

**10 STRATEGIES THAT  
HELP INCREASE  
PRODUCTIVITY.  
ORGANIZE YOURSELF.  
PART II**

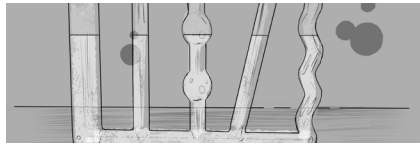
---

SELFFORMAT.COM

KRZYSZTOF MARCZEWSKI



# INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF PRODUCTIVITY. ORGANIZE YOURSELF. PART I



This article is the second one in four-part series "Organize yourself". If you didn't read the previous article, it's better to start from the beginning because I will refer to it.

This part will show you a few keywords which really make sense, and in my opinion, should drive our lives. Nowadays they become buzzwords, but they shouldn't be interpreted in such a way. You will find these keywords as underlined words in subheaders. During that part, we'll discover a lot of W's (what, why, when).

The purpose of this article is to give you a complex overview of self-organizing. What is it about, how to get started, what to keep in mind and how to manage the most precious resource - time. I won't give you a detailed path and a step-by-step list of how to change every aspect of your life because these tips are scalable. It means that you'll be able to translate it to your individual case and domain.

You won't find here an advice like: eat healthy food, do sport, read

books because it's a core. Instead, I'll introduce 10 not-so-obvious things from the world of productivity.

## 1. Keep a balance between each aspect of your life

Every human has different beliefs and interests. But every one of us is trying to manage some resources. We can distinguish several main areas:

- **body health**
- **mental health** / relations
- **material goods** / finances

It's like character statistics from games. Some of us have better “stats” up front. Lots of us think about improvement in some of these fields. Others don't even try to improve any of them and that's **the first mistake** we should start to be aware of. Why?

Because we should take a look at the **bigger picture** — **every area as one organism**. Organism where one defect could (and most likely will) affect the other areas. In short:

we should care about every single area of our life and keep them at least in a good shape.

After "life calendar" lecture, you could say: *'It's nothing but the race against time. It even looks exactly like corporation rat race. I want to live slowly — not like those crazy, constantly stressed people that live in a hurry with nothing else but careers.'*

You know, everything could be stressful if we make it stressful. The same thing is with time management. If you schedule your day with no rest—you probably do more tasks, but you won't make much progress, especially if you are doing creative work. You may think that you do, but you won't.

For example, if you're constantly overworked by scheduling more than you can do throughout the day or you don't sleep well, then there's is no balance because your health condition is getting worse. We sometimes don't feel that but it happens in the background. We realize it after time when it's too late. Your priceless time and money will be spent for recovery instead of just sleeping enough.

It could also go in an opposite direction. When you're not working for some reason (e.g. long student holiday time) there is a tendency to not schedule time at all. In my opinion, it could work but only for a single day, when you have to do nothing - just rest for sanity or health-related reason because your body sends you a message 'calm down' (by the way, this assumption is also a plan). So going back: unplanned free time will slip throughout our fingers, and by the end of the day we realize that we did nothing. Additionally, we'll be tired anyway.

It's time to introduce second W - WHAT. The key we need here is **the balance**. Balance between:

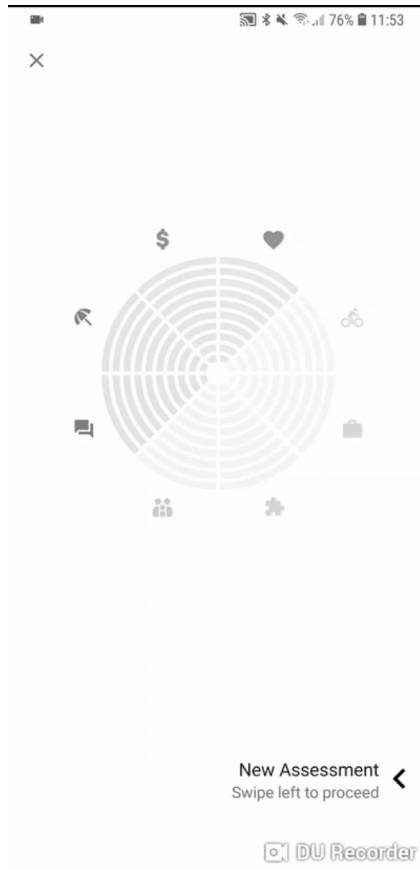
- rest and life (not work-only).
- self-development areas that I'd mention.

Now let's extend areas issue. There is a good concept from author Miłosz Brzeziński about "three gardens" that we have to take care of. These gardens are:

- work
- home (relations)
- yourself

This idea comes from his book "Życiologia" (we could translate this title freely as "Life-ology"). He explains details of how to keep balance in those three areas. It's definitely worth reading book, unfortunately, there's no English translation at this moment.

Categorization above is also good but too short to visualize the scale of the problem.



### Remente app screen

During research for this series, I tried several top rated mobile apps connected to this topics. One of them seems to be built on this idea. App distinguishes 8 areas to rate and shows neglected factors that require more effort:

- Love & Relationships
- Health & Fitness
- Career & Education
- Personal Development
- Family
- Friend & Social life

- Fun & Recreation
- Finances

As we can see there are sub-categorized areas I'd mention which could be helpful in understanding the complexity of this issue.

## **2. Produce more than you absorb**

We associate being a producer with the creative type of minds: artists, businessman etc. But it shouldn't be limited to a specific group. Being producer means that you give (not only make) a value to somebody (including and primarily to yourself).

"Be the producer rather than the consumer."

*Miłosz Brzeziński*

To achieve that, things that you absorb should also be valuable. It's easy to misunderstand entertainment and rest (which we need) with laziness and wasting your precious time (which is just being a typical consumer). Let's say you like watching several tv-series. And also reading facebook wall and Instagram kittens profile, and.. you know. You can do it, but probably you could limit that tv shows to just one the best series, and other things move to one specific hour in your week. There are endless possibilities in consumer things reduction.

People like to compare themselves with others. And usually, everybody thinks about themselves as a bit better than "typical citizens". I would say that a typical citizen is consumer type: so if you are more consumer than a producer, then you belong to that "typical" group and your material status or education doesn't change anything.

If you want to be a person that gives the value to others, things that you absorb should also be valuable.

### 3. Always do an assertive evaluation

Evaluate and be able to say no. Ask yourself how could you rate watching "interesting" movies on YouTube, meeting with your colleague for a beer or next "important" clothes shopping. Is it important, SUPERimportant, or just nice? Let's visualize it using example scale:

- 6 - milestone
- 5 - important
- 4 - interesting
- 3 - nice "to do / to have"
- 2 - fun but unnecessary
- 1 - garbage

The smaller scale, the easier it is to evaluate the value and get rid of worthless things. This approach will help you set your schedule. Pairing it with plan then done technique (which we will talk about in a second part) will make a huge step forward. What's more, it can serve as a guideline in a whole life.

Using the above example, assertiveness occurs when your schedule is filled with things from the top two levels of the scale for the most part. It means that you are able to just say "no" to some things and people, and mainly (again) to your lazy self, sitting comfortably and playing a new game with micro-transactions.

When should you be assertive and evaluate?

This is our third W: **always - as a habit.**

All the things that are connected to time management need one thing in return. Stopping being lazy. Let's check why this is destructive and looks nice only from INside.

### 4. Deep work - the key of flow

Productivity has lots of point under the hood. One of them is the **ability to be focused**, which without being rested exploit faster than fast. The second, equally important element affecting mental clarity is **perseverance**.



Keep learning how to be focused. You could begin with just 5-10 minutes of uninterrupted work. That also need some arrangements: unclutter space, turning off unneeded distractions etc. which we will talk about in part II. But when you'll get to this moment than truly be focused. If that was problematic, then lower this time.

Step two is to constantly increase the time in which you are focused. **The goal is immersion and total loss in the activity which is described as flow.** It requires practice.

That statement stands in opposition to "rest and taking a break every e.g. 25 minutes" - which keep your focus in long-term. Our brain needs to take a break in order to keep being focused. But the above task is just an exercise. When you'll be able to be focused for one hour or more than you've learned it. Then it's time, to set reasonable time intervals and learn to be in focus-mode for all day (with rest every X min). This idea is described widely in part II but this subsection tells us just to learn to focus, not how long should it take once you've achieved that.

You probably wonder why it's so necessary. Firstly, almost everybody likes immersive experience - that's the fun part. More practical part is that the more attention you spend on the job, the more progress you make in that field.

## 5. Minimalism and the power of less

I remember the first time I started going deeper into topics I'm touching now. It begins from a single article about people who have implemented minimalism into their lives. Believe me or not but this turned my life on the path I'm proud to follow.

"Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."

*Andrew Hunt, David Thomas*

Minimalism is an essential tool in organizing toolbox because it helps you focus on most important things. I'll break it into two parts.

## **outside**

Every idea starts in your head but we'll separate material things or what you are doing from thoughts ideas or interests. The article about minimalism mentions about people that live with just a few things that they are able to pack in a backpack. That's an insane idea, but the more you read about it the more sense it has. I know that you probably won't save only a few things, but the point is that you think about it. Open any of your wardrobe or drawer with "maybe I'll use it" things. Probably none of that is truly useful to occupy space in your home.

There's a nice rule that if you don't use something for one year (so it's full cycle of every season in which it could be useful) then get rid of it. Give it to somebody who could use it, or throw it away. The best example of the usage of this technique is to try it with your clothes.

That's just one of examples in minimalism journey - it could touch every aspect of your life. Choosing this path is great because of "less". Fewer worries that occupy your mind.

## **inside**

Being minimal inside means that you maintain focused, uncluttered mind. Even if you like to dance, write a blog, make woodwork and have kids etc. you are not distracted by the rest of things while working on one of them. You are doing one thing and you're thinking only about it. That also means that you don't discuss and worry about past or future or that you should maybe do something different.

How to get rid of thoughts that appear unexpectedly while working? Write it down, forget and get back to the current task.

If you are constantly distracted then you should probably limit the number of interests or take care of your fears or inner critic. And that's just the beginning of minimalism. It starts from one area and then spread to another.

## 6. Meditation - do not underestimat mental hygiene

Calmness is one of the elements in this puzzle. A good way to achieve that balance in task-oriented life is to have time for mind relaxations. It's also described as mental hygiene.

What's most important and we should have this in mind that meditating doesn't have to do anything with religion. It's common to connect this only with spiritual things, but it's an independent thing like "talking" or "sitting".

There are lots of types of meditation like zazen, mindfulness, vipassana or meditation with mantras. Practicing it regularly comes with lots of benefits such as calmness, mindfulness, awareness, improved ability of deep focus and relaxation etc. That's just psychological advantages but meditating also has good neurological and physiological effects. Talking about the benefits of it is like talking about the pros of a healthy lifestyle.

There is also a cure for your excuse "I don't know how to meditate. I don't have time and teacher etc" - Guided meditations - you're hearing teacher who explains what to do. There are plenty of free and paid apps worth trying, just search for an app about meditation. You could also try youtube videos or find some local group near your home.

## 7. Make use of procrastination's light side

Remember Tim Urban, author of the life calendar? His second best-known article series is exactly about procrastination, but it's better to start from watching his TED talk. I don't want to double what's said there but I want to point out an interesting issue.

Of course, we should fight with procrastination but it's also somehow helpful with a bit of delay. Because if we have a long-term task, like (writing an article in one month) and you plan to write e.g. 100 words a day starting from the right now, an idea about it won't be clear enough. You need time for your mind to think about it for you. The time when you're not working on it and even not thinking about

it isn't a complete waste of time, because your mind is processing pieces of information in the background. There are big chances that in e.g. 5th of 30 days, you'll unexpectedly come with an idea about how to write that article. It's a sign that your mind processed it and throw you a result of that work.

So the point is again: balance. Pure procrastination like starting work in deadline day or day before it's just silly. But starting bigger tasks without some time for thinking it's also not so right.

## **8. Back up your memories**

Do you remember what was the best thing that happens in your life last week? Did you achieve your goals? Do you have any specific? The most common answer is no.

Even if your answer is “yes” then what about last year? Or maybe three years back — not so far, but still very hard to recall from your memory. And if you finally recall some - it won't have too many details. And that details could also be corrupted. If you didn't store them in diary/calendar/photos they will be just foggy memories.

You'll ask me ‘What is that for?’ Is that worth spending my time? That answer may be different for each person. But there are some things worth keeping in mind:

- our memory is like cheese with big holes which likes to change the course of past events over time.
- writing things down helps seeing progress over weeks. This gives us a clear signal to take action to not stand still and start making some changes. It's like a photo from 5 years ago -> you might think that there are no such changes, but there are. For your memory, you looks the same and it's hard to have a clear picture of ourselves from the past (if there were no drastic damage/changes). But if you have pictures, you could see changes. The better the resolution the more details you could see and compare. It's the same thing with making a backup of your memories.

You'll ask 'What does this have to do with time management?'. To be honest writing diary is a time-consuming task. But it comes with a

value over a time. It gives you a wide view of your life progress. And the most value comes with your own conclusions.

As areas to improve differ for every person, keeping track of things may also vary. Some people have to write a diary, others stay with keeping track of finances, possessed things etc. We will take a closer look at part II.

## 9. Never stop process of self-improvement

As you know boiling-frogs doesn't notice little changes in its environment and ends up cooked. It's a bit similar to the example of turkey which doesn't expect that the hand gives him security would pick it up as well after several hundred of similar, safe days. From the turkey's point of view (it's observer dependent) this event is described as a black swan - extremely unlikely event. I encourage you to read Nassim Taleb's book "Black swan" about that topic because life is full of such unexpected events.

That's the reason to leave the lazy zone - be prepared for possibilities and dangers.

Let's get back to boiled frogs. In "Pragmatic programmer" book in the chapter about self-development (which is brand-independent) this tale was used to warn against lack of development in your business domain. If you won't be up-to-date your value decrease and from your next employer point of view you become useless. But this topic isn't only associated with work. It also doesn't mean that you should buy the newest things and wear top-fashion clothes. **It means that learning doesn't stop at school or college. It's an endless task.** Of course, if you won't become a boiled frog.

Every day comes with new discoveries and tool which - same as watching your friends food photos - are only waiting for our laziness. How to learn to survive in "always something new" world? Again one of a good solution is to be assertive and evaluate every new task or things that appear around you. If you manage it then you are ready for the next breakthrough step which takes productivity to the whole new level.

## 10. Systematic repetitions

All of this, could be the beginning or re-approach to take care of everything that matter. If you're just starting organizing those "untouched" aspects of your life it's always good to make progress gradually. If you'll keep doing it well then just dig deeper.

Finally, I want to invite you to download a summary of the article above. The graphical brief representation is easier to remember. So if you think you should have in mind any of these ideas, come back to them regularly because:

„The problem, of course, is that unless they are drilled into us systematically, or integrated into our way of thinking, (...) great observations are rapidly forgotten.”

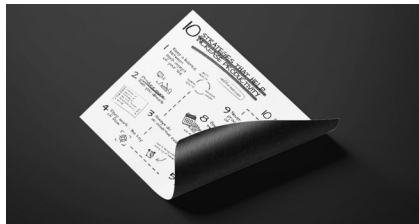
*Nassim Nicholas Taleb*

### what's next?

Now when you know more strategies, it's time for Part III - **II time management tools & tips for power users**

### gifts! (visual summary + ebook versions)

You could download beautiful visual summary of this post for free. Consider signing up for newsletter to get notification about new content like this!



**GET FREE VISUAL SUMMARY**