

# The Accidental Productivity Coach

How to get your life back using the small disciplines of prioritisation and daily planning...

...regain your focus and work-life balance with Personal Productivity Tools.

As an expert in Legal Project Management and Legal Process Improvement, I am surprised by how many lawyers I work with don't have the basic foundations of good working habits and personal productivity. I found myself unexpectedly coaching many of them in how to set up good productivity habits and sharing tools that I had been using and refining over decades in the corporate world as an extremely successful project manager and academic.

## Where did it all begin?

I can still remember with crystal clarity the moment that I developed my Daily Book framework. I had just started a new role as a Program Director for a major not for profit. I was responsible for conceptualising and implementing transformative changes to their enterprise systems and shifting their culture to support the massive growth strategy that had been set by the CEO.

It was a wonderful role, but I was struggling to keep on top of everything. The work was engaging and energising. So much so that I just wasn't keeping up with my personal admin.

## How bad was it really?

I was ignoring it all and concentrating on my work. Everything fell on my shoulders - I was the primary breadwinner and I wasn't getting any help at home from my (now late) husband.

I discovered that we were months behind with the mortgage repayments on our home and investment properties and that I had a huge tax bill that we couldn't afford - I couldn't figure out how to continue to kick goals at work and sort everything out, and I couldn't just take a few days off as I was on a daily contract and we needed the money! Taking the time off would have meant less money to sort everything out - I was so stressed that I couldn't think straight!

## How did I dig myself out?

That was the precise moment that I remembered a work habit that I had abandoned a few years before. When I was starting out as a Project Manager, I used to always have a notebook and sit down every morning and spend time writing a list of everything I needed to get done that day.

So I decided it was time to use a Daily Book again. I chose an A5 notebook and it was purple, because it's one of my favourite colours - pretty much an exact match to the theme colour I now use for my Personal Productivity Frameworks. That's NOT a coincidence!!!



1. **Before I wrote in my new Daily Book I did a free flowing brain-dump** of everything that I had to do
2. **Then, I prioritised everything into the 4 Magic Quadrants**
3. **Next, I selected one Urgent and Important task from the personal administration list** and wrote it at the top of Day 1
4. **Then, I selected several Urgent and Important tasks from the work related list** - as many as I thought I could get done that day
5. **Finally, I started getting the work done and ticked things off as I went.** It felt good, I was able to focus and my productivity went through the roof!
6. **When the day was over I made a commitment to continue to use my Daily Book**

## Daily Book - amazing and unexpected results...

I had some major breakthroughs over those first few days -

1. I was able to find the right person to talk to at the Bank and they organised a 6 month pause on ALL the mortgage repayments due to my husband's illness;
2. I negotiated a payment plan to pay my tax bill each month and it was set at an amount that I could comfortably afford; and
3. I identified many tasks that I could delegate to my team and relieve my overburden.

***Basically, I had expended a small amount of effort to create a clear plan to get out of financial distress and to get more done in less time at work - and it felt great!***

## Does this stuff really work? How do I know for sure?

**YES, YES, YES it does.** I've got so many examples of the improvements that can be achieved by individual lawyers as well as legal teams. I've only got room to share one with you now.

Around 7 years ago I was working with a team of lawyers in a mid-tier firm to introduce Legal Project Management (LPM). I was delivering activity based training every fortnight and also providing on-the-job support aimed at developing LPM precedents that the team could use to increase both their effectiveness (through higher and more predictable quality) and efficiency (by getting more done and not missing deadlines).

Here's one quick example of how my personal productivity tools can make an immediate and tangible difference...

## CASE STUDY - Daily Book and Personal Prioritisation Matrix

I was working with a Senior Associate to map out the phases, deliverables and activities for her matters when it became obvious to me that she was so overwhelmed that she couldn't think straight. Before we could begin to develop the LPM precedents to support delegation and improve quality and consistency, I needed to find ways to reduce her stress so that she'd have the headspace to concentrate on the task at hand. I quickly dove into my kit bag of techniques for getting organised and selected the Daily Book supported by the Personal Prioritisation Matrix.

I worked with her over the next few sessions to design her own approach to these tools and on our third session together I was so happy to see her commitment to her new Daily Book. She shared her feelings of sheer relief about being better organised and also mentioned that she had been seriously considering resigning due to the intense overwhelm and stress - this would have resulted in a massive loss of knowledge for the firm. Instead we went on to develop amazing LPM precedents that are regularly shared with clients and team members, and still in use today!

**I knew then that I could combine Legal Project Management with Personal Productivity Tools to have a positive impact on the working lives of lawyers across the globe!**

That's when I realised that I could magnify the positive impacts of Legal Project Management by combining it with my suite of productivity tools that I use in my own working life.

### Taking the next step...

These Personal Productivity Tools and online learning modules are the results of my work with thousands of lawyers and I know they work.

I built the Personal Productivity Tools Online Course for exactly this purpose. It has three one hour modules that cover the tools in more detail. Each one provides in-depth, step by step guides on how to integrate the tools into your daily working life so that you'll never fall into bad habits again. You'll be guided through reflection activities and active learning activities to ensure that you make changes and stick with them. And because I believe in delivering amazing value I've also included bonus content, examples, templates and precedents that you can use to kick start the change process.

1. **Module 1 - Personal Prioritisation Matrix and Time Boxing**, specifically, learn how these tools work synergistically together to accelerate your productivity and reduce stress
2. **Module 2 - Monthly Matter Milestones and Reminder Flags** with bonus content including Matter Overviews, Matter Structures and Matter Planning Tables
3. **Module 3 - Daily Book Step-by-Step and Reminder Flags**, in depth detail with bonus content on visual management and effective meetings

Who doesn't have time to spend a few hours becoming more effective, more productive and less stressed? My Personal Productivity Toolkit online learning module covers the Daily Book process in more detail and also includes practical tips on how to use the other tools in the Personal Productivity Checklist.

## Reading list on productivity

### The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen R Covey

This book is an oldie but a goodie. It's one of the first that I read on productivity skills and has the original prioritisation matrix that I have adapted in the Personal Productivity Tools.

The 7 habits are as follows –

1. **Habit 1: Be Proactive** – focus on being proactive and taking control. It features a key tool drawn from Gestalt Theory known as the Circle of Concern or Circle of Influence. Covey issues a productivity challenge as follows “For 30 days, work only in your Circle of Influence. Make small commitments and keep them. Be part of the solution, not part of the problem. When you make a mistake, admit it, correct it and learn from it — immediately. Don't get into a blaming, accusing mode. Work on things you have control over.”
2. **Habit 2: Begin with the end in mind** – deals with overarching goals and the concept of a personal mission statement.
3. **Habit 3: Put first things first** – deals with the importance of prioritising your work and activities to ensure most effort is being put into important activities. This was the inspiration for the Personal Prioritisation matrix that I developed as part of the Personal Productivity Tools.
4. **Habit 4 :Think Win/Win** – Covey doesn't see this as a negotiating technique, but rather an overarching paradigm or philosophy by which to carry out all work and interactions.
5. **Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood** – involves a deep in paradigms as typically we first to be understood. Empathetic listening is recommended as a way to first understand others. This is critical to understanding client outcomes in order to deliver on their expectations.
6. **Habit 6: Synergize** – looks at communication and collaboration, as opposed to competition.
7. **Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw** – looks at the four dimensions of renewal – physical, mental, spiritual and social. All four are necessary to live you most productive life.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey. Copyright © 1989, 2004 by Stephen R. Covey. ISBN 0-7432-6951-3.

### Atomic Habits, James Clear

This is one of the newest publications on habits and productivity. I have subscribed to James' articles for many years and bought this as soon as it was available. The core premise is that many 1% improvements will compound to have an exponentially positive impact on performance.

The book focuses on Four Laws of Behaviour Change and considers how to use these to create positive habits and how to use the inverse to avoid negative habits -

1. **Cue:** Make it obvious.
2. **Craving:** Make it attractive.
3. **Response:** Make it easy.
4. **Reward:** Make it satisfying.

Atomic Habits by James Clear, Cornerstone, 2019, ISBN. 1-8479-4183-4



## About the author...



This article was written by Therese Linton, Founder and Principal Consultant of The BASALT Group® encompassing The Positive Lawyer® and the Academy of Legal Leadership®. She is a global leader in the field of Legal Project Management and literally wrote the book. She also has unique expertise in Legal Process Improvement, Legal Portfolio Management, Legal Transformation and Legal Operations.

In addition to delivering training in LPM and LPI, Therese has spent much of the last decade coaching lawyers with an emphasis on productivity improvement and recently completed her certification as an NLP Practitioner to complement her skills in this area.

So if you want to super charge your productivity, stand out from the crowd and get your life back then take the first step and download the Personal Productivity Checklist [HERE](#) or checkout the training programs and tools offered at [www.basaltgroup.global](http://www.basaltgroup.global)

***My aim is to inspire you to achieve great things and I look forward to joining you on your journey! Cheers....T***

