

Maintaining focus and building resilience during difficult times...

Practical tools and habits to maintain productivity, improve focus and increase adaptability

Establishing foundations and getting the basic right

This article is the first of three articles that explores **10 Habits of Highly Productive People** and explores how to adjust your old habits to create new ones that will serve you better in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We all have to work and live differently now and it's critical to consider how to thrive in these difficult times. The current global situation is a human and economic tragedy, the likes of which we haven't seen since the World Wars. It could have impacts that are orders of magnitude greater than combining the Great Depression and the Spanish Flu pandemic.

So how can we clear our heads of the doomsday thinking and maintain focus?

Let's turn our thoughts to how we can adopt new ways of thinking and working. It would be amazing if we can carry forward some of the positive changes that can come of these incredibly challenging times. Professionals who are fortunate enough to still have jobs find themselves working in radically new and unexpected ways. Some are working from home and delivering virtual services for the first time; others are working from home surrounded by young families who are completing their learning online.

Strengthening our mindsets

Sometimes it's important to start with definitions to establish context and provide anchors of meaning.

Resilience

- the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or toughness.
- the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity.

Adaptability

- the quality of being able to adjust to new conditions.
- the capacity to be modified for a new use or purpose.

Flexibility

- the quality of bending easily without breaking.
- the ability to be easily modified.
- willingness to change or compromise.

Definitions from Lexicon, powered by Oxford



The ability to be adaptable is more critical than ever as we find ourselves working and living in vastly different conditions.

The ability to be flexible enables us to be nimble and adjust to the new conditions more quickly.

The ability to be resilient will enable us to bounce back once this global crisis has passed.

It's important to be adaptable during difficult times and resilient afterwards!

There are many amazing tools that have been developed by experts to support us all. Here are links to some of my favourites as they are evidence based and have been developed by global leaders in their fields.

[10 tips for managing anxiety during COVID-19](#) - Published: 20 March, 2020; Dr Jill Newby, Associate Professor of Psychology at UNSW and based at the Black Dog Institute shares some helpful actions which can assist in reducing anxiety and help manage COVID-19 fears.

[Staying calm in the face of the coronavirus uncertainty](#) - Published 13 March 2020, Martin Seligman, Director, Positive Psychology Center offers a quick and straightforward way to refocus the mind.

[The COVID-19 wellness guide for older adults](#) - Published 15 March 2020, Dy Regina Koepp, Assistant Professor, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioural Sciences provides 10 tips designed to support older adults through the COVID-19 crisis. Use this to support your older relatives and also to look after yourself.

[Thrive Inside with Smiling Mind](#) - is a special initiative to help you stay calm and healthy in the physical constraints of your home, while remaining calm and healthy inside your mind. Free Apps developed by psychologists and educators.

[Coronavirus: How to work from home, the right way](#) - Published 13 March 2020, Bryan Lufkin, BBC on what you need to do to stay productive when working from home in a pandemic

[Managing Anxiety in an Anxiety-Provoking Situation](#) - Published 16 March 2020, New York State, Office of Mental Health. Feeling Stressed About Coronavirus (COVID-19)? The outbreak of COVID-19 around the world has led to the spread of fear and panic for individuals and communities. In addition to following physical precautions guidelines, individuals should be taking care of their psychological well-being.

[Mental Health and COVID-19](#) - site compiled by Mental Health America, information and resources. For the past several weeks, MHA has been using its unique database to monitor daily this increase in anxiety. According to our screening data, we experienced a 19 percent increase in screening for clinical anxiety in the first weeks of February, and a 12 percent increase in the first two weeks of March.

[COVID-19 Mental Health Resources](#) - site compiled by the American Bar Association, providing mental health resources for the legal profession during COVID-19

Productivity Habits

My primary professional focus is supporting lawyers to develop competencies in Legal Project Management and Legal Process Improvement, and my primary personal focus is productivity. I've read extensively on the subject of productivity and also worked with thousands of lawyers to develop competencies and new skills to change their ways of working. Often these two areas overlap, and I have worked with many lawyers to improve their personal productivity by synthesising the disciplines of LPM and LPI with the tools and habits of productivity. I've distilled all of my experience and research into a snapshot of the most common productivity habits.

10 habits of highly productivity people

1. Be disciplined about the basics
2. Maintain a healthy body and positive mind
3. Ruthlessly prioritise
4. Focus on what is important, remove the unimportant
5. Allocate time for the important things
6. Use every minute
7. Allocate time for rest and rejuvenation
8. Get in the zone and stay in the zone
9. Create the right environment
10. Good enough is good enough

Productivity Foundations

Habits 1 and 2 are foundational habits, these underpin your ability to apply the tools and mindsets applied in the other habits.

Be disciplined about the basics – this refers to the daily routines that keep your mind and body in peak condition. These are the core routines that are performed automatically without thinking, the routines that are rarely forgone - only given up deliberately and due to extenuating circumstances.

Maintain a healthy body and positive mind - it is widely understood that in order to deliver our best performance, we need to be in peak condition, both mentally and physically. This is all about sleep quality, optimum nutrition, physical fitness and good mental health.

Habit Audit - Review, Select and Replace

One of my favourite experts in the area of productivity and habits is James Clear, author of Atomic Habits, Cornerstone, 2019. I've subscribed to James' articles for many years and the core premise of his books is that many 1% improvements will compound to have an exponentially positive impact on performance.



Atomic Habits 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

Chapter 4 suggests using a Habit Scorecard to evaluate the quality of your current habits by listing every micro habit that you undertake on a normal day and then evaluating them on the basis of – positive (good), negative (bad) or neutral. This brings a level of consciousness to the habits that make up your day.

I like to take this concept a few steps further by critically reviewing all the habits and removing the ones that don't contribute to our goals, doing more of the habits that support our goals and introducing new positive habits to strengthen our foundations of good health and a positive mindset. Here are the steps that I work through when conducting my own Habit Audit and when supporting clients through the process.

Undertaking a Habit Audit

1. **Pre-work** – Mind mapping of broad goals in major life areas
Work, Health, Friends & Family, Leisure Activities, Home etc
2. List all the micro habits making up a normal workday
3. Review and categorise as positive, negative or neutral
4. Remove the negative habits or reduce and reframe them
5. Select new habits to support your work and life goals
6. Include new positive habits ensuring room for rest and rejuvenation
7. **Optional** - create a Habit Tracker to reinforce achievement
8. Repeat regularly to refine and improve

Tiny changes make a big difference...habits are the compound interest of self-improvement...if you can get 1% better each day, you'll end up with results that are 37 times better after one year" James Clear

CASE STUDY - Awareness and changing daily habits

I am currently working with a Development Team Leader who has been working from home for over a month now, along with the rest of the development team. He lives with a flatmate in a small two bedroom apartment where his workstation is set up in his bedroom. He is amazing, extremely dedicated, productive and diligent.

Last week I noticed that he was starting to look extremely scruffy and fatigued on the multiple Zoom meetings that we have each day. I asked him how he was going, and he confessed that he has often found himself sitting and working from 7am to 11pm with just the necessary breaks for food and personal hygiene. I suggested that he would need to find ways to make time for exercise and asked him about his normal routine. Prior to this crisis he had worked out at the gym every morning before work doing cardio and weight training and played football with his mates most weekends. Since he started working from home, he has been for a few runs but nothing structured or regular as he didn't buy weight equipment for home before it sold out.

I asked him to think about a new routine for his daily exercise and to make a commitment to me by emailing it to me so that I can ask him about it specifically each day when we catch up. Indeed, I will be introducing a short wellbeing update from all team members in our daily stand-up meetings at 11am. Here is his email about this new workout routine...

Subject: Workout Routine

Hi T,

Needed to test it was doable before sending through...

Before work: 15 minutes of stretching/yoga.

After work:

Monday - Full body workout at park - body weight + Resistance bands

Tuesday - Running or Football or Golf

Wednesday - Full body workout at park - body weight + Resistance bands

Thursday - Running or Football or Golf

Friday - Full body workout at park - body weight + Resistance bands

I may swap before and after works to keep things interesting... ok cheers!

I can now hold him accountable to this each day and I suspect he might actually reverse the morning and afternoon sessions. He could also play golf in the afternoon as we have the most beautiful autumn weather in Sydney and then come home and keep working. I believe he will increase his productivity with this new regime and I'm happy to support flexibility.

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.

As a leading global expert in Legal Project Management, she has worked with thousands of lawyers to develop their capabilities and skills. As part of this work, she supports lawyers to improve their personal productivity and create habits that underpin their success.

On a side note, I am also committed to my morning workouts and weekend sports. Before the pandemic I did F45 (small group, gym based High Intensity Interval Training) 5 to 6 mornings a week and skied every weekend during the snow season or went rock climbing in Spring and Autumn. It was a difficult adjustment for me when the gyms and outdoor group based exercise program were shut down. Now I do a cardio/body weight circuit with one close friend for an hour outdoors watching the sun come up over the Sydney Harbour Bridge. I've discovered that I love exercising outdoors, our morning workouts are great fun and the photos are amazing!

Next steps...

If you're interested in my free Personal Productivity Tools Checklist and a massive discount on the Personal Productivity Online Course to support everyone dealing with the changes brought about by COVID-19 then [click here](#).

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



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