crazy! We do not need 300, or even 100 emails a day to do our jobs effectively. I would argue that these emails are actually *stopping* us from doing our jobs effectively. But that sense of overwhelm is definitely being felt at all levels in organisations. We need a solution, fast.

Still using outdated tools and strategies to organise our work

We are not leveraging the technology at our fingertips enough — tools like Microsoft Outlook, Lotus Notes[®], Google Calendar[™] and smartphones. We use them every day, but in my experience most of us are not really harnessing their power. In fact, I would suggest that the average worker probably uses about 20 per cent of the functionality of a tool like Outlook. And yet this is the first thing they turn on every day to check their email. We learn the basics — how to send an email, how to schedule a meeting. But few of us go on to utilise these powerful tools in a holistic way to organise our time, priorities and information.

Instead, we are grappling with modern productivity issues using old-fashioned tools and strategies. Paper lists, sticky notes and piles of paper — none of these answer the challenges of managing our work in the modern workplace. We need to get smart about leveraging our technology.

The real issue — a sense of urgency or senseless urgency?

There is no doubt that these three issues are having a major impact on our effectiveness and motivation. But I

believe there is a fourth issue that has an even greater negative influence.

When is everything needed? Now! ASAP! Yesterday! Five minutes ago! We are under great pressure to deliver everything instantly, and this constant urgency is affecting the quality of our work. It is causing reactivity in the workplace that is increasing stress levels, increasing working hours, and decreasing the quality of our thinking and outputs.

This reactivity has come to be accepted as the norm in many organisations. 'But that's just the way it is around here', they say. It's just how it is in global finance, the legal sector, the insurance industry, even in the consulting industry. Well, I don't agree. I do not accept that it has to be that way. I believe that to a large degree this urgency has been driven by the 'instant' nature of electronic communication. Certainly we need to ensure that we all work together with a *sense of urgency* to get things done. But have we gone too far with this, creating instead *senseless urgency*?

Sometimes I imagine myself as a superhero, flying in to save the day in my clients' offices. If I was, I would have to have a nemesis, an arch-enemy. The enemy I have sworn to banish from as many organisations as I can get to is *unnecessary urgency*.

I see workers battle with urgency every day. And they are losing. They are becoming resigned to the fact that this is 'just the way it is around here'. The battle is complicated by the fact that there are different types of urgency at play. There is the *real urgency*, the things that crop up which need our immediate attention, no question. But often masquerading as real urgency is *false urgency*. These are the things that are not really urgent, but other people have worked out that if they shout loud enough they will get cut-

through in a hectic workplace. And sometimes we make things seem urgent when they are not. Do you react instantly to email alerts and allow yourself to become distracted from other, more important work?

Urgency can also be reasonable or unreasonable.

Reasonable urgency applies to time-sensitive work that needs our urgent attention and could not have been planned for. Something has happened, and it needs our prompt response. *Unreasonable urgency* is work that has become urgent either because someone else has not done the work in a timely way or, worse, because we ourselves have not done the work in a timely way. This needless crisis now risks throwing your day (or someone else's) into chaos.

The cure for urgency — working proactively

This last scenario is avoidable, and much of this book is aimed at reducing this unacceptable and unnecessary frenzy of activity. We need to get back to completing tasks in a timely way, to working proactively most of the time, and reacting only to the real and reasonable urgency that should arise infrequently. If we dial down the urgency just a couple of notches, our work lives will become less stressful, more enjoyable and, ultimately, more productive.

So how do we change this dynamic that is so entrenched in the modern workplace? Can we control urgency? I believe we can. It requires a mind-shift and a certain amount of discipline, but I do believe we can move to a more proactive work style.

In my observation, the most productive (and inspiring) people are proactive. This means they are driving the next steps and are in full control of their work and priorities.

We can drive productivity at the individual level, at the team level or at the organisational level. But it always