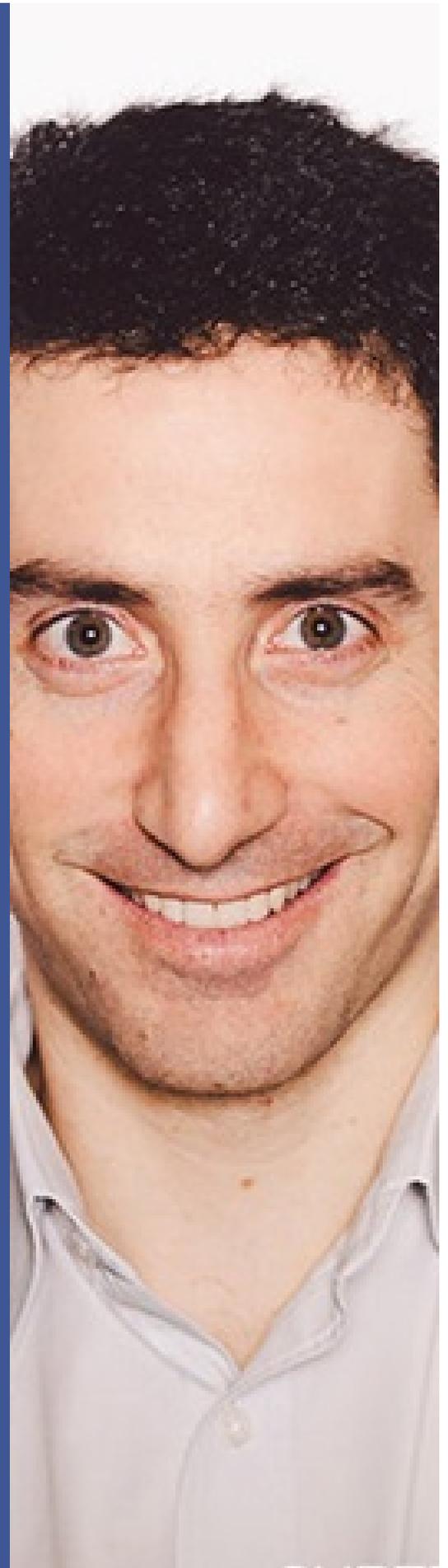




SuperFastBusiness Presents

5 Actionable Productivity Hacks That Will Change Your Work Flow With Dan Dobos

Dan Dobos discusses what productivity is and isn't,
and offers 5 helpful action steps for accomplishing
more in life and business.



5 Actionable Productivity Hacks That Will Change Your Work Flow With Dan Dobos

by SuperFastBusiness



Dan Dobos

James: James Schramko here, welcome to SuperFastBusiness. Today's topic is very important because underlying everything else you do is going to come back to you and how optimized you are as a machine out there in the world. If you're not right, your business doesn't stand much of a chance. In fact, everything you do can be compromised by how productive you are. I've brought back a good friend of mine and a repeat guest, Dan Dobos, to talk about this topic today. Good day Dan!

Dan: Hey James, how are you going?

James: I'm going well. Now, thanks for taking time away from your fabulous leadmachine.com business adventure to talk with us.

Dan: Pleasure. Always a pleasure to talk to you, my friend.

James: Now, you've been on the show before. We've talked about [different learning methods](#), and [how to optimize training course](#), and [how step-by-step may not be the best way](#); that was a fascinating insight and one that I've implemented for a lot of the training that I've produced since then, that was fundamental for that. And then you came and talked about [offline combined with online marketing](#), and [how to get people to events and things](#), and you've spoken at the last live event I did, and you're featured at the next one that I have, back by popular demand, shall we say?

Dan: Awesome.

James: We're going to be talking about productivity. I think before we get too far down the track, we should even question, "What is productivity?" Have you got a way you like to think about it?

What is productivity?

Dan: Yeah, definitely. I think a lot of people think about productivity the wrong way. For me, productivity, number 1, it's not about efficiency. You can be very efficient doing data entry, and for me, that's probably not at all productive. The other thing is, it's not even about doing more with less. So a lot of people say, "You want to get as much done with as few resources as possible."

Again, you can do lots of data entry with very few resources. And again, in my opinion, you're not very productive.

So, the way I think of productivity is that if you're a business owner, and you had this unbelievable, special ability to get Richard Branson, Warren Buffett and Mark Zuckerberg all on a permanent conference call. Where whenever you had a question, you could just say, "Guys, I've got a question. Can you help me with that?" In that situation, would you be more productive? I think you'd be unbelievably productive. So for me, productivity is about being able to produce the best possible results.

James: Yeah, that sounds good. It kind of fits with the way that I think of it. I

borrow from Peter Drucker, “Doing the right things.”

Dan: Yup.

James: I like that idea because, you know, you could be efficient but if you’re not doing the right things, it doesn’t help. Doing more with less is great as long as the more is the right thing. A lot of people have this false economy idea and so many people are focused on budget and price too.

Dan: Yeah, exactly.

James: Frugality sort of crops up, but a lot of the people who are super successful are a bit more ballsy than the frugality set. If I was going to have a panel of experts, I’d probably want Charlie Munger in there because I think he’s pretty much the decision machine for Warren Buffett.

Dan: Yeah. He wrote an incredible book as well.

James: Now, you can’t get away with just saying he wrote an incredible book. You have to tell us what it is.

Dan: You’re pushing me, you’re pushing me. I think we’re going to have to include it in the show notes. I’m looking at my massive bookshelf.

James: Well, he wrote one there called “Charlie’s Almanac,” which is big, thick, heavy coffee table book.

Dan: Yeah, that’s one.

James: It’s great reading. I love that book. It’s one of my absolute favorites.

Dan: Yeah. The word almanac is an interesting word.

James: Well, he pretty much ripped off Benjamin Franklin’s idea. So he just replicated the thing but with Charlie. So good reading. Let’s get back on track. So what do you think people like Warren Buffett and Mark Zuckerberg and Bill Gates and Charlie Munger; how do you think they’re making good decisions?

How successful people make good decisions

Dan: I think the way they’re making good decisions is number 1, they are not making a lot of those decisions themselves. I think a big mistake a lot of people make is that they feel that they should be making every single decision. And

sometimes they should, but in many cases, they shouldn't. I think they oversold this idea that you can do it, and you can buy an info product. But for me, to make your highest contribution, you need to decide what you're not going to do.

So for example, there's Google Adwords. I'm not an expert in Google Adwords, I'm not going to do that. I think it's much better to actually engage in an expert. So I think that's an important part. The other thing that I think is important is that a lot of people make bad decisions by being impulsive or emotional, or doing something that is in some way related to all the marketing triggers that we use, whether that's social proof, or scarcity, or commitment and consistency, we actually fall for those same ideas.

So for me, the opposite of that is to really try to get into a state of flow. Really, what that is, is being able to be totally absorbed in what you're doing. So being able to be totally immersed in it and full on so that you're operating at your highest potential because you're doing something, which you really, really love, which you're great at. And when you're in that state, what happens is you actually make the right decisions spontaneously.

Having the willpower to make decisions

James: Yeah. And I want to come back to the flow just to recap where you were there about decisions. One thing is also, some people think they have to make a decision, which doesn't even have to be made sometimes. Maybe they're inviting inputs and stimulation that shouldn't be there by maybe having weak filters. So letting too much in forces decisions that you wouldn't have had to make.

For example, if you were to be really pruning back your email list than unsubscribing from the marketing bombardment, now you've actually automatically eliminated a thousand decisions over the next year that aren't going to come to your inbox to force you into decision making mode whether you should delete, click on the link, make a purchase, or whatever. So hard pruning can help.

I think almost the opposite of making bad decisions under emotional situations, you know if you're tired or whatever, a few things on that: firstly, who doesn't have a couple of domains they bought at 2 or 3 in the morning, right? We have no willpower left at 2 or 3 in the morning. It's a bad time to be making big decisions so I think there's a lot to be said for the old adage of sleep on it, if you're in the buying mode.

I'm not talking about us marketers when we're selling. I'm talking about when we're

buying, it's great to make sure you're well-rested, well-fed, you're not compromised in any way, you have released all other stimulants and emotional distractions, and now, you are making a decision that gives you the best chance of success; you've got that willpower energy. So early in the morning actually is a good time to think about big decisions if you've had a good night sleep. What do you think?

Dan: Yeah, absolutely. I've actually gone as far as saying to several people, don't call me until 2 o'clock. Between morning and 2 o'clock, I'm not doing calls, I'm not doing busywork, I'm purely focused on my to-do list, which usually has 1 or 2 items, and I just want to focus on that. So the morning I'm actually protecting that time, I think is critical.

James: I'm still on the same page with you. I protect my time with scheduling software and my prime chunks that I offer up. Two chunks in the morning; so that I'm doing my best work with the client call that I'm doing and the interviews that I do, and I have two calls in the afternoon, and this is 2 days a week. The other days of the week are for other projects where I can have real thinking time, and processing time, and I'm not doing anything after 6 o'clock in the afternoon. There's no work functions that require me to be on, so to speak, because, you know, you start to fade, especially if you throw in a surf, here and there.

Flow and surfing

So let's talk about flow for a minute. I can totally relate to flow with surfing. A lot of people think, when you surf, the big challenge is to stand up. And what you find out after you learn how to stand up, it's not even anything to do with that. In fact, it's a normal human behavior to be able to stand up. If you were to lie on the ground now and say jump to your feet, we can all do it. So that's actually not what we need to be doing. And what I found after I've sort of figured out the standing up phase, is that I never even think about that anymore, it's just automatic. You paddle for a wave and the next thing you know, you're standing.

Dan: Yeah, definitely. So it just happens now. It's part of your routine.

James: Exactly. So tell me about flow and maybe it relates to surfing.

Dan: It does relate to surfing. It's actually interesting that in relation to surfing, which is more than 1,000 years old, and between (I've actually got the numbers here because they're recently published), between 400 A.D. and 1996, the biggest wave that someone caught was 25 feet, whereas today, between 1996 and 2015, it's well over 100 feet.

James: That's incredible.

Dan: So how has that happened? The only way it's happened is because there's this idea of a relatively new concept, and basically surfers really embraced it, they've hacked it, and they're now doing things, which was previously totally unimaginable.

James: Right. There's also a documented incident where Laird Hamilton was surfing one of the biggest, scariest Millennium Wave in Teahupoo, Tahiti, and he instinctively just put his hand out, at the opposite side to normal to counter balance himself, just because he was in the moment. And I also saw a video of him shooting the pier at Malibu when the big waves came through in summer, and he was just riding a stand up paddle from right through and underneath the pier, which sounds incredibly dangerous. But imagine the skills you'd have to have for that and the amount of practice that you'd have to have as well.

Dan: Yeah, definitely. I think that I've read about that same idea as well of how he did something, which was the opposite to what you do when you're surfing, and I think that's a big part of flow, which is that you're in this state where you're totally focused, you're doing one thing, it's effortless. You forgot yourself, time has distorted, it's probably going slower in this situation. As a result, you're spontaneously making the best possible decision.

I think the challenge for us as business owners is to say, "OK. Well that's great for surfers. How can we do that in our business? How can we put ourselves in that state where we're doing one thing, where we're totally absorbed, and when we're producing our best quality work?"

James: Yeah.

Dan: That's why I'm so excited about this idea of flow and how it's really had a big impact in sort of everything I do, and I really try and build everything I do around this idea.

James: Well I think I can relate to that. It's just making sure that you only work on projects that you're really, really excited about and enthusiastic for, like you can't wait to wake up in the morning so you'd get started on it, that sort of stuff. But I'm sure, knowing you, there's probably some indicators that would say if you're in flow or not.

Important characteristics of flow

Dan: Yeah, definitely. So there's a few parts. I guess just to describe flow, from

what I've observed and from looking at other people, there are really 9 characteristics that I think the most important parts of flow.

So the first is that you're doing only one thing. So you're not checking emails, and you're also looking at this and talking on that, you're just focused on one thing. You're totally absorbed in it; it's effortless, you forget yourself to the point that time distorts.

For example, you're in a conversation where you're just totally into that conversation, you're just fully into it, fully focused. Not sure if you had this experience where you're presenting. Often it happens to me when I'm presenting, like maybe an hour or 2 hours, it feels like 15 minutes, it just goes so fast. You're in this state of total relaxation that's mixed with complete concentration.

And this is actually something I've learned from juggling, which is interesting as this. One of the things, which as you know, I'm fairly into juggling, one of the things I learned with it, is it's very important to be very relaxed while you're juggling. If you get too stressed, you could totally lose it, whereas if you're too relaxed, that's not good at all. So relaxed but with high degrees of concentration.

The other things that I think are important with flow is that you're at the edge of your comfort zone. So you're doing something that is challenging but it's not beyond your capacity. You're doing something which is fulfilling and important. And so, those are the key attributes to knowing whether you're actually in a flow state or not.

James: Makes sense. If you probably historically look back at the things that you feel were your best achievements, you'll probably recognize some of those things.

Dan: Yeah, definitely. And I think it's really useful certainly for me when I sort of heard about this idea. One of the things I did was I thought back, when was I in a state of flow? What was I doing? And one of the big things for me was presenting. And so that's very much influenced the direction that I see myself going in, it's like that was working, how can we do more of it? So yeah, for sure, for sure.

James: Before I ever heard the term flow, I would have referred to it as being in the zone.

Dan: Yeah.

Being in the zone

James: And I specifically remember, it was back in 1998, when I was selling Mercedes-Benz at the time. And I remember that I had the process so refined that I knew everything that was going to happen just before it happened. It just worked like clockwork. I studied so many sales books, I got all these processes working, in particular I was using a spin selling formula, and just by following like a 4-step template or framework, it was really helping me move through.

And I could see the steps materializing that I've really felt like I had total control of the situation. And the results I was getting were just phenomenal compared to all of the peer group. And I felt like I was in the zone. I've found my place in the universe where I could really do good things. And I've always looked for that feeling in anything that I'm pursuing.

I think the latest time I found that recently was just this surfing bug, this addiction that bites and it's a fantastic metaphor for doing one thing at a time because you can't do too many other things; there's no tech, there's no devices, it's really very analog and raw and primal, and it's just pure focus. It's a mix of survival/exhilaration in there.

Dan: Yeah. It's interesting that you said that point about sales. I've actually noticed the same thing with presenting. I've noticed that the best presentations, and certainly from my experience, sometimes you'll do a presentation where you don't actually know the material that well, so you're sort of struggling just to get the content out and it's sort of slightly unnatural because you just trying hard to make the point.

Whereas, I found that the best presentations are the presentations where you know everything, back to front. You could do it without the slides, you could do it at 3 in the morning. And as a result, you are able to respond to the audience, you are able to sort of get the vibe, you're able to sort of do what works well in the present without being concerned as to whether you're actually going to get the content perfectly because you already know it so well.

All the books that you've read, all the study that you've done into sales, it just then makes that process of actually being in front of the customer effortless. You don't need to think about it because you've got everything down the pat.

Time distorts when you're in flow

James: Yeah. And you mentioned before about when time distorts for you and you felt like the presentation whizzes by. I know, and sometimes when I felt that I have the material so well ingrained. And I think that was last year when I presented several times around the [OTR](#) ideas that I have. I know the material very very well. I live it and breathe it, and practice it, and teach it.

For me, the time distorts almost the other way, where I'd feel like I get 10x more time than my audience. I can see them react and watch them take notes and sort of synchronize with them their rate of absorption of the material. I feel like I could stroll around a few times in between sentences.

Dan: Yeah, that's interesting. That's interesting how we had opposite time distortions. I wonder what that means. I've also read cases where mountain climbers have been falling and because they're so into flow, and time has distorted just as you've said. It has slowed down and they're managed to catch a rope or somehow manage to save themselves because things have gone so slowly. So yeah, it's interesting.

James: But it also, in a contradictory way, it doesn't feel like it was a laborious 6-hour presentation. It's like I disconnect the amount of time that the presentation takes with the actual time that I'm spending there because as a professional presenter, you always have to keep an eye on the timer. But I'm correlating my time at where I am in the slides, not how much actual time that means, which is a whole other thing. But you do a lot more presentations than I do so it would be interesting to be able to experience what you experience, but I'm sure people are doing that in their own specialty.

Dan: Yeah. It's interesting because I can understand what you mean as well and it makes total sense in the sense that you're not just presenting, but you're also observing and you're seeing the whole picture. I think that's interesting that it's happened in reverse. Maybe there is something to be said for, like your actual experience may be slow in the moment but the actual presentation still goes quickly. I need to think of whether I've had that.

James: It's like I'm firing the bullets and then I'm watching people's reaction to getting hit with an info bullet.. "Boom. Like, oh wow, what is this? Oh, I see how this might affect." Then the hand starts moving to make notes. This seems to be like the Matrix movie. So let's move on with the flow of the podcast. What are the 3 pre-requisites?

3 prerequisites for getting into flow

Dan: I think the 3 prerequisites for getting into flow is that if you think, to our examples, you know, whether it's you in sales or me in presenting, whether it's someone surfing, the three things that they all have in common is number 1, it's something that you absolutely love doing, it's something that matters, and it's something that you're actually good at, that you can say, "Look, I've done it. I've got these things under my belt."

And I think, a lot of business owners sometimes get a bit unstuck because they don't actually have those things. Maybe they're in the business, or maybe it's a family business, or they've been doing it all the while, sort of lost at it, and I think that makes it a whole lot harder. So having those 3 questions to ask and to think about, I think they're really important.

James: So do you love it? Does it matter? Are you good at it? So it's like the old Venn Diagram almost from the good to great.

Dan: Yeah.

Taking the less commercial route

James: And it's the Hedgehog Principle is starting something it's like, can you make a commercial thing out of it is one aspect that maybe we didn't talk about but a lot of artists take the less commercial route but they're really pleased with what they do and they don't want to compromise.

But imagine if you can combine your business creativity with a business model that works really well. I think I've found that. I like to talk rather than type or dig holes with a shovel in the backyard and all that sort of stuff. I've chosen a way of doing business that suits my personal preferences.

I know that when I observe my children, my son is just so good with his electric guitar, and he writes the songs and does the graphics and the artwork for his band, and he's so passionate about it. It is art for him. They don't compromise on their style. They're not making choices that would probably help them get airplay because they think that's rubbish. They'd rather just create the type of music that really stirs them up.

When I think about my daughter, she's so passionate about horse stuff; training horses to behave properly and to get them jumping and build up their confidence.

And then my other son is very passionate about gaming. And when he gets into a state of flow with an electronic game, he's unbeatable. He can beat anyone of my friends, anyone I've ever put against him. He can beat them even if he only uses a knife and they've got the best machine gun available in the game. He can just wipe them to the floor. And he must be just automatically processing every possible scenario available to him and he can just run rings around them.

Dan: Yeah. Time would be distorting slowly in that situation I would guess.

James: Definitely. The amount of time they prefer to spend on a game definitely proves that one. You know some of those hardcore gamers actually die because they don't eat and the really hardcore ones are like peeing into buckets because they can't leave the screen. They don't even want to have a toilet break. So they must be really, really absorbed; I think absorbed is such a good expression of flow.

So what I'd like to do now if possible is to formulate a couple of action steps. It's great to pontificate. We've got this thing, yes, Dan, I'm sold, flow is awesome, give me 3 doses, you know like, how do we actually turn this into action?

Action Steps

Dan: Yeah, OK. So one of the key parts of flow is you've got to be doing just one thing. So the first action step is to be less ambitious and more successful. So the whole point here is that as a society, we're being overwhelmed with this idea of MORE; more money, more time, more fun, more everything. But we're often underwhelmed with the virtue of less. And the whole point is if that you're doing 20 things in a day, you're probably not going into flow in any of them.

It's like with Warren Buffett, we spoke about before, 90% of his wealth actually came from 10 investments. So I think it's really, really important to look at all the things you have to do and like Dan Sullivan says in any day, he does 3 things, and I take it further. I'd actually start off with just one or two. And what that does is it gives your brain this space to breathe, I can't tell you how relaxing it is just to say, "My to-do list today is one or two things." Now it's not to say you're lazy, like you actually spend quite a lot of time on those things because those things are important.

So I think what happens is a lot of people do lots of things, but a lot of things that they're doing are actually not very important. So that one thing, it can actually take the whole day potentially, but it is important.

You know what's actually interesting, I just recently came across the word "priority"

that when the word came into the English language into the 1400s, it was singular. And it stayed singular for around 500 years. And then in the 1900s, we decided to pluralize it and we started talking about priorities. It's just interesting how our perception with everything has changed.

So I really think it's important to do less each day. But to make those things very important, and there's a really great book called "The One Thing." And in that book, they have two really useful questions. The first question is: "What's the one thing that you can do today such that by doing it, everything else would be easier or unnecessary?" Really, really powerful question. And then related to that, which is I think even stronger is, "Until my one thing is done, everything else is a distraction."

So basically, what is that one thing and let's get that done and really everything else is a distraction. So when I start the day, I'll write one or two things down, and then I'll have a whole list of other distractions. And I know that they might have to get done but that's later, between when I start at 2 o'clock, I'm really going to be focused on these one or two things.

And related to that is, I think it's really important to try and eliminate things because you can't do everything so you need to delegate, you need to outsource. In eliminating things, some things you can eliminate by just not doing them, or delegating them, or outsourcing them. Every week, I always ask myself a question, I say, "What is one thing that I've done this week that if I keep doing will stop me from getting the results I want to achieve?" So I'm always trying to prune back. So that takes care of total elimination.

But sometimes you'll see you can partially eliminate. So for example, if you're creating content. For example, one thing which I've seen several people do, Taki actually was one of the first people that showed me this, was that when you've got an idea, you've got this idea you want to write a blog post, instead of doing that, it can be a lot easier to just take out some mind map software. I really like a program called XMind. You just mind map what you want to do, mind map the points, it's just in brief bullet points, and then you use something like [ScreenFlow](#) for Mac or Camtasia for PC, and you just talk to the screen and then you've got a video recording, and then someone can go off and they can create the article.

So you've done what you're uniquely good at, you've focused your energy on something that's important. A lot of people are really good at expressing an idea, they really understand the customer but they may not be the best writer. So someone else could do that. So that's a way to partially eliminate things.

James: Cool. There's a lot of points there. I immediately thought of "The One Thing" as well. It's a good book and coincidentally for a couple of years prior to reading that book, I've been using "The One Thing" idea in [my mastermind](#). All I ask each member each week is what one thing would they like to have achieved by the same time next week. And then the next week I ask them how they went. It's hard to hide from one to do, isn't it?

Dan: It is.

Practical tips

James: So that's good. It really ties in well with the Pareto Principle that the bulk of your results are going to come from just a few of the things and the rest aren't really that important.

Let's talk about a practical way to achieve this. In my office, I've got a whiteboard that's on trolleys. So it's a double-sided whiteboard, you know, the type that can flip over, you've probably seen one at school. On the back of the whiteboard is where I write stuff that I would like to get done, and on the front is where I put the one thing that I'm actually doing.

Dan: Oh, nice.

James: So the only way to get from the back of the board to the front is for me to rub off the one thing and I can just bring forward one idea at a time.

Dan: Very good. I like that one.

James: I'm all about practical tips. What can I say? I'm an ideas man.

So I'm big on deletion as well. The same could be said for your wardrobe. You go and pick the ten shirts that you've got. I was reading a book recently, it suggested you turn all the coat hangers facing away and then over the next season, you see what ones you haven't turned, so when you put the shirt back if you actually wear it, you turn the coat hanger. Anything that you haven't turned is really part of the deletion pile because it's not being used, it's not relevant.

You sort of touched on modality, only sticking to the modality that works best for you so that you're not investing wasted energy on substandard things. So you're never going to get in flow as a writer if you're a high visual or an auditory sort of person. If you love talking instead of typing, then stick with that and have stuff around you. I love repurposing. I've got repurposing down to an art now where I'll

even do someone else's podcast and record my side of the conversation and give it to my team to turn it into an infographic and publish it on my own site because they can strip out the main points and illustrate them and it's good stuff.

Let's move on then. We've got this down. We've got to be less ambitious and more successful by just really focusing on the most essential things. What else can we do?

Unusual timings

Dan: What else can we do? My next point is all about unusual timings. I got this idea from a guy called Josh Waitzkin, who is an incredible guy. He's an 8-time National Chess Champion. He's a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu black belt, a 13-time National and 2-time World Champion of Tai Chi; he's a crazy, crazy guy.

One of the things that he mentions, which I think was really, really smart was: a lot of people have heard the idea where before you go to sleep, you ask yourself a question. And then often, you'll wake up with an answer. And that actually works really well. Not particularly a new idea. He takes this idea a lot further.

What he says is, a lot of the time I have this finish mentality. It's also like this, how can I do more of this? I'm going to get this done before the end of the day. I'm going to get all of these done before lunch. He goes, "Nah, it's actually a big mistake." He goes, "What you should do is you should go to lunch with something incomplete. You should go to lunch with a question, like a problem you can't solve. Because what that will do is it will give your subconscious time to actually come up with a solution." So similarly at the end of the day, you should try to not finish something, and you should have this idea like, "Oh, what do I do with that?" Because when you come back the next day, you'll have that answer.

Steps to getting into flow with unusual timings

In terms of the steps to getting into flow; the first step is getting all the information, the second is actually giving your brain time for it to process, and then after you come back, Step 3 is you'll get into flow. So I thought that was really clever in terms of using unusual timing so that you actually let your subconscious be not just productive before you go to bed but also productive at different downtimes during the day. Before you go surfing.

James: Yeah. It really extends on the ideas put forward in psycho-cybernetics, that we are a server mechanism. We are like a problem solving machine and I'm a huge fan of asking questions. One of the mentors that I had drummed into me to

question everything. And you want great answers? Ask great questions. And we should be asking ourselves questions, “How can I? What would be the best? What’s the easiest way?” etc. All right.

Dan: Yeah. I’ve definitely always loved that line, you know, the quality of your life is directly proportional to the quality of your questions. So yeah, I think there’s a lot to that.

James: So true. I think one thing, just to follow on to that, is I think when you switch from employee to entrepreneur, you have this huge white canvas staring you in the face. You have a lot more decisions to make. “What should I do today?”

Dan: A lot more options.

James: Yeah. Unbelievable amount of options. Do I sleep in? Do I wake up? Do I grow my business? Do I pursue lifestyle? Do I travel? Do I stay at home? Do I go to this conference? Do I not? Do I do a podcast? Do I not? You know, like there’s so many things. Do I hire more people? What should I do? Like you’ve certainly got all these things to think about. That as the employee you’re just being directed all day. You don’t have to think so much at all. So these are real tools that are practical. So the unusual timings – great idea. What else have you got?

Distinguishing and separating processes

Dan: Next thing is to distinguish between brother and sister processes. So what I mean by that is similar to the idea when we’re talking about modalities but slightly different. There are certain tasks, which are brother and sister tasks, which need to be done to get a result. But are not good to do at the same time. So some examples:

Planning and doing. So Friday morning, 9 o’clock, I have an appointment to do planning. I have to fight with myself to not do anything, to just spend that time thinking.

Concepts and data. Sometimes you’re thinking about the big picture and sometimes you get lost in some data and you want to stay focused on the big picture.

Writing and editing. When you’re writing, you don’t want to correct yourself. Unfortunately, we’ve been brainwashed at school, “Oh, no no, things have to be perfect.” And so, that’s really killed a lot of our creativity.

So you want to separate the creative, expressive processes, with the editing and the data related processes. You want to separate getting ideas with evaluating ideas. In terms of practical things, they're like actually having a mind map. I find it really useful. I'm just going to get ideas out, or I'm just going to have a pen and a blank sheet of paper, I'm just going to create.

So really separating those processes, I think is important so that you stay in flow. Because once you've get into those data, once you go into that other type of process, it really takes you off the rails.

James: Yeah it makes practical sense. Even if you're a software developer, the person giving the brief and instructing the build is different to the one building the thing, and then there should be someone different to the person building it doing the checking. There's tasks that you shouldn't combine. Very, very good. And obviously, the fundamental thing here is that you're getting back to that one thing. You're not a one size fits all processor.

Dan: Yeah. And I think just being aware of the fact that there are multiple processes that you need. Like if you're writing. You know you're going to write and you're going to edit, but just saying to yourself before, "OK, I'm just going to write, I'm not going to do the other process, that taught me a lot in just staying focused.

What is the Chinese military approach?

Next idea is the Chinese military approach and really what we're talking about here is that in ancient times, the way that Chinese military was structured was that, you'd always have the chief at the back of the base. The idea was that the enemy would have to get through all of the less senior military staff before actually getting to the chief.

And today obviously we don't have Chinese military and enemy running around the house but what we do have is more of a mental game today. Because today, we will get people that will annoy us, we will get emails that have an emotional effect on us, we will get people that frustrate us and the question becomes, how will we respond?

Will we let them take us out of this state, this fluid concentration? Or will we somehow be able to retain that state? And it is also related to this idea that, there are some people who react and there are other people who respond. And for me the one thing that I've done 10 years ago for the first time was meditation.

I sort of slightly ignored it for a while but relatively recently, I've really been strict

and I've been just doing it every single day and I can't tell you how much more peaceful it has made me, being able to observe what's happening in this situation, they've obviously got this issue here, let's just try to make them feel better and taking it personally.

The power of meditation

Also in Tim Ferriss's podcast, he said that every single one of his guests are people who regularly meditate so I think it's really worth thinking about that you want to protect, just like that chief in Chinese military, you want to protect this thing that you're doing, you want to protect this fluid state. So how are you going to do that? For me meditation has been, massive.

James: Yeah, and for me too, I think it's been good. I just read "10% Happier" and he talks about react and respond, exactly what you just said.

Setting up goals

Dan: The last idea here has something to do with the way you briefly discussed in a Facebook conversation which is affirmations might make you delusional and just really thinking about the difference between goals and systems and yeah it's really interesting, Scott Adams, who is the creator of Dilbert, he has this thing where he was sort of saying ...

James: Big fan of cubicle working

Dan: Yeah, and he's a very sarcastic and brilliant guy and he said, goals are for losers, I'm not sure of goals are for losers, but he's given a really good point, which is if you set a goal, you're basically saying, I'm not yet good enough until I reach my goal. And how some people would run a marathon and just stop and some people will overexert and say well I have to do three bench presses today. Whereas if you're taking a systems approach, you'll go, well I'm just going to do this consistently, I'm not feeling that good today, you know what? Let me just do two, you know, I'm not going to kill myself.

And really, the idea here is, you know James clearly wrote this [really good article that I posted on Facebook](#) about the difference between a system and a goal. If you're a coach, your goal is to win the championship and your system is what your team practices. If you're writer, your goal might be to write a book but your system is your writing schedule. If you're an entrepreneur, your goal is to build a big business, your system is your sales and marketing system.

So the whole point is if you didn't have the goal, would you achieve that result, if you consistently followed those systems? And I believe you would. I think there's a very strong argument that you would and the whole point is that if you're in a state of flow while you're doing these things, and you're following these systems because it's congruent with who you are, it makes sense to you, it's easy, it's effortless. You don't have to say to yourself, you have to go out and practice surfing today, you're just going to do it because you love doing it.

Same with working in your business doing the tasks that you love and you're good at. So really, this whole point here is that if you really want to achieve a goal, instead of being so attached to getting this outcome, you really want to think about what are the systems and what are the actual work you got to do and really get energized on actually doing that work.

A lot of people are very excited about the outcomes but they're not actually excited about doing the work and that's a big source of disconnect.

Focusing on the short term

James: Yes, because it seems so far in the future you just don't do it. Like a year down the track seems a long way so I'll do it tomorrow, I'll start tomorrow. And that's why I like short time frames to focus on sort of getting some measurable improvements in your position from where you are to where you want to go but focusing on the short term.

If you think about the goals versus systems and process, I'd say I'd be like sure I have in mind what sort of business you want to have 5 years from now, what would you love to be doing, how would it look? If you had that, would you be happy? That's a really important thing, 'cause a lot of people build something and say, I hate this.

Like they go and get a Subway franchise and they're working really long hours, or a coffee shop. They're there in 4 in the morning and they're exhausted. The dream isn't exactly the reality so give it a bit of a thought to really walking around in your future version of what you want and test all the buttons and the doors. Make sure it's exactly what you want and then you come back down to where you are now and you just draw a line to it and think about it perhaps as a train tracks to the platform that you want to get to in the end and start rolling that train to the next station. Just the next station.

If you get to the next station, you know you're making forward progress and that's

a short, easy thing to focus on. Train to the next station. And it's the process, we have to turn the wheels. We got to get some fuel into that engine. In the beginning, we have to shovel the coal ourselves and later we hire someone to shovel it.

Questions you need to ask

Dan: Yeah, there's definitely something to be said about small winds and I think that those small winds will come a lot easier if you are focused on saying, OK this is what I'm going to be doing today, these are the two things. I'm in love with these ideas of whether it's creating content or it's something that comes naturally to you rather than buying the Subway and hoping that maybe you'll be happy one day.

James: Exactly, it comes back to questions. What's going to get me the best impact? Of all the things I could do, what would give me the highest impact that makes the most sense that I'm super excited about that I'll do regardless if anyone tells me. I often speak to people who have got objections and they say to me stuff like, oh, I keep putting it off. It's usually because there's no connection between this arbitrary goal and the reality of the processes required to get there.

Dan: Yeah, if you keep putting it off, why did you decide to do it in the first place if you really do want to do this?

James: Exactly, like someone would apply for coaching. So I say what sort of result are you looking for? And they would say, "I want to make \$5 million a year." And I'll question them, I'll say, why is that important to you? What does that mean for you to have that and it really falls down quickly. It's just a number thrown out there. There's no real connection to that so that the actions won't come forth either. So we break it down to more practical things. Like how many hours a week would you like to be working or engaged in this project? What sort of things would you say, natural strengths and what assets do you have already that can be leveraged?

Like what do you do when no one is looking and you're not being measured? Like what magazines do you buy? What do you do on your days off? They're always a good indicator as to where someone's true heart lies.

Dan: I think the point is that if you're doing things that you don't have to do, if you're doing things which you anyway choose to be doing, you're naturally going to do them better, you're going to have more enthusiasm, people are going to appreciate them more, and you're going to get better results. Instead of doing something that you're going to be like, "Oh, I have to do this." That's why I think

this whole idea of systems is so good. It's like if you're consistently doing something and you can say, these systems when put together will build this house, well off you go. It is going to work.

A recap

James: Beautiful. All right. So let's recap the 5 actions steps from this session about productivity. Be less ambitious and be more successful. So less things, but really attack those with gusto. Unusual timings; so leave a few cliffhangers for yourself that you can solve when you're doing non-work activities. Distinguish which processes are like oil and water, or yin and yang, or brother and sister, than should not be combined. Split them out into single items. The Chinese military approach; we're saying put yourself behind a few layers.

Dan: For me, that's really just meditate fundamentally. I really think everyone should at least try it, look into it. So that you have this ability to respond instead of react.

James: Yeah. And for me it's that but also get a helpdesk. So you've got a bit of a buffer between you and the front wall of the monotony that comes with having a business, from the questions that get asked 1,000 times, and just put some support in place there, a buffer, like an actual business buffer for you.

It doesn't mean don't be reachable or contactable. I mean people can just email me for example, but I can respond to an email in my own time. Then I'm not taking any cold Skype calls. That's something that needs to be preserved; my time is going to be for doing productive things like this.

Then there's the affirmation on the side of things just be careful about this sort of airy-fairy futuristic New Year's resolutions, wonderful goals you've set, and just get back to reality, and have some kind of system. I like the idea of routine as well. Routine sets you free and you can make specific progress if you have a routine.

And interestingly for me, one year down the track as a surfer, the main thing that really helped me was having the routine of just going everyday, just getting wet every day, even if it was for 30 minutes and I could barely catch a wave. It was that routine of forming a habit on the process of getting the wetsuit, going to the cold water, paddling and getting smashed around a bit, and just doing everyday. It builds up your muscles and your tolerances, and your muscle memory, to the point where now you don't think consciously about a lot of the things, they just happen automatically and it's so much more enjoyable, and access whole new levels of

exhilaration and performance because you've put in the groundwork.

Dan: Yeah. And focus on doing that work and what you need to do to achieve the goal, I opposed to just obsessing about some result.

James: Yeah. There's a big difference between saying "I want to be an awesome surfer" to "I'm just going to go out everyday and try and catch three waves." Every day that it's good and not dangerous so whatever, I just want to try and catch three waves because if I keep catching three waves for a whole year, I'm going to have caught 1,000 waves and that means I'll inevitably collect that goal of being an accomplished surfer at some point in the future if I just stick with the process.

Dan: Yeah.

James: Dan, thanks for coming along talking to us about productivity.

Dan: It's been a pleasure.

James: So, it's Dan Dobos from leadmachine.com. I'd love it if you could come back and talk to us about some of the other topics. You're so accomplished with all these things. I know you do a lot of reading and implementing that you've got such a successful business. You do presentations, you do selling. Selling would be a fun one for us to talk about because we both have a foot in that world.

Dan: Yeah. I've started sales when I was really young and you know, it is something that people look at with less respect than it deserves. So I always enjoy talking about that.

James: Especially since they're already doing it, whether they acknowledge it or not in life. Even trying to convince their friends to see a particular movie, they're selling. If you want to understand about that then listen to our future episode. We'll link to it when it's published.

So thanks Dan for coming along. I'm getting excited about SuperFastBusiness Live. I'm sure you're ready to show us this phenomenal presentation?

Dan: Yeah, yeah. I'm really looking forward to it.

James: All right. We'll see you then.

Dan: Good on you. Talk to you soon.



superfastbusiness

Access more training to
improve your business
and your life

[CLICK HERE](#)