

# EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Do More Better

### THE SUMMARY

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#### Introduction

Over the years I have invested a lot of effort in understanding productivity and the skill of getting things done. I love to make the best use of my time and energy, and I am constantly fine-tuning the ideas, tools, and systems that help me to remain that way. From time to time I even get to teach these things to other people and to help them do more better. It is always a thrill to see them getting it and living it.

In this little book I will share some of what I have learned along the way because I believe it can help you learn more than you know now about living a productive life. That is not to say I have mastered it all. I am still learning and making small tweaks as I go. But I can say with confidence that what I will teach you really does work. It has brought order to my chaos and direction to my meandering. It has worked for many others as well.

#### Chapter 1: Know Your Purpose

An understanding of productivity needs to begin with an understanding of the reason you exist. Productivity is not what will bring purpose to your life, but what will enable you to excel in living out your existing purpose.

I am going to lead you through a brief Productivity Catechism, a series of questions and answers. Only when you understand these foundational matters about your God-given purpose and mission will you be ready to get to work. Here is the first question:

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*Q1. Ultimately, why did God create you? A. God created me to bring glory to him.*

God created you so he could receive glory from you and receive glory through you. That is an astonishing truth to consider and a deeply humbling one. When you grasp it and apply it, it transforms everything about your life. The simple fact is you are not the point of your life. You are not the star of your show. If you live for yourself, your own comfort, your own glory, your own fame, you will miss out on your very purpose. God created you to bring glory to him.

*Q2. How can you glorify God in your day-to-day life? A. I can glorify God in my day-to-day life by doing good works.*

You do not glorify God only when you talk about him, or share his gospel with other people, or stand with hands raised in public worship. Those are all good actions, but they are not the only means through which you can bring glory to God. Far from it. You glorify God when you do good works. The apostle Peter wrote, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12). Your good works make God look great before a watching world.

*Q3. What are good works? A. Good works are deeds done for the glory of God and the benefit of other people.*

You are already very good at doing things that benefit you. We all are. From your infancy you have become adept at expending effort toward your own comfort and survival. But when God saved you, he gave you a heart that longs to do good for others. Suddenly you long to do good to other people, even at great cost to yourself. After all, that is exactly what Christ did on the cross. It is what Christ did, and he calls on you to imitate him.

Good works, then, are any and all of those deeds you do for the benefit of others. There is no task in life that cannot be done for God’s glory. Again, this is what Jesus calls for in these simple words from the Sermon on the Mount: “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

*Q4. But you are a sinful person. Can you actually do good works? A. Yes. Christians are able to do good works because of the finished work of Christ.*

God saved you so that you could do good works and in that way bring glory to him. Paul amplifies it even more in his letter to Titus: “[Christ] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). Christ gave up his life for you so that you could have a genuine zeal to do good works. Paul calls upon Christians to be good works zealots or good works extremists—to be absolutely committed in every way to doing good for others.

Take heart! You can actually do works that delight God. He is genuinely pleased when you do these works, even when you don’t do them as perfectly or as selflessly as you might wish, or even when you are uncertain about your motives. Though even your best deeds are far from perfect, God is pleased with them and accepts them with joy.

*Q5. In what areas of life should you emphasize good works? A. I ought to emphasize good works at all times and in all areas of life.*

If you can bring glory to God in all areas, you should bring glory to God in all areas. There is no area of your life where you have no ability to do good to others and where you have no ability to bring glory to God. Paul said, “So, whether

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you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). The Bible is clear: At every and in every context you are able to do good to others, and so you should do good to others.

*Q6. What is productivity? A. Productivity is effectively stewarding my gifts, talents, time, energy, and enthusiasm for the good of others and the glory of God.*

Now we come to it: what is productivity? Productivity is effectively stewarding your gifts, talents, time, energy, and enthusiasm for the good of others and the glory of God. Productivity calls you to direct your whole life at this great goal of bringing glory to God by doing good for others. This call involves using your gifts, the spiritual gifts you were given when the Lord saved you; it involves deploying your talents, those areas of natural strength; it involves managing your time, those 24 hours God gives you each day; it involves making use of your energy, the strength or vitality that ebbs and flows through the day and the week; and it even involves your enthusiasm, the passion and interest you can bring to those works you love to do. God calls you to take all of that and to apply it carefully, faithfully, and consistently to the great goal of doing good to others.

I trust this maxim establishes your purpose: to glorify God by doing good to others. There is no better plan and no higher ideal. So, ultimately, here is what productivity is all about and, therefore, what this book is all about: doing good to others.

## Chapter 2: Answer the Call

I am sure you can come up with a never-ending list of reasons that you are not more productive. But I believe lurking behind most of your reasons, and mine, we will find three main culprits, three productivity thieves: laziness, busyness, and the mean combination of thorns and thistles.

The first productivity thief is laziness. There is something of the sluggard in most of us or perhaps in all of us—maybe even in you. If you want an excuse to be unproductive, you will inevitably find one, and if you can’t find one, you will manufacture one. And it could be that today’s world offers more ways of lazily procrastinating than ever before. When you ought to be working on your computer, you are only ever one or two clicks away from checking out your friends on Facebook or welcoming a few minutes of mindless entertainment on YouTube. Text messages provide a welcome distraction from deep thinking, and binge watching the latest series on Netflix can set you back a week. You are surrounded by temptations to laziness and may succumb far often than you think. It could be that laziness is what stands between you and true productivity.

The second productivity thief is busyness. This is, of course, the very opposite of laziness—doing too much instead of doing too little. But it is no more noble a trait. Although we complain about being busy, we also find that it validates us, as if we have only two choices before us: doing far too little or far too much. We somehow assume that our value is connected to our busyness.

But busyness cannot be confused with diligence. It cannot be confused with faithfulness or fruitfulness. Busyness does not mean you are a faithful or fruitful Christian. It only means just like everyone else. Busyness may make you feel good about yourself and give the illusion of getting things done, but it probably just means that you are directing too little attention in too many directions, that you are prioritizing all the wrong things, and that your productivity is suffering.

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What is both remarkable and absurd is that these two traits can even collide to form a kind of superstorm. In fact, one of the reasons I developed such a deep need and appreciation for productivity is that this combination is exactly what I saw in my own life. I am naturally lazy which means I am prone to ignore or procrastinate my responsibilities. That essay could wait a few more days, that book could sit there a bit longer, that bill hadn't come back with "final notice" yet, I could have that heart-to-heart with my daughter tomorrow. But eventually the bill came due and the essay needed to be handed in and my daughter just needed her daddy, and I went from lazy to frantic, from idle to crazy. The times of busyness would then make me so worn out that I would experience a crash and convince myself I had earned the right to lay low and be inactive for a little while.

God created us to live perfectly in a perfect world in which everything was working with us and for us. But then man rebelled against God and when he did that, God explained to him that there must be consequences. These consequences would extend all the way to work, to productivity. "Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field" (Genesis 3:17b-18). The punishment was not work itself, but the difficulty that would now accompany work.

What is true for farming would also be true for every other job. Every task would face these "thorns and thistles," these difficulties that would constantly threaten productivity. And even today each one of us, no matter our vocation, has to grapple with them, to keep them at bay. The truck driver gets snarled in traffic, the doctor has patients who don't show up, the conference speaker misses his flight, the stay-at-home mom gets the call from school that her child has come down with flu and needs to come home.

It could be busyness, it could be laziness, it could be the thorns and thistles, or it could be just about anything else, but whatever keeps you from doing good to others is a problem—a serious problem. It is a problem that keeps you from doing the very work God has called you to in the short time he gives you here on earth. Which means that the absence of productivity or the presence of woefully diminished productivity is first a theological problem. It is a failure to understand or apply the truths God reveals in the Bible.

God calls you to productivity, but he calls you to the right kind of productivity. He calls you to be productive for his sake, not your own. While this book will emphasize tools and systems and other important elements of productivity, nothing is more important than your own holiness and your own godliness. No amount of organization and time management will compensate for a lack of Christian character, not when it comes to this great calling of glory through good—bringing glory to God by doing good to others.

## Chapter 3: Define Your Responsibilities

Each of us has areas for which we are responsible before God. We are all responsible for the care of our bodies and souls; parents are responsible for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of their children; husbands are responsible for providing for their wives, and fathers for their children; church members are responsible for extending love to the other members of the church; every Christian is responsible for caring for the poor and sharing the gospel. And this list is only scratching the surface. Such responsibilities can be overwhelming if we do not corral them and bring order to them.

I want you to create a list of each one of your areas of responsibility. You will need to think about all of life and create broad categories, asking the question: Before God, what am I responsible for?

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Now here's the challenge: You need to have every one of life's responsibilities encompassed by a category, yet with as few categories as possible. I would suggest targeting five or six categories, with no more than nine. Let me show you how I have done this thinking in my own life. I have structured my life into five areas of responsibility:

- Personal
- Family
- Church
- Social
- Business

There is no responsibility I have in life that falls outside of these five areas. If I am asked to be something or do something, if I am asked to dedicate time or attention to something, it will fit into one of them.

You will share some of these areas of responsibility, but you may have some different ones as well. You definitely have personal responsibilities—you need to care for your body and soul, and you need to clothe and feed yourself. You almost definitely have family responsibilities as well, whether they relate to a spouse and children, or parents and siblings, or all of the above. As a Christian you know that God has placed you in a local church community and charged you with all those New Testament “one another” commands, so you will also need a church area of responsibility. You have social responsibilities to be a committed friend and an evangelistic neighbor. You may be a student with school responsibilities, or a vice president with work responsibilities, or the organizer of a book club with hobby responsibilities.

Now that you have come up with those broad areas of responsibility, I want you to begin to bring greater definition to each of them. You will do so by listing the roles, tasks, or projects that fall under each.

Begin with your personal area of responsibility. What roles do you have there? What tasks has God given you? What projects are underway, or what projects would you like to begin? What are the criteria God may use when he requires that accounting? Begin to write those down as they come to mind, but do not be concerned if you miss some—you will be able to add to each list later on. When you have finished with personal, move to family, and then go down the list until you have done the same for each area of responsibility.

As with your areas of responsibility, it is better to have fewer roles that encompass several items than to have hundreds of roles. Be as thorough as you can, but do know that this is a living list you will add to and take from on a regular basis.

## Chapter 4: State Your Mission

Think back to our definition of productivity: Productivity is effectively stewarding your gifts, talents, time, energy, and enthusiasm for the good of others and the glory of God. You have limited amounts of gifting, talents, time, energy, and enthusiasm, but unlimited ways of allocating them. For this reason productivity involves making decisions about how to allocate these finite resources. Many of these decisions involve saying either “yes” or “no”—“yes” to those responsibilities that appear to offer the best opportunity for you to do good to others and “no” to those responsibilities

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that appear to offer lesser opportunity for you to do good to others. These are very often difficult or even agonizing decisions to make. But these decisions are simplified when you know your mission.

Many productivity gurus tell you that you need to have a personalized big-picture mission statement to encompass all of life and every area of responsibility. Personally, that both intimidates and paralyzes me, and I have never been successful at it. But what I have found very helpful is preparing a limited mission statement for each of my areas of responsibility. I have five areas of responsibility, and for that reason have five mission statements.

Let me release the tension a little more. My mission statements are not fixed and unchanging. Their primary purpose is to guide me week by week as I schedule my time and make decisions about where to expend effort. So while I do not change them haphazardly or without good reason, I do have freedom to tweak them as my mission comes into focus and as it changes throughout life. The primary value of seeing these as “living” statements is that it frees me from the paralysis of defining a mission that needs to guide me today and twenty years from now.

Let’s pause for a moment and consider where we have come. We have asked, “What are the things you are doing?” and, “What are the things you are responsible for?” We have then put together a mission for each one. But what we have not yet done is asked, “Are these the things you should be doing?”

What I want you to do now is to take a good look at those roles, tasks, and projects under each of your areas of responsibility and ask whether those are the things you ought to do. Do the things you do actually fit your mission?

Your primary pursuit in productivity is not doing more things, but doing more good. Generally speaking, you can do more good for others if you have fewer roles and projects than if you have more. It is far better to dedicate lots of attention to those areas in which you are particularly talented or gifted than it is to dedicate minimal attention to the many areas you are not. Only once you give yourself permission to stop trying to do it all, to stop saying yes to everyone, can you make your highest contribution towards the things that really matter.

You haven’t begun to live a focused and productive life until you have said no to great opportunities that just do not fit your mission. There are many good things in this world that will go undone or that will have to be done by someone else. So keeping your mission in mind, return to each one of your areas of responsibility, examine that list of roles and projects, and ask questions like these:

- Are these the right and best things for me to be doing?
- Do these things fit my mission?
- Are there things I can do in this area that no one else can do?
- Am I especially gifted or talented in this area?
- Do I bring unique value to this?
- Is there someone else who could do this better than I can?

At this point you may have a small collection of tasks, roles, and projects that do not fit your mission. You have several options for each of them:



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You can drop them. You may find that certain things are being done for no good reason at all. If it does not serve a clear purpose today, that time and energy would undoubtedly be better directed elsewhere. Just because that ministry or that project had a great past does not necessarily indicate it needs to have a future.

You can delegate them to someone who can do them better. Maybe you have been managing the family's budget, but you realize that your spouse can do it with greater skill or give it more substantial attention. Ask if he or she is willing to take on the task.

You can do them. Before you dump everything that doesn't perfectly fit your core mission, remember that your primary calling in life is to do good to others. This is where Christian productivity is unique. Most productivity gurus will encourage you to be as selfish as you need to be, to get rid of anything that doesn't interest or excite you. But as a Christian you know you can do things that do not perfectly fit your mission but still do them out of love for God and with a desire to glorify him.

God may call you to do things simply because they need to be done, and he will expect you to do them with joy and excellence. Who knows, he may even spiritually gift you to do them with the highest excellence.

## Chapter 5: Select Your Tools

You rely on tools to do work you cannot do yourself or to do tasks better than you could otherwise do them. When it comes to productivity, your tools are able to compensate for many of your shortcomings and do things you do not want to do yourself. You are bad at remembering mundane facts and information, yet completely dependent upon it—facts like your insurance policy number, flight schedule, or parking spot at the ball game. There are tools that are well suited to collect, archive, and access that kind of information for you. You are bad at remembering all of the tasks you need to accomplish in a day, which is why you may find yourself lying awake at night, trying desperately to remember all those tasks and deadlines due the next day and the next week. There are tools that can manage those items for you and present them to you just when you need them.

To a large degree, your productivity depends on identifying and using the best tools for the job and then growing in your skills in deploying them. Effective productivity depends upon three tools and the relationship between them.

The first essential tool is the one that is least familiar to most people: a task management tool. A task management tool enables you to capture and organize your projects, tasks, and actions. The older variant of this tool is a Daytimer or a simple sheet of paper with a list of tasks to perform and a list of boxes to tick when those tasks are complete. Today there are excellent new programs that can manage all of your projects and tasks like never before.

The second tool is for scheduling. A scheduling tool enables you to organize your time and notifies you of pending events and appointments. The older variant of this tool is the familiar calendar hanging on your wall or stuck with magnets to your refrigerator. Today there are electronic calendars that have most of the strengths of the paper calendar, but many additional powerful features such as the ability to notify or alert you before your events, or even to provide traffic alerts you may need to know about.

The third essential tool is an information tool. An information tool enables you to collect, archive, and access information. Not too long ago these were filing cabinets organized by folders, each of which held sheets of paper. It remains a familiar paradigm. Today, however, electronic information tools help you archive all (or most) of your information electronically, and this offers a host of important benefits such as universal access (you can access your

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files wherever you go) and searchability (with a few keystrokes you can search across your entire collection of information).

Your productivity depends upon effectively and consistently using these three tools and managing the interaction between them. At this point I am going to introduce an important organizing principle that you will return to again and again. This principle extends to any area of life but is especially helpful in organizing your productivity system. Here it is: a home for everything, and like goes with like.

When it comes to productivity, this principle is powerful. If you consistently apply it all over your life, your life will be and remain organized. You will never again find yourself lying awake wondering what important project you have forgotten about or where you left those important tax files. This principle tells you what to do with your information, what to do with your events, meetings, and appointments, and what to do with your tasks and projects. It tells you that appointments always need to go where appointments go, information always needs to go where information goes, and tasks always need to go where tasks go. It means that appointments and tasks should never be in the same place, and tasks and information should never be in the same place. Each of these things has a home, and it must always live there.

The principle can also be used in a more specific way. Multiple pieces of information that are alike need to be kept in the same place within your information tool. Several tasks that relate to the same project need to be kept in the same place in your task management tool. It tells you that all of the information about one area of responsibility needs be kept with the other information about that area of responsibility, and that all of your tasks related to one project need be kept with the other tasks related to that project.

## Chapter 6: Collect Your Tasks

The first tool you need to master is your task management tool. This tool represents the heart of an effective productivity system, and you will use it to store and organize your projects, tasks, and actions. While each of the three tools is important, none is more crucial to the functioning of the system than this one. In fact, there is a sense in which all of the other tools are supplemental to it, because this is the one that will determine and propel your actions each day.

Software-based task management tools are relatively new, so you may be far less familiar with them than with the other two essential tools. In the past, most people spread the functions of a task management tool across calendars, journals, scraps of paper, whiteboards, and email inboxes. Today, though, these tools bring new power and new capabilities to an age-old concern: getting things done.

I recommend Todoist as an exceptional tool for task management. It will be the software I use as I explain how to set up and use task management tools. If you have chosen to use another product, you should be able to follow the principles and extend them to your tool of choice.

To better organize tasks, Todoist offers various levels of structure or hierarchy. I recommend using three: projects, sub-projects, and tasks. Tasks (individual to-do items) go in subprojects (collections of related projects). Subprojects can be grouped into projects (collections of related subprojects). In other words, projects are composed of subprojects, and subprojects are composed of individual tasks. Don't worry if that is confusing, as I will explain it as we go.



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Now get out that productivity worksheet you filled earlier. Look at the personal areas of responsibility and, in Todoist, click "+ Add Project" to create a Project to correspond to one of the roles or projects for which you might want to collect tasks or action items. Now go to each of your other areas of responsibility and do the same thing: Create a project for each of your areas of responsibility and create a subproject for each of the roles or projects for which you might want to collect tasks or action items.

Now that you have finished your Todoist setup, it is time to begin adding your tasks. There is only thing you should ever add to Todoist: tasks. Tasks are specific and actionable items that relate to one of your projects. Whatever requires future action goes into your task management tool. And once again, your tasks need to adhere to the rule: a home for everything, and like goes with like. This approach means that all of your tasks related to family finance need to be together within that one subproject. All your tasks related to the church's pre-school ministry need to be together within that subproject.

I recommend that you begin each of your tasks with a verb followed by a colon. This pattern brings at least two benefits. First, it ensures that you are only adding actions to Todoist and not using it as a place to hold information. Second, it makes it easy to skim your list of tasks to find ones that require the same kind of action (e.g. Buy, Write, Email, Call). After the verb and the colon add a brief description of the task (e.g. Buy: New pens, Call: Pastor Bob, Send: Thank you note to Susan).

Now we need to consider a simple Todoist workflow. Whenever you think of a task you must do in the future or would like to consider doing in the future, add it to Todoist. When you are in a meeting and a task or project is assigned to you, add it immediately. When you spot an item you need to fix or a product you need to buy, add a task to Todoist. Add tasks as soon as you think of them, and add them without restraint. Even if you are unsure if you will actually need to take action, add it now and make a decision about it later. Do not convince yourself that you will remember the task later that day or the next day. Whatever it is, get it out of your head and into Todoist.

Information you add to Todoist will automatically be added to your inbox. This inbox holds unfiltered and unsorted tasks, so you will need to process it on a regular basis. I recommend doing this step at least once each day either at the very beginning or very end of the day.

Processing your Todoist inbox involves briefly examining each note and making a decision about it. You have four options:

- You can delete it. If it is a task you no longer need, delete it.
- You can do it. If it is a task you can do immediately and one that will take no more than a few seconds, do it right now. The time and effort involved in filing it would be better spent simply completing it.
- You can defer it. If it is a task you want to do at a future time, you will need to move it to the appropriate project and subproject. You may also wish to set a due date at this point. To do this, type something like "July 21" or "next Monday" in the "Schedule" box. If it is a task that happens on a recurring basis, you can add a recurring date, which will help you complete the task, but then have a new copy of it re-appear on a predetermined schedule. To do this, type something like "every two weeks" or "every Thursday" in the "Schedule" box.
- You can delegate it. If it is a task that needs to be completed but it would be best if someone else did it, delegate it to that person.

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Do not stop processing your inbox until you have taken an appropriate action for every one of the tasks. The inbox is meant to be only a temporary holding spot for your tasks, so determine that you will never leave them there for long.

As you accomplish tasks, mark them as complete and move to the next one. Few things are more satisfying than clicking the “complete” button and watching that task disappear. You are getting things done!

Todoist and other task management tools require a small up-front investment in learning how to use them and how to best configure them. They require a small amount of ongoing maintenance. But they bring many tangible benefits. They are very powerful tools to propel action and to sustain it. However, like all tools, they require commitment. You will find that the more you use them and the better you use them, the better the results they provide. Do not give up too quickly!

## Chapter 7: Plan Your Calendar

With your tasks in their proper place, it is time to look to the next essential tool: your scheduling tool, or calendar. While there is still a lot of benefit in using a printed calendar, today’s electronic calendars have added powerful new features such as sharing and notifications, and this addition makes them indispensable to productivity.

The degree to which you use your calendar and rely on your calendar will depend in large part on the particulars of your life. The more meetings and appointments you are responsible for, the more important it will be to put a lot of time and planning into your calendar. If you have very few timed appointments, your calendar can be far more basic and receive much less attention.

The calendar is the proper home for events, meetings, and appointments. If you need to remember something that happens at a certain time or at a certain time and place, it is an ideal candidate for the calendar. These are the only items that belong on your calendar.

Putting only this information on your calendar may mark a significant shift for you. It is quite likely that in the past you have relied on your calendar as the home for your deadlines and tasks. However, we have already seen that task management software offers a far more effective solution. Once you have moved deadlines and tasks into their proper home, your calendar will be left with all of those events, meetings, and appointments—and hopefully nothing else.

Unlike task management, your calendar requires little workflow. You will simply add events, meetings, or appointments as you schedule them. As you add these items to your calendar, ensure that they have the proper date, time, and location information.

However, the calendar does have one mission-critical daily function. When it is configured as I have outlined here—when it contains only events, meetings, and appointments—it provides important information that enables you to properly plan your day. As an important component of your daily review, you will begin each day by looking at your calendar to see how much time is committed to events, meetings, and appointments.

## Chapter 8: Gather Your Information

With your events and information in their proper place, you are now ready to consider your information management tool. This tool is used to collect, manage, and access information. It is the home for life’s nouns—for the data, facts, documents, and information you may need to access in the future. It functions as your auxiliary brain.

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I recommend Evernote as a powerful tool for information management, and as I proceed, I will explain how to set it up and use it. If you have chosen another product, you should still be able to follow the principles and set up your chosen tool in a similar fashion. It is less important that you use Evernote than that you use some kind of tool that can gather, store, and access your information, and do it in a logical, hierarchical fashion.

By default Evernote has just two notebooks: First Notebook and Trash. Change the name “First Notebook” to Inbox.

Next, get out the worksheet you used to define your areas of responsibility. We are going to begin by creating a place for information related to your personal area of responsibility. We will create a notebook for each of the roles and tasks, then we will combine them together into a stack.

Take a look at your personal area of responsibility and create a notebook to correspond to each of the roles or projects for which you might want to collect and archive information. Once you have created those notebooks, combine them into a notebook stack and call the notebook stack “Personal.” (Hint: Create a notebook stack by dragging one notebook on top of another notebook and then releasing it. Then drag all the other personal notebooks into that same stack.)

At this point you should have one notebook stack that contains all of your notebooks related to your personal area of responsibility, and two other individual notebooks: Inbox and Trash. Now go to each of your other areas of responsibility and follow the same process: Create a notebook for each of the roles or projects for which you might want to collect and archive information, and combine them into notebook stacks.

If you find that you need to add more notebooks or notebook stacks than just your roles or projects, feel free to create them. However, try not to add them unnecessarily; whenever possible, have fewer rather than more. Do ensure that each notebook you create fits into one of your notebook stacks (with the exception of Inbox and Trash).

Always ensure you follow the familiar dictum, a home for everything, and like goes with like. Also ensure that you do something with everything. There needs to be some way that every bit of information has a home and that every bit of information is stored with similar information. If you have twenty notes about a new car you are researching, put them all in the same notebook. If you have five notes about a vacation, put them all in the same notebook.

Now that you have configured Evernote, it is time to start feeding it your information, which Evernote refers to as notes. Evernote’s strengths are capturing, archiving, and retrieving information—almost all kinds of information.

Evernote can handle almost any kind of data. Once you feed that data into Evernote, it begins to process it, to add it to your personal search database, and to even scan it for keywords. Search within Evernote for “minutes” and it may even find that photograph of the notes you scrawled on the whiteboard during your last meeting.

One of the principles you need to know about Evernote is that the more you commit to using it and the more information you add to it the more powerful it becomes. A half-hearted commitment provides halfway results, while a full-out commitment provides much more substantial results. Do not give up on it quickly and do not feel that you need to use it sparingly.

Finally, we need to consider an Evernote workflow—the way to actually integrate it into your life. Whenever you come across information that you may want to retain or remember, add it to Evernote. Use your desktop or laptop, use your mobile phone, use your tablet, or use your browser. Add information indiscriminately. Even if you are not certain

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whether it is actually information you will need to retain, add it now and defer the decision until later. Do not leave information you want to remember in your email inbox or your computer's downloads folder. Add it all to Evernote.

When you add information to Evernote, it will automatically be added to your inbox notebook. Because your inbox holds all those unfiltered and unsorted notes, you will need to access it on a regular basis in order to process everything. Do this at least once per week. Processing your Evernote inbox involves briefly examining each note and making a decision about it. You have only two options:

- Trash it. If it is information you no longer need, trash it.
- Move it. If it is information you want to keep, move it to an existing notebook or create a new notebook for it. Add any appropriate tags.

## Chapter 9: Live the System

You have selected your tools, configured them, and begun to use them. Now you need to construct the procedures that will enable you to use them together and depend on them. You need to make those tools work together in a simple but effective system.

Your tools work together to help plan your day, and your tools work together to help you get things done throughout your day. This reality means that your day needs to have two phases: planning and execution. In the planning phase you will make your plans for the day, and in the execution phase you will actually get your work done. While planning does not need to take much time, it is very important, and when done right, will dramatically increase what you are able to accomplish throughout the rest of the day.

Your tools have slightly different jobs during the planning and execution phases. During the planning phase, your scheduling tool shows you the time available in the day ahead, your task management tools tells you tasks available to you, and your information tool ensures that you have the necessary information.

Then, during the execution phase, your scheduling tool notifies you of any pending events, meetings, or appointments, your task management tool tells you what to do, and your information tool provides the information you need to get those things done.

To manage your day effectively You need to know what the possible tasks are for that day, what the necessary tasks are for that day, and what time is available to accomplish them. Once you have that information available, you can begin to fit tasks into your day like pieces in a puzzle—you set tasks into time.

This is what you do during the daily planning phase. The purpose of this phase is to consider all of your projects, duties, and appointments, and to prayerfully choose the tasks that will receive your attention that day. To do so you will follow a routine that spreads out all of your possible tasks before you so you can choose the ones that you will attempt to complete.

Open Todoist and create a new project called Reviews. This project will not fall into any of your areas of responsibility, but will exist alongside them. Within the project add 6 tasks:

- [Get Focused] Pray

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- [Get Clear] Bring: Task Inbox to 0
- [Get Current] Check: Calendar & Alerts
- [Get Current] Check: Waiting for
- [Get Current] Check: Forecast for Next 7 days
- [Get Going] Choose: Today's top tasks

Set each task to repeat everyday at or before the time you begin your workday.

At the start of your workday, before you do anything else, open Todoist and go to the Today screen to perform your daily review. Every day you will see those 6 tasks awaiting you and you will need to complete them all. As you complete them, you will see the due date change to the next day, indicating that the task has been completed and will need to be completed tomorrow as well.

This review is not a major commitment and takes only four or five minutes. However, that small investment pays great dividends. By the end of it, you will have looked at all the things you could do in the day ahead and have selected the ones you actually will do—or plan to do, at least. It is four or five minutes well invested.

With the planning phase complete, you are now ready to execute. Your tools are now there to tell you the options available to you. Evernote to provide the information you need to complete your tasks, and your calendar to remind you of any pending events, meetings, or appointments.

As you begin this phase, look at Todoist, choose a task, and begin to do it. And this is where my specific guidance will need to stop since your life and mine may be so different.

Even when you organize your life and plan your day, you will still have times when you fail and times you are overwhelmed. Your responsibility is to plan, organize, and execute to the best of your ability, but to realize that circumstances and providence may interrupt and delay even your best laid plans. Not only that, but you set and manage your priorities with the information available to you at the time, but this information is always limited.

## **Chapter 10: Maintain It Consistently**

You need to free yourself from thinking that organizing your life is a one-shot deal. Far from it. Productivity is not a system you set up and then forget about, but something that demands dedicated attention on a regular basis. It is not something you configure one time and finalize, but something you need to constantly refine.

I have found no better way of maintaining my system than to work through a short checklist each week. This list helps me ensure that the system is functioning properly. It calls me back to the system when I have drifted and it takes care of the routine maintenance that ensures each part is working just as it should. This checklist is what I call my weekly review.

Your daily planning session is meant to be tactical: It has a limited purpose and a narrow scope. But where the daily planning is tactical, a weekly review offers a chance to be more strategic, to widen the scope and the purpose. This review offers the opportunity to set new plans into motion, to restart projects that have stalled, and to course-correct plans that are drifting.

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Where the daily planning takes only a couple of minutes, the weekly review requires a little bit more time—I find that I need to block off around 30 minutes for it. I schedule it for each Friday afternoon so that when a new week begins on Sunday, it is already planned and organized.

This weekly review is a work in progress and I occasionally add a step or remove a step. But on the whole it is comprised of these actions:

- [Get Focused] Pray
- [Get Clear] Bring: Email Inbox to 0
- [Get Clear] Bring: Evernote Inbox to 0
- [Get Clear] Bring: Task Inbox to 0
- [Get Clear] Tidy: Desk
- [Get Clear] Tidy: Desktop
- [Get Current] Review: Calendar for next 30 days
- [Get Current] Review: Evernote notebooks
- [Get Current] Review: All projects
- [Get Current] Review: Next 7 days
- [Get Set] Review: Mission
- [Get Focused] Plan: Serve and surprise
- [Get Going] Decide: Next week's deadlines, deliverables, and priorities

As with the daily planning, I suggest you begin by copying my weekly routine, then add to it and take from it as you go.

This weekly review will soon become a fundamental part of your productivity system. Your system will function well when you make time for this review and it will begin to sputter when you do not. Of course, a strong system will be able to endure brief times of neglect—we all have a bad week or need to take some vacation, and missing a single weekly review will not harm the system too badly. But missing several of them in a row will eventually cause a significant weakening.

As humans created in God's image, and as Christians saved by God's grace, we have a remarkable privilege. We have the joy and the responsibility of stewarding our gifts, talents, time, energy, and enthusiasm for the good of others and the glory of God. This is your privilege and this is your purpose. So go and do. Do more better.