

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 13: Productivity Tricks for the Neurotic

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Tim Ferriss: Hello, Ladies and Gentlemen. This is Tim Ferriss and welcome to another edition of The Tim Ferriss Show. This is an in between-isode. It is a short audio essay, as opposed to the longer form interviews that I tend to do on a weekly or biweekly basis. Those usually run about one to two hours. This will probably be less than 15 minutes total. I did have some complaints after my last episode which featured some editing. I had bleeped out some profanities. So, today's leading wisdom – the quote that I will start us off with is, “You is a fine mother fucker, won't you back that ass up.” Alright, now that we have covered that – feeling frisky folks. I am going to move on to today's essay. Which is intended to give you some tidbits, some food to digest, something to feed your brain over the weekend or the week and ideally to get you some tactics and tips that you can really apply to your own life to increase your productivity or your perceived sense of well-being.

And the essay today, which shall not be edited, partially because I do not know how secondly because I am [Speaking Japanese] that is lazy bastards sloth in Japanese. [Speaking Japanese]. This essay is called, and some of you may have come across this. It was making the rounds a while ago became very popular "Productivity" Tricks for the Neurotic Manic-Depressive and Crazy Like Me. And this essay is really intended to perhaps your move a few illusions that people have about those they aspire to be like or those they look up to and hopefully it is very empowering. So, here it goes. Productivity Tricks for the Neurotic Manic-Depressive and Crazy Like Me.

I originally wrote this essay months ago but I have been too self-conscious to publish it until now. The following quote convinced me to put on my big girl pants and get it done.

"The moment that you feel that just possibly you are walking down the street naked, exposing too much of your heart and your mind and what exists on the inside, showing too much of yourself that is the moment you may be starting to get it right." That is from Neil Gaiman one of my favorite writers from the commencement speech that he gave at the University of the Arts, which you can find on my blog if you want to give a search. So, here it goes with the essay and I hope it helps at least a few of you.

Part one, reality check. A few months ago I had a birthday party, it comes every year of course. A dozen friends and I gathered for several days of wonderful sun beach and catching up. On the last day however, I did not get up until 11:30 A.M. knowing full well that the last remaining friends were leaving to 12:00 P.M. I was afraid of being alone. Seems kind of silly, right? Like a child I hit my head under the covers literally and hit snooze until reality could not be any further.

But, why am I telling you this? What is the point of the story? That leads us to part two, the dangerousness of "successful" people and successful is in quotation marks here. We all like to appear successful, a nebulous term at best, and the media likes to portray standouts the superheroes. So, there is a survivorship vice. You always see the rock stars the people on top of the world on the cover of the magazines. Sometimes these dramatic stories of overcoming the odds are inspiring, more often however they lead to an unhealthy knee jerk conclusion from people who are reading these magazines, seeing the TV profiles, and so on and that is, well maybe they – entrepreneurial, artist, creator painted a superhero, can do it, but I am just a normal guy. I am just a normal girl. How could I possibly do that? And this essay is intended to give a behind the scenes look at my own life. Though I have occasionally done profiles like a day in the life with Morgan Spurlock's crew which is really fun. You can check it out online.

I rarely let journalists all me around for a normal day and they always ask let us follow you around for a standard day, a normal day. Why do I not do this? Well, to start off, I am no superhero. I am not even a consistent normal. To give you an idea in the last three months I have cried while watching Rudy, I have repeatedly hit snooze for one to three hours past my planned wake time because I simply did not want to face the day, I have considered giving everything away moving to Montreal, Saville, Iceland, the location depends on what I'm trying to escape, I have seen a therapist for the first time as I was convinced I was doomed to lifelong pessimism, I have use gentlemanly websites to relax during the day when I clearly have urgent and more important shit to do, I have taken my daily caffeine intake read self-medication so high that my resting pulse was a 120 plus beats per minute. That is nuts eight to ten cups of coffee per day minimum.

I have worn the same pair jeans for weeks straight just to have a constant something to cling to turn weeks of chaos. Okay, that seems pretty dysfunctional, right? Does not really seem like the picture of effectiveness, efficacy, and efficiency that you might expect me to be. Well, that is true, but in the last eight weeks I have also increased my passive income 20 plus percent, bought my dream house, I have been meditating twice per day per 20 minutes for her session without fail. This marks the first time I have ever been able to do that consistently. I have cut my caffeine intake to next to nothing. That is in the last four weeks. Usually, having puer teat in the morning and green tea in the afternoon. I have had no more than one cup of coffee per week. Now, I will probably elaborate as a future essay or post. With your help we have raised \$100,000.00 plus for charity water for my birthday.

We have raised \$250,000.00 in 53 minutes for a startup that I am involved with. I have signed one of the most exciting business deals of my life, certainly of the last ten years anyways. I have added roughly 20 pounds of muscle after learning the pain enjoy higher up front squats and topical DHA courtesy of Patrick Arnold. You can check him out. He is a fascinating guy. I have transferred my blood work, realized once again that manic-depressive symptoms are just part of entrepreneurship and I have come to feel closer to all of my media family members. Okay, that is quite the laundry list, quite the mouthful.

But, that leads us to part three, the point. What is the point of all of this? Most

superheroes are nothing of the sort. They are weird, neurotic creatures who do big things despite lots of self-defeating habits and self-talk. I am no exception, that is me too. Personally, I suck at efficiency, doing things quickly that is. Here is my coping mechanism and eight step process for maximizing efficacy instead, doing the right things.

Because hard work does not solve impotent goals and unclear priorities. It actually magnifies and multiplies all the problems, so I focus on efficacy, doing the right things. What are my eight steps number? 1.) Wake up at least one hour before you have to be at a computer screen. Email is the mind killer. 2.) Make a cup of tea. I like to pu'er tea and sit down with a pen or pencil and paper. 3.) Write down the three to five things and no more that are making you most anxious or uncomfortable. They are often things that of been punted from one days to do list to the next, to the next, to the next, and so on. The stuff that you put off. Most important usually equals most uncomfortable. There is often times some chance of rejection or conflict. So, if you do not know what is most important to ask yourself what is making me most uncomfortable. So, for each of these three to five things that you have written down – I used Post-it note typically because it is constrained and there is a limited amount of space –

For each of these items ask yourself, if this were the only thing I accomplished today what I be satisfied with my day? Okay, I will repeat that for each of these items, if this were the only thing that I accomplished today would I be satisfied with my day? And the second question you ask is will moving this forward make all the other to dos unimportant or easier to knock off later? So, is this thing a force multiplier? If I handle this one thing will make all the other issues either relevant or easier to do? 5.) Look only at the items that you've answered yes to for these questions. So that should narrow your list of three to five down to maybe two, probably one. Then step number six, block out two to three hours to focus on one of them, one of them for today. Let the rest of the urgent stuff the less important stuff slide.

Okay, you pay some penalties, a few people get pissed off, who cares? The world will not end. It will also be there tomorrow, so I block out two to three hours and focus on one of those items for today. Step number seven, to be very clear block out two to three hours to focus on one of them for today. This is one block of time, alright? Cobbling together ten minutes here and there to add up to 120 minutes does not work at all. It is a single block of time and you might be able to spare the time for these interruptions. But, you cannot afford the distraction of being pulled in and out of trying to focus. So, one single block of time two to three hours. Step number seven, if you get distracted or start procrastinating do not freak out and downward spiral, which is what I used to do. Just gently come back to your one to do item. Meditating regularly helps with this not freaking out and just coming back to that one to do item. Those are the eight steps. Congratulations, that is it. You are now a master of productivity.

This is the only way that I can create, personally, big outcomes despite my never ending impulse to procrastinate, nap, and otherwise fritter away my days of bullshit. If I have ten important things to do in a day, it is 100 percent certain nothing important will get done that day. So, if I am ten important things to do in a day, I have zero things that are going

to get done that day. You cannot. If everything is important, nothing is important. On the other hand, I can usually handle one must do item and block out my lesser behaviors for two to three hours a day. Really, if you can do it for two hours that puts you in rarefied company. You are in the top, top, top 5 percent of people in the United States certainly I think. It does not take much to seem super human and appear successful to nearly everyone around you. In fact, you just need one rule and that is this, what you do is more important than how you do everything else and doing something well does not make it important.

I will repeat that, what you do is more important than how you do it and doing something well does not make it important. If you consistently feel the counterproductive need for volume and doing lots of stuff working harder, harder, harder, but perhaps not with clear priorities, put the following bullets on our Post-it note. Bullet number one, being busy is a form of laziness. Lazy thinking an indiscriminate action, being lazy – I'm sorry, being lazy is a form of business, that is not true. Being busy is a form of laziness. Lazy thinking an indiscriminate action. Bullet number two being busy is most often used as a guise for avoiding the few critically important but uncomfortable actions. Okay, being busy is a form of laziness. Following up on that and when despite your best efforts, you feel like you are losing at the game of life remember this, even the best of the best feel this way sometimes no one is 100 percent all the time I have not met them at least.

When I am in the pit of despair I recall what the icon accreditor Kurt Vonnegut said about his own process and this is an absolute icon, a hero in the world of writing. One of the most famous of the most famous and this is what he wrote, “when I write I feel like an armless legless man with a crayon in his mouth.” Okay, so if the best of the best feel that way you are allowed to feel that way too. Do not underestimate yourself. Do not overestimate the rest of the world. You are better than you think and you are not alone.

In closing if you struggle with this and we all do, if you occasionally struggle like me their resources and articles that could help you rebound.

So, you can go to for instance my blog which is just fourhourblog.com and search for the prescription for self-doubt or harnessing entrepreneurial manic depression and you can also read other pieces by people, friends of mine I respect greatly, like Brad Feld who is a world-class venture capitalist. He wrote a piece called two root causes of my recent depression, which is fantastic. So, I hope this is helpful if you'd like access to other essays like this, longer form interview pieces check out the podcast just got a fourhourworkweek.com/podcast, all spelled out so four, fourhourworkweek.com/podcast and if you would like some of my favorite snippets from these podcasts episodes some of my favorite segments, two to three minutes long, you can go to YouTube. [YouTube.com/timferris](https://www.youtube.com/timferris), two R's, two S's. Thank you for listening. Please let me know what you think @tferriss on Twitter, two R's, two S's, and look forward to hearing from you. Thanks for listening.