



Achieve Your Goals Podcast #111 - Productivity Hacks: Achieve More With Less

Nick: Welcome to the Achieve Your Goals Podcast with Hal Elrod. I'm your host Nick Palkowski and you're the listening to the show that is guaranteed to help you take your life to the next level faster than you ever thought possible. In each episode, you will learn from someone who has achieved extraordinary goals that most haven't. He's the author of the number 1, best-selling book, *The Miracle Morning*, a Hall of Fame business achiever, an international keynote speaker, ultra-marathon runner, and the founder of vipsuccesscoaching.com, Mr. Hal Elrod.

Hal: All right, Achieve Your Goal Podcast listeners this is Hal Elrod. This is a solo episode. We haven't done a solo episode in a while, meaning nobody's here, it's just me. Not even Nick, not even our buddy Nick Palkowski's on the line, it just me today. We've been interviewing a lot of fascinating people lately and I decided to do a solo episode, it was actually inspired by this new tool that I got called the productivity planner. No this is not a sponsored- It sounds like an ad, a sponsorship plug. "Check out the productivity planner." No, actually it's a tool that was created by our friends UJ Ramdas and Alex Ikonn that created *The Five Minute journal*, they're the owners of the company Intelligent Change.

This productivity planner, I got it in the mail, they did a Kickstarter a few months back. I got in the mail, I don't know, a week ago and I've

started using it and I'm loving it. I'm loving it. In fact my only gripe is that it doesn't have a spot necessarily for a pen so that I can have it with me at all times. Well, I can have it with me at all times but I've got to have a pen somewhere attached to it. Anyway, the point is I'm not going to talk about the productivity planner as much as I'm going to talk about what this reminded of you will. I had to be more productive, right?

We're going to talk about some productivity hacks today and how to achieve more with less. The one thing in the opening pages of the productivity planner, and I guess I'm holding it my hand so I am going to reference this as we go through the episode today, I was reminding of the very old story, a real life story of Charles Schwab. Charles Schwab, if you're not familiar with Charles, he was the owner of Bethlehem Steel Company, which became the single biggest independent steel producer back in, I believe, early 1900s. Schwab became one of the wealthiest people in the world.

There's this story of how Schwab was frustrated with his employees, at the lack of their productivity at one point. He made a deal with them that he would reward the person who increased productivity for their company. In that process he came across Ivy Lee, and Ivy Lee gave him a singular life changing piece of advice. The advice that Ivy gave to him was very simple. He said the process that Ivy was using was using for productivity is that every evening before finishing work, you might want to jot these down, this is not rocket science but are you doing it, right? That's always the question, it's not what you do that matters. Every evening before finishing work Ivy would do 5 things, or 4 things really.

Number 1, he would write down 3 to 5 things that he planned to get done the next day. That's the first, write down 3 to 5 things that you plan to get done the next day. Second thing, rank them from highest to lowest priority. Of those 3 or 5 things what's the most important? Then in the morning start working on the task of the highest priority,

and then last but not least only move on to the next task when you've completed the current task. Only move on to task number 2 when you're completed task number 3, onto 3 once you've completed 2 and so on and so forth, and then repeat that process.

While this may sound simple and you may go, "Yeah, that's nothing new," most of the ideas that we need to implement in our lives are typically fundamentals that have worked for successful people for decades or for centuries. Miracle Morning is a great example of that, the 6 practices known as the life savers, none of those were new but most people were having trouble implementing any one of those. Meditation was something that they had always thought of implementing or wanted to implement but they weren't implementing it. Maybe journaling was that for them or maybe it's morning exercise or whatever. None of these were new, it was just putting them into a system and actually making it doable so that every day you could check off your list that you meditated, you did your affirmations, visualization, reading, exercise, journaling, et cetera.

Ivy stressed to Charles Schwab the importance of completing the tasks in order of priority and resisting the urge to go to the next task before completing the previous one. If you don't complete the list of 5 tasks, you don't sweat it. If you get 3 or 4 of the tasks done that's fine, the important thing is to maintain focus on getting the highest priority task done. Now if you've heard the story before, the part that makes it pretty amazing is that at the end of 3 weeks, Charles Schwab sent Ivy Lee a check for \$25,000. Today that would be roughly \$300,000 in 2015, give or take. He included a note to Ivy mentioning that it was the most valuable piece of business advice he had ever received. It was within 5 years that their company, Bethlehem Steel, became the single biggest independent steel producer, making Schwab one of the wealthiest men in the world.

I share that with you, like I said it's nothing that you probably haven't heard before but are you doing that every day? I know that I'm not,

that's where the productivity planner, getting this and having a tool to do it, it's like I've known this for years and sometime I do it, sometimes I don't, sometimes I've been better than others. But what ends up happening, and this is human nature, think if you can relate to this. What ends up happening is you've got your to do list and you often look at it and human nature is to take the path of least resistance, that's human nature. We grab our to do list and we look at it and we go, "Hey what's something I could check off?" To kind of almost trick myself into feeling like I'm making progress.

But there's the different between being busy, which is just doing stuff for the sake of doing stuff, and then making progress which is actually completing activities or tasks or projects that are moving you in a meaningful direction and achieving the goals that matter the most in your life. That, as simple as it is, are you doing it? If not, like me, if this is an area of improvement for you, that's all I want you to get out of this call. I don't know how long it's going to be, it's not a call, it's a podcast, but I don't think it will be a real long one, although I always say that.

The point is, from now on, starting today at the end of each day, you prioritize what are the top 3 to 5 most important tasks that you will complete tomorrow, that you prioritize once you've written those down from 1 to 3, or 1 to 5, which is the most important, which is the most significant, and then the next day you execute in order and you don't move on to task number 2 until you've completed task number 3, or task number 1, you get what I'm saying with that. I'm going to flip through the productivity planner here. One of the things that the productivity planner uses, which I never knew the name of this but back in my sales days when I was in direct sales, this is actually the single most valuable technique that helped me rise to the top of my field, of all the sales people in my company.

It's known as the Pomodoro technique. The Pomodoro technique it is named after, Pomodoro is Italian for tomato and it gets its name from

the tomato shaped timer that its founder, the founder of this technique, Francesco Cirillo, first used to combat his procrastination. The idea of the Pomodoro technique is relatively simple. You decide on a clear task that you want to focus on that will take you at least 25 minutes to do. 25 minutes is one Pomodoro, and then you determine how many Pomodoros will it take me? You go, "Okay, this task will probably take me roughly 2 hours, that would be 4 Pomodoros, roughly 4 Pomodoros." The idea is that our ability to focus intently on one activity for an extended period of time, they've measured depending on the research that you read it's anywhere from 30 minutes to even upwards of 90 minutes.

I called this back when I implemented it in my sales career, half hours of power. I'm going to tell you the way that I applied it and how powerful it was. I got really clear on how many phone calls I needed to make to achieve all of my sales goals. Then I got really clear on how many phone calls I could make on average over the course of an hour, that was about 20 calls an hour. I could sometimes make more but I averaged a few hours and I went, "Well this hour I made 26, this hour I made 18, this hour ... " It averaged about 20. The half hours of power technique is where knowing that it was easier for us to stay focused on a smaller period of time and a smaller amount of tasks, I went from 60 minutes down to 30 and I went, "Okay, I'm going to do half hours of power."

The idea was that my activity, which was phoning ... You can apply this to anything, you can apply this to any activity. Cleaning your house, you can apply it to any activity. The idea was I knew that I would average about 10 calls every 30 minutes. My goal was to make those 10 calls as fast as I possibly could, with the idea, with the reward that I would earn a break from work to stretch or meditate or check Facebook or whatever, from the time that it took me to finish those 10 calls until that 30 minutes half hour of power time block was completed. If I was able to finish my 10 calls in 23 minutes, then I had

7 minutes until my next half hour of power started. 7 minutes to rest, to relax, et cetera.

This was powerful because what it allowed me to do is focus on the task at hand and in the case of making, you've ever been in sales, making sales calls, there was the rejection and people would be rude on the phone, and often you would let that affect you emotionally and then you wouldn't want to make any more calls. What this did, by focusing on [specific 00:11:24] the measurable metric, the task, how many calls I would make in a specific measurable amount of time. Then by setting myself up with this reward to get, and it's just an easy reward, just a break from work. It was something that psychologically what happens is when we know that we have a really short window of time, and if we maintain a sense of urgency in our activities, then we immediately get a short term reward. Very different from going, "Well if I do the stuff I'm doing for the next 10 years, gosh eventually it will pay off." That's a harder way to stay motivated when you've got a 10 year reward that you're working towards.

But if you've got a reward that's 30 minutes away, or 20 minutes away, it is a lot easier to stay motivated, stay disciplined, stay focused. What it did is instead of worrying about how my calls went, my results, you may have heard me say this before that, I believe the secret to success, or one of them, is to define your process, or me it was making those calls, and be committed to the process without being emotionally attached to your results. Most of us are emotionally attached to our results, if things go good we feel good and we keep going, if things go bad we don't feel good and we feel discouraged. What it used to be, before I created this strategy, was when I would call someone and they would be rude or they weren't interested or they would hang up on me, that used to really bother me. It's like, "Why would you hang up on me? I'm a nice person? If you knew me you wouldn't do that."

I would take it really personally, and when I shifted and I focused on committing to the process without being emotionally attached to the results, it was big shift. Because here's what happened, now if I made a call and someone answered, a prospect answered and they were like, "I'm not interested, don't ever call here again, click." Instead of getting all emotional about that, I would go, "Awesome, that's the fastest call I could have had," and I would tally that call. I was that much closer to earning my reward.

That was my technique, half hours of power. Everyday I would do usually 2 half hours of power, I needed to make 20 calls a day, and then I would go to the pool. Literally, I was 20 years old when I came up with this idea and I lived in an apartment back then with a pool. It was Central California, it was very hot. I would make my 20 calls for the day, then I'd go lay by the pool for a couple hours. I'd swim, get some exercise in, and then I would go shower, get in the car and go to my first appointments for the day.

Bringing this back to the Pomodoro technique, which is what the productivity planner that I'm looking at here is largely centered on. By the way if you want to get the ... I'll figure that out later. If you want to get the productivity planner, I should have figured that out where it is first, but I would probably Google productivity planner and you will find it. In fact we'll post a link in the show notes which I'll find out for you. The Pomodoro technique, number 1 you decide on clear task as mentioned that you want to focus on that will take you at least 25 minutes to do, because that's one Pomodoro. Then you start your timer for 25 minutes.

It's important to have a timer, you want to have something that is counting down or that is holding you accountable, keeping you on pace, keeping you on track. I use my phone now and I just set the timer for 25 minutes, and that time block is known as a Pomodoro. The idea is that you don't work on anything else. You don't work on anything else. I encourage to put your phone on airplane mode, turn

off your notifications, really so you can stay focused. If you do get distracted, it's okay, just gently bring yourself back to work. It happens, but if you get so distracted that you end up going into some other task for 5 minutes or longer, you've got to start your Pomodoro over, you've got to start it over.

What this does is over time this technique will condition you to focus exclusively on the task at hand, and therefore it will increase your productivity, it will increase your ability to focus and it will increase your discipline. Once the time ends at 25 minutes that's your time for a reward, that's for a mini celebration. Get up, stretch, get some water, do a happy dance. You have a 5 minute break until you start the next Pomodoro, that's it. It's a simple technique but it is so powerful. I called it half hours of power back in the day but it's known for longer than that as the Pomodoro technique.

If that's really all you walk away with today is to try those 2 techniques. The 2 techniques are at the end of the day clarify what are the top 3 to 5 priorities for the next day, that's your to do list. By the way, limit your to do list to 5, that is advice that Benjamin Franklin gave, the idea that having a to do list is important. Benjamin Franklin is famous for saying if you fail to plan you're planning to fail. There's good research that shows people are significantly more likely to follow through on a task if they write it down. Keeping your to do list every day in writing, but keeping it to a [minimum 00:16:41] of 5 items or less. Less really is more, and when you prioritize 1 to 5 you're focusing on the most important tasks.

At the end of each day, start today, write down your top 3 to 5 priorities for the next day, number them in order and then the next day decide what time you're going to commit to implement those priorities. You might even have, for example a one hour block of time would be 2 Pomodoros, 25 minutes plus a 5 minute break, and then another 25 minute Pomodoro and a 5 minute break. I'd encourage you to try this for the next 5 to 7 days. Try it for the next 5 to 7 days and

implement it in a way where you see ... You need to give it at least 5 days I would say to see how it's going to benefit you and how it's going to start reconditioning you and shift the way that you think about productivity and how focused you are, et cetera.

Oh, my son just came in. All right buddy I'll be right there okay? I wish you guys could see my son Alston, he is 3 and he's so, so cute. So cute, so sweet. So sweet, 95% of the time. 5% of the time, he has his moment we'll say, but amazing. All right buddy, I'll be right there, okay? Oh man he's coming in. All right, I guess this is time to wrap up. I've got to give my son some attention here, but that's it, 3 to 5 tasks for tomorrow. Do that for the next 5 days in a row minimum to start seeing the benefits of that.

Once you've identified those top 5 tasks order them in order of importance but use Pomodoros to implement. Figure out how many Pomodoros are you going to need to complete each of those tasks, estimate is it 1, is it 3, is it 5? Here's an important caveat, an important distinction here is, if one of the things you write down you're like, "That's going to take me 20 hours to complete, or 5 hours," or whatever. Then break it down into more manageable chunks. If you're like, "I need to write the first chapter of my book, but that's going to take a heck of a lot of Pomodoros", or, "I don't even know how many Pomodoros it's going to take." Whenever it is a big project, what is the first part of that project? What's the first thing that I can do?

Often if you don't know where to start, I always say Google where to start. Google, "First step in doing blank," and you'll get some answers. Leverage Pomodoros and then track your Pomodoros. That's what's cool about the productivity planner, is that it helps you do that for the week, plan out the most important tasks for the week and then your secondary tasks and then your additional tasks. Each day you've got them in order of 1 to 5 and it actually has this little box where you put in a target number of Pomodoros that you guesstimate it will take to complete the task and then the actual number of Pomodoros at the

end. Then there's little bubbles for you to track every time you do a Pomodoro.

I'm going to go ahead and I want to do this, I hate to leave you guys hanging. I want to look at where you guys can get the productivity planner because ... It's actually much simpler than I thought, productivityplanner.com, okay that was easy.

Productivityplanner.com if you want to check it out. But whether or not you use the productivity planner or you use a line notebook or you use your computer, some for of technology, there are your productivity hacks for today. Keeping it simple, prioritizing your tasks, working on them in order of what's most important and breaking your time into 30 minute chunks. 25 minutes of focused productivity and 5 minutes of min celebration, relax, rejuvenate, get re-focused, et cetera.

That's it for today. Thank you so much for listening to the Achieve Your Goals Podcast, I really appreciate you and I look forward to our next conversation, take care.

Nick: Thank you so much for tuning in to this episode of the podcast. Now hopefully you are ready to go out there and to actually get more done, to use some of these productivity hack. Which ones are you going to actually start implementing right away? Let us know by going to halelrod.com/111 for episode number 111, and just leave a comment there on the show notes page. Let us now your big take aways from this episode.

Also if you haven't done so yet, please go subscribe to the podcast on iTunes by going over to halelrod.com/itunes, click on the little subscribe button and then leave a rating a review. Rating and reviews truly are the best way for you to show your appreciation for the show because they help more people find out about the podcast and decide if this is the one for them. Now until next week, it's time for you to go out there, take action and achieve your goals.

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