

Are you being effective or just active?



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Notice how busy you are all the time? Newsflash: Being busy is not necessarily being productive. It's easy to fall into the trap of just being constantly busy.

I know. I've been there – and occasionally find myself there again and again.

The trick, business planning and productivity experts say, is scheduling monthly 80/20 analyses to determine what you are really spending the majority of your time on.



First, you figure out the 20 percent of activities that are producing 80 percent of your desired results. Then you figure out the 20 percent of the activities that are taking up 80 percent of your time.

Finally, you look at the two lists and highlight the overlap – or lack thereof – and eliminate the activities that are keeping you busy but aren't producing key results.

This is not an easy task. While you think checking your email 10 times before you get to the office is helping you achieve more, it's just taking away your brain's limited resources and focusing them on a nonimportant task at a key time of day. You need to be able to turn your brain on and off during the day in order to restore and maximize those "on" moments.

Once you have your list, prioritize key activities and put them into your schedule at peak times of the day when you know you're alert and can focus on them. Block all other distractions out during those times so you can focus – even if it's for small portions of time each day to work toward a goal.

Time is a precious commodity. You can always make more money, but you can never make more time. Allocate your daily hours in order to realize your greatest return.

Practice the 80/20 exercise, and then when you are invited to other activities or events that take up more of your time, ask yourself a few questions to determine if this is a good task to add to your day:

Is this moving me toward my goal?

Will this activity bring me joy?

If you instantly answer yes to one of these questions, add the event to your calendar. If you don't, politely decline.

At the end of the day, remember to keep asking yourself: "Am I being effective or just active?" The more honestly you can look at this, the better you can focus your time.