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Productivity

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Learn to:

- Focus and get more done
- Be more productive in the workplace
- Manage your time more effectively
- Beat procrastination and become more productive

Ciara Conlon

International Coach and Speaker



Productivity

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by Ciara Conlon

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Productivity For Dummies®

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Introduction

Ten years ago, the word *productivity* had no meaning for me. Apart from the fact I am the most naturally disorganized person I know, I had no inclination to make it any other way. I tended toward chaos, hence the title of my first book *Chaos to Control*. But having reached my early 30s with three boys to look after and very little achievement to speak about, the time had come for change.

I wasn't clever enough to go out and seek ways to improve my cluttered and disorganized life; a chance meeting on a sunny day in South Africa was what changed the course of my life. I met productivity expert Gerrit Cloete of Productivity Pit Stop, who sparked my interest and guided me while I learned the things that were about to rock my world and my business for the next ten years.

About This Book

This book is about all the techniques, tools and behaviours that you can adopt to change your life. Most of them have been tried and tested by yours truly. Note that some of the resources I speak about are apps and websites, and although I aim to be as accurate and up-to-date as possible, new applications and software changes happen all the time.

This book is a comprehensive guide to how and why you should become more productive, more organized and more in control of your life. Whether you're a stay-at-home parent who wants better ways to organize your day, a senior manager who is responsible for a large team or a student who wants time to fit it all in while acing your tests, this book has something for you.

I'm regularly asked the question, 'Who is your ideal client?' The answer is anyone who lives and breathes. Everyone needs help fitting it all in and planning days with the right things, the things that make a difference. Who doesn't need help with taking control of the digital world, the distractions, the interruptions and the information overload? We're all given the same 168 hours each week, which is plenty of time for work, rest and play. If you want to find out how to live your life to the fullest and maximize the precious time you have, this book will help get you there. But please remember that this book

won't change your life unless you're willing to implement some of the suggestions in it. Even if you try one new thing, it will have a positive impact on your productivity and your life.

Throughout the book, you'll find sidebars (grey boxes) with extra bits of information or other stuff you may want to know. If you decide to skip these sections, you won't miss any vital facts or information.

Within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy – just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

Foolish Assumptions

As I wrote this book, I made a few assumptions about you, my readers:

- ✓ You are a human being who struggles finding time to fit it all in.
- ✓ You pine for a better work-life balance and need some practical strategies to make it work.
- ✓ You know an easier way to do things exists, but you just haven't figured it out.
- ✓ You need to find time to be more creative, strategic or simply take on more work.

Icons Used in This Book

You'll find a number of icons in the margins of this book. These icons highlight special types of information.



This icon highlights points that are especially important and worth committing to memory.



Watch out for the target, where you'll find tips and tricks to help you become more productive.



The warning icon highlights potential pitfalls and things that you should avoid in order to stay in control.



This icon advises you to stop reading and try out the tip right now. Knowledge is no good unless you act on it. This icon encourages you to act now to reap the benefits sooner rather than later.

Beyond the Book

This book is chock-full of useful information to help you understand productivity and become more productive yourself. But you can find even more online! Head to www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/productivity to find ways to be more productive at work, as well as other productivity boosters. You can also find various bonus articles related to increasing your productivity at www.dummies.com/extras/productivity.

Where to Go from Here

Nothing in this book is difficult to implement. It includes strategies and techniques for even the most skilled procrastinators among you. So get started, choose any chapter or begin from Chapter 1, take action and begin to enjoy a life of calm, organised control.

Part I

Getting Started with Productivity

getting started
with

productivity



For Dummies can help you get started with lots of subjects. Visit www.dummies.com to learn more and do more with *For Dummies*.

In this part . . .

- ✔ Understand what productivity is and how being more productive can help you in all aspects of your life.
- ✔ Find the motivation to change your bad habits that hinder productivity.
- ✔ Discover all the benefits of productivity.

Chapter 1

What Is Productivity?

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering exactly what productivity is
 - ▶ Recognising the different sources of productivity
 - ▶ Understanding why productivity matters
-

In basic terms, productivity is a measurement of how efficiently you can convert inputs into outputs. In manufacturing terms, it's how many units of a good can be produced with a certain amount of raw materials and labour. In personal terms, it relates to how much work you can get done in the time allocated. But these definitions don't come close to explaining what exactly productivity can do for you, your family or your business. In this chapter, I explain the value and contribution that productivity can make to your life.

Productivity is simply a method to get what you want out of life. It gives you the tools and techniques to not only get the work done but to also get it done while making time for the things you enjoy and value in life. No longer is it necessary to sell your soul to your employer, nor work incessantly to launch a start-up. Working productivity can emphasise your priorities and make sure they're getting the attention they deserve while eliminating all the time-wasting stuff.

Understanding the Importance of Productivity

You've likely heard the expression, 'what you put in you get out'. With productivity, you can get out much more than you put in. You can work smarter rather than harder. You can work more efficiently rather than just effectively. Personal productivity is a subject that should be taught in schools. Teaching children simple productive habits can make the difference to their future success and happiness. Productivity transforms lives, relationships and business.

Effectiveness versus efficiency

Effectiveness is about doing the right thing at the right time, completing tasks to reach your goals. *Efficiency* is about doing these things

in an optimal way. Using the fastest or least expensive method to reach your goals.

What can productivity mean to you?

The word *productivity* means the same thing whatever way you look at it. It means getting more out for what you put in. But the context in which that is done can make it mean different things to different people, including the following:

- ✔ **Reading the bedtime story:** To a working parent, productivity can mean not having to sacrifice the bedtime story to do a good job ever again. It can mean always being there for your kids' birthday or sports day or school play or whatever occasion is important to them. Figuring out how to work flexibly and fit work around your life can help you have a great work-life balance and still do a top job. See Chapter 17 for more on a productive home life.
- ✔ **Being first to market:** For the start-up, productivity can be the difference between being first to market or fifth. The more effective methods you use to get the job done each day, the more quickly you can produce what you want to produce. Cutting-edge technology or scientific breakthrough all depend on the productivity of the people to get it to the masses as quickly as possible. Waste too much time on emails, and you may find yourself at the back of the queue for recognition. See Chapter 12 for more on productivity in business.
- ✔ **Keeping the doors open:** Increasing productivity can help to produce goods at a lower cost. If you're responsible for the wages of your employees, increased productivity can mean they get paid again this month. To a business owner, productivity, can mean keeping the doors open.
- ✔ **Making the grade and the party:** To a student, productivity means making the grade *and* the party. A student wants to fit it all in – attend classes, go to the gym, have time to study, and still make it to all the best parties. These are the priorities of a student, and becoming more productive can make them a possibility. See Chapter 19 for more on studying productively.

What can productivity mean to your business?

People are generally more familiar with the business benefits of productivity – increased profits, competitiveness and less employee stress, to name but a few. But businesses today are faced with increased competition from emerging markets along with a more demanding customer who wants it all and wants it now. Forever under pressure to cut costs, and with the emerging war for talent, being in business is no walk in the park. Productivity is a powerful tool that can help you to address these challenges and give organisations a competitive edge. This section covers the benefits of productivity for businesses. For example:

- ✔ **Making the difference between profit and loss:** Most people understand productivity in its traditional sense: increase productivity and experience greater profits. To a CEO, increased productivity can mean a good year. How this difference was made could be made up of a hundred different factors. Productivity could have been increased through changes in factory processes, through the influence of a new manager who helped all employees perform at their best or through the new computer system that cut out all the downtime. The outcome is of most interest to the CEO, but his managers should know how to replicate the increase by understanding its source.
- ✔ **Reducing employee stress:** Increased productivity usually results in a reduction in stress. When people learn how to work more effectively and manage their time and energy better, they tend to benefit from a feeling of control and reduced stress. This reduction in individual stress can have a positive impact on the people, their team and the whole organisation. Stress is responsible for so many negative factors in a working environment; you can read about how to deal with stress in Chapter 6.
- ✔ **Being innovative:** Productive employees tend to have more time for strategic thinking time and innovation. Only when you're relaxed and in control of your day to day can you take the time to visualise something better. Productivity usually leads to a more innovative company culture when employees are praised for the time spent dreaming or thinking of better ways to do things.

When an organisation is under time pressure to achieve its daily goals, any time not spent on the core activities will generally be frowned upon. If a company doesn't take the time to innovate, its future won't be so bright.

- ✓ **Creating a culture of success:** Productive organisations are more successful. Their people tend to take the lead and tend to be more proactive, more creative and more innovative. They're generally people who take responsibility for their own actions and circumstances. This can result in a culture where people are more likely to think beyond the daily remit. They'll be more inclined to have ideas and willing to share and follow up on them. Calm control breathes success.

Checking Out Sources of Productivity

Productivity gains can be felt from making changes in multiple areas of life. Simple changes to the way you currently do things can have surprising implications to the efficiency of how you run your business and your life.

The three main areas of focus where you can make a substantial difference are systems, technology and behaviour.

Productivity from systems

Creating new systems and processes in your day to day will help you see great improvements in productivity. Standardizing the way things are currently done usually leads to a decrease in the amount of time being spent on the current process.

Standardising daily processes

Many companies don't have a formal process designed for each job role. New employees learn on the job from whoever is there to train them. Along with the previous employee's habits, good or bad, new employees create their own way of completing the work. Some people are naturally faster, more organised and efficient, but others take more time – more time to learn and more time to do everything. Standardising the process, how the workflow ideally is managed, is important for any company; following are some of the reasons daily processes can be beneficial.

Quicker workflows

The first benefit of standardising procedures is the obvious time saved. If you can cut down the number of steps involved in completing a job, you'll gain hours each week. Working out what is involved in completing a job is important to be able to improve the process.

Establishing quicker workflows is a simple exercise that can help you improve every part of your job. Map out how the work flows from the first task until the last. Then you can see whether you can improve the process and make any adjustments to make it more efficient.

Increased quality

The quality of the service you offer will be improved due to fewer mistakes and more time available for customer service. You can follow a checklist to ensure that each part of the process is completed in the correct order.

When you introduce checklists, you ensure that the process is adhered to perfectly. This is very important when it comes to customer service because you can be sure that every customer gets the same quality of service and see what the results are from a particular procedure. You can then change procedures and measure the impact more accurately when you have something to follow.

Reduced handover time

When new staff come on board, it's important for them to learn the existing process. They need to know how things are done. If they can follow a written procedure, they'll learn more quickly, reducing the amount of time required to train them and the downtime of the person responsible for training them.

Reduced loss of intellectual information over time

When you fail to capture your processes and procedures in a sensible manner, you risk losing intellectual capital each time a staff member moves. To prevent this loss of knowledge that one employee may hold, you should keep your processes documented and saved electronically or on paper. You can simply record these processes in a Word document or as a checklist in a programme like Excel or Evernote. I use a website called Process Street (www.process.st), which enables you to create checklists for the different processes involved in your role. I have a training checklist and a blog posting process. Process Street has a number of templates that you can choose from and personalise to suit your own processes.

Exploring productivity techniques

You can use many techniques to create a more productive environment. In this section, I list tried and tested ways to up your game and get into the driver's seat. Some of the better known ones include GTD, inbox zero and using your calendar to plan your day.

Getting Things Done (GTD)

Getting Things Done is a workflow management system devised by management consultant David Allen. Allen wrote a book in 1997 called *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* (Penguin). In the book, Allen outlines a system for managing all the work that comes your way each day. It has become a widely adopted and popular technique for getting organised and becoming productive. You can learn more about GTD in Chapter 10.

Inbox zero

Inbox zero is a technique conceived by writer and speaker Merlin Mann of the website 43 Folders. Inbox zero involves taking control of your inbox and processing your email – planning the work rather than using your inbox like a to-do list and completing the work in each one as it comes in. This technique is an efficient way of managing your email and your time. I cover email management in detail in Chapter 15.

Using your calendar

Using your calendar is an effective productivity technique for managing the time available to you. By planning your work, you make decisions about priorities and commit to completing the work that needs to be done. This technique is a powerful way to get a good overview of what you need to do and to see the time you have to do it in. There's more on using your calendar effectively in Chapter 14.

Productivity from technology

Technology is the big game changer for getting things done more quickly. Computers can do the work of hundreds in a minute percentage of the time. With both software and hardware, the world of business has seen massive changes and advancements. I cover technology in Chapter 15.

Software

Hundreds of different types of software have been created to make life easier for the modern worker, but two pieces of software that have radically changed their field and can be found in every business are accounting software and sales or CRM software.

- ✔ **Accounting software:** Few people still use paper to manage their accounts. For some years now, accounting software has become the norm for most businesses. You can use software to record all income and expenditure and to manage invoicing, payroll and any other financial transaction that a company may have.