



The Great Productivity Hoax

John Richardson

www.successbeginstoday.org

Contents

Contents.....	0
Chapter One: The Hoax	4
Can You Read Email and Answer Voice mail at the Same Time? .	4
The Prefrontal Cortex	5
Focus Is Key.....	5
Exercise 1: Focus	6
Exercise 2: Two Objects at Once.....	6
Chapter Two: Actors on the Stage.....	7
Visual Metaphor.....	7
Very Small Stage	7
Only Four at a Time	8
Exercise 3: Focus	10
Chapter Three: The Rambo Actor	11
A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words	11
Why Paper Is Better.....	11
The Daily Planner.....	12
Exercise 4: Fill Out the Daily Planner.....	13
Chapter Four: 48 Minutes.....	14
Quick Success: Under Two Minute Items	14
Singletasking: Do One Thing at a Time.....	14
Why 48 Minutes?	14
Exercise: Implementing the 48 Minute System	15
The 80/20 Solution.....	15
Chapter 5: Don't Believe the Hoax!	16
Download instructions:.....	16
About John Richardson	17
Further Resources.....	18

Introduction

We don't have enough time to do the things we want and need to do. 24 hours a day just isn't enough anymore. Technology was supposed to save us time, not increase the demands on us. Unfortunately, each new technology item adds to our time commitments.

Consider the following...

When I grew up in the 70's we didn't have any of the following...

- Computers
- Cell phones
- Voice mail
- E-mail
- Texting
- Facebook
- Twitter

Yet we got along just fine. Ask yourself, how much time do you spend on email every day? Then add in talking and texting on the phone, checking your Facebook profile, tweeting your friends... you get the picture.

Technology has become the enemy. I've talked with many people that spend half of their day responding to e-mail, and then they have to respond to voice mails and a list of Twitter requests. It stands in the way of doing our real jobs. The problem is, there's a hoax going around. It is an insidious one and it goes like this.

We can do more than one thing at a time. We can multitask.

We are told we can do amazing things if we just put our minds to it. Our job descriptions have been re-written to reflect this belief. We are expected to talk on the phone, answer e-mails, listen to voice mail – all while accomplishing what we are paid to do.

Unfortunately we have been told a BIG lie!

Multitasking doesn't work!

Over the years I've struggled with productivity solutions. They have all had good intentions, but many took the wrong approach. After implementing some of them I actually became less productive. It wasn't until I read a book on brain science that I discovered what happens in our conscious mind and began to understand why productivity is so hard to achieve.

In this short e-book, we'll take a look at how our minds really work and come up with some solutions to help us truly...

Get things done!

Chapter One: The Hoax

“You can do more than one thing at a time”

Scientists have found that the human mind can actually do only one conscious task at a time. If we try to do two things at once, our mind has to stop what it is doing and then restart on the new task. This stopping and starting may seem natural but in reality slows us down.

The problem is, it takes our mind time to get up to speed on the new task – like a computer that has to reboot each time you start a new program. This slowing down is magnified when we try to do multiple tasks at a time. The constant stopping and restarting is manifest with

- Loss of Attention
- Forgetfulness
- Loss of accuracy

While it is true that our minds can do certain things simultaneously, such as walking and talking, we can't cope with two cognitive tasks at the same time.

Can You Read Email and Answer Voice mail at the Same Time?

While it appears that you can do both of these conscious tasks at the same time, your mind is actually shifting its focus back and forth between the actions very quickly. This slows the process down and it would be more efficient to do them separately. Trying to do two things at once may slow you down as much as 50% according to the latest brain research.

The Prefrontal Cortex

Making decisions and solving problems relies heavily on a region of the brain called the prefrontal cortex. This is the center of conscious thought. While this is a powerful part of the brain, and separates us from other mammals, it is actually very limited in many ways. We will take a look at how it functions in the next chapter.

The main takeaway of this chapter is that we are led to believe that we are superhuman and that our minds are almost limitless. While it's true that our minds have amazing power, the limitation of conscious thought can really trip us up. Yet if we know what is happening and plan accordingly we can dramatically increase our productivity.

“While the brain is exquisitely powerful, even the brain of a Harvard graduate can be turned into that of an eight-year-old simply by being made to do two things at once.”

David Rock: [Your Brain at Work](#)

Once I discovered a few of these secrets I'll reveal in the next chapters, I gave them a try and was amazed at the results. I really didn't think they would work. Yet each time I experimented with them, the results were impressive.

Focus Is Key

Focusing your mind on one task at a time is key. When our minds are distracted, they flow from one object of attention to another. This slows our process since our mind is continually stopping and starting. To give you an idea how hard it is to focus, try the exercise on the next page.

Exercise 1: Focus

Try focusing on your right hand for ten seconds. Focus on the texture of your hand and how it feels.

Do it now.

You probably noticed how hard it is to focus on one item for just ten seconds. Your mind may have jumped focus to another object or you may have lost track of your hand altogether. Focus is key, but it's not easy to do.

As hard as it is to focus on one object at a time, imagine focusing on two objects at a time in the following exercises and see how this will affect your performance.

Exercise 2: Two Objects at Once

Imagine simply swapping two letters on your computer keyboard. This simple change will slow down your writing substantially. The brain now has two things to do at once: remember where the keys are and focus on writing.

Imagine driving to work and chatting with a friend in the seat next to you. It's easy to carry on a conversation as long as you are taking your usual route. Try going a completely new route and that conversation will slow considerably. Most people have firsthand experience with this limitation.

Chapter Two: Actors on the Stage

Imagine being in a small nightclub. The stage up front is very small, but the audience area is wide and deep. Above the stage is a little perch, where the director of the play sits. He is usually out of sight, but plays a significant role in what happens on stage. At the right of the stage is a door to the outside where new actors can come and go.

This is how author David Rock, explains the conscious mind. The stage is our short term, conscious mind. The actors are our thoughts. The audience area is our long term memory, and the door outside is where new thoughts come and go.

Visual Metaphor

Over the next few chapters I want to use this stage concept as a visual metaphor to illustrate what is happening inside our conscious mind as we deal with the common distractions of modern life. Through illustrations and descriptions you'll see it's almost impossible to get important things done in our life. Distractions have taken over.

Very Small Stage

The main thing that becomes immediately apparent is that the stage is very small. It can hold at the most four actors at a time. The actors in this play come and go very quickly, and they are often fighting for presence on the stage. The door to the outside is constantly opening and closing, with new actors running up on stage. This results in a lot of confusion and pushing and shoving.

Only Four at a Time

Since only four will fit, the director of the play has his work cut out for him. He must ensure there is only one scene going on at a time and arrange actors in the right sequence. He finds it relatively easy to do this with audience members that are near the stage. They can come in quickly. Finding actors in the back of the huge auditorium is much harder. These long term actors have been around for ages and are hard to locate at times.

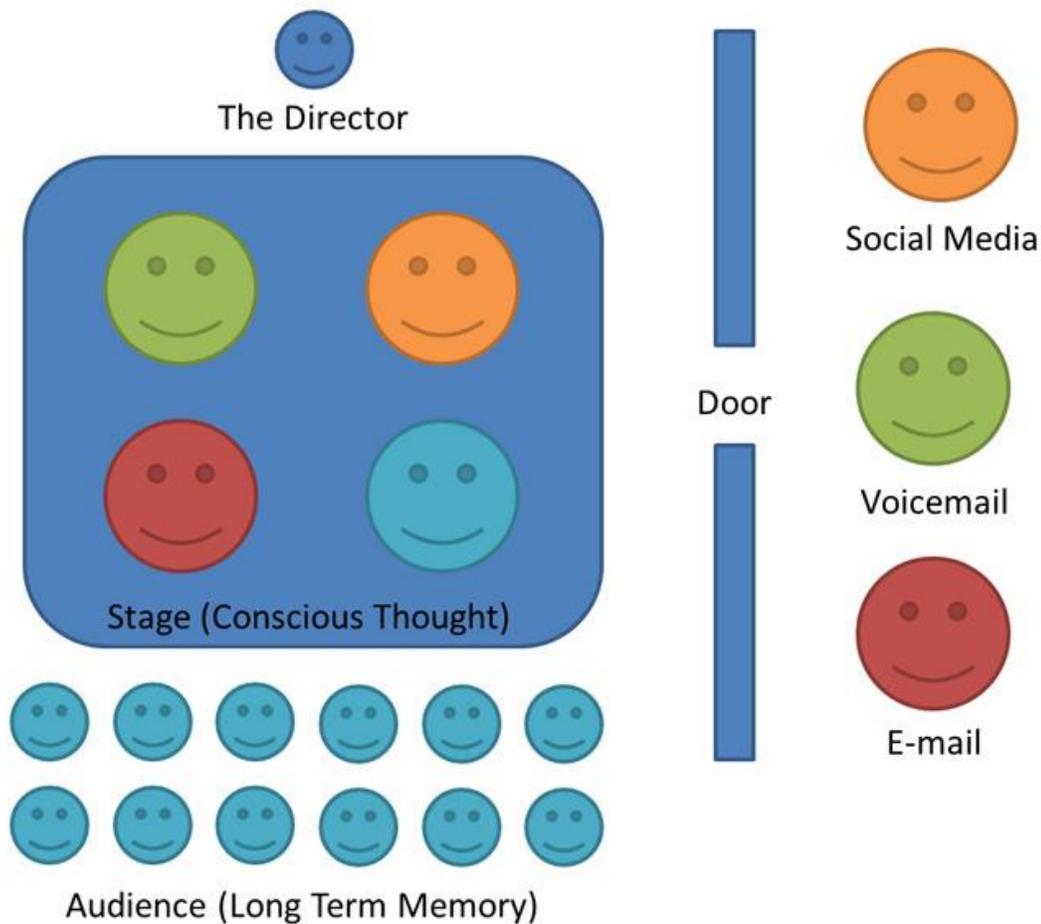
When the play starts, things go well at first. Actors from the auditorium come up one by one and wait their turn. One actor at a time says his or her lines and then sits down. It is a logical flow. The actors come in all shapes and sizes. Some are skinny, holding only a word or two. Others are bigger with a quotation or full sentence. Then there are the really heavysset ones, with a story or picture. As long as the stairway to the stage isn't jammed, the play runs smoothly.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of gate crashers that burst in the outside door and push other actors off the stage. Sometimes the actors are shoved into the audience and they have a very difficult time getting back up to the stage.

In the old days of the theatre (pre-technology), the surrounding neighborhood was rather quiet. Outside actors came by once in a while, but they were orderly and took their turn getting on stage. Unfortunately, over the last 10 years a bunch of rabble rousers moved in. These gangs didn't cause much trouble at first, but they found that the director was pretty lax with the door. First there was the e-mail gang. This gang only had a few actors at first, but they multiplied quickly. Some days there are 50 to 100 of them hitting the door on a regular basis.

Then a new gang moved in... real loud mouths. They are called the voicemail gang. They tend to hang around for minutes at a time, and they won't leave until they have had their say. But as bad as they are, two new gangs just moved in that are even worse. The Facebook gang seems friendly at first, but they hog time on the stage. If you aren't careful they will stay there for hours at a time. Then there are the Tweety birds, who are little creatures, but they cause all sorts of commotion on stage.

The director of the play has now completely lost control. There are just random things happening on stage. It all depends on who comes in the door at what time.

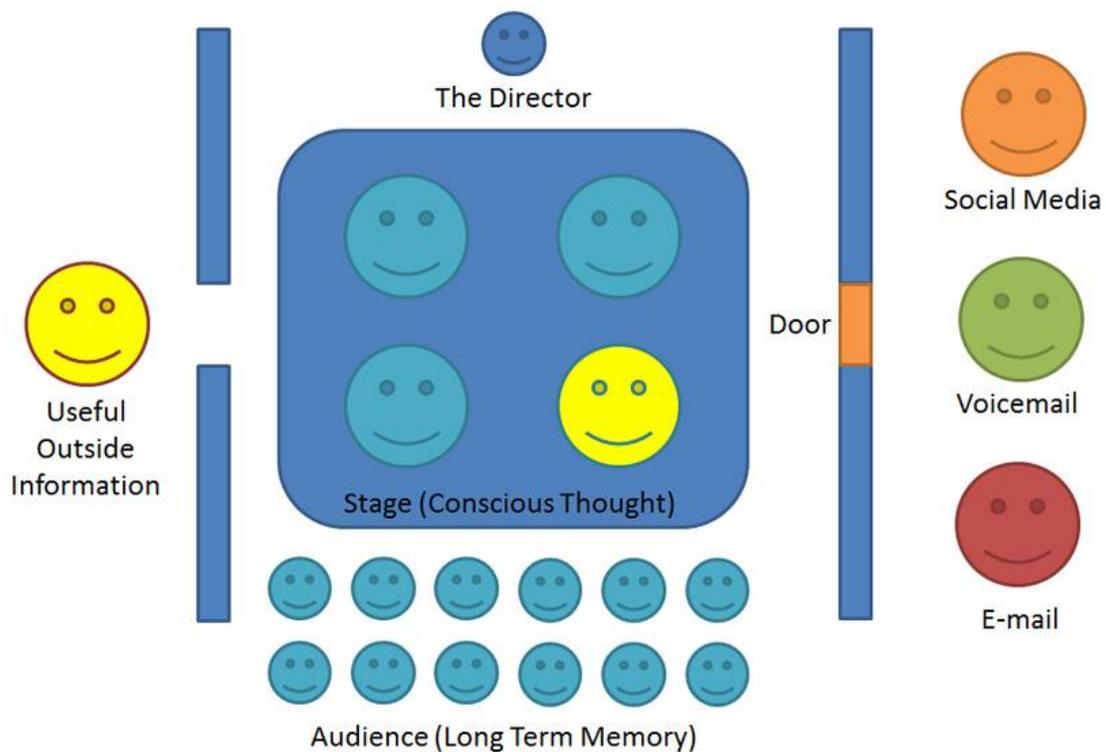


For most people, this is how their brains work now. They are constantly bombarded with e-mail, voice mail, tweets, and Facebook posts. Trying to get some high quality actors on the stage that will help you do your job and make money, is almost impossible.

There really is only one solution...

They have to lock the side door!

This is the only way to get things back under control.



Exercise 3: Focus

Describe what your stage looks like in your mind. What “gangs” cause you the most trouble? Can you easily close the side door or do you have trouble gaining control?

Chapter Three: The Rambo Actor

If you are going to hire an actor to help you control the craziness at the club, you want one that is strong and well built. He needs to be smart, efficient, and good at communicating. You want him to go away when he isn't needed, but be available at a moment's notice to get things under control.

A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words

When we plan out our day, there are a lot of management actors that need to go on stage. We need one to handle e-mail, another to handle phone calls, another to arrange our tasks, yet another to prioritize our work. The problem is, there's limited space. You can't get all of these actors on the stage at once.

What we need is one big actor that can control the situation effectively and store a lot of information for us, capturing it outside of our club. When we call him on stage, he has all the information we need. That is where Rambo comes in. We can trust him to do everything we need. In our minds the Rambo actor is a picture. We can glance at it once and have all the information we need.

Why Paper Is Better

When we need to store a lot of information and put it in a logical order, there are a lot of systems available to us. We can use computers, cell phones, or plain old paper. Each has their advantages and drawbacks, but when we want a robust system with a minimum of fuss, it's best to choose paper. Paper allows us to SEE everything in one place, and make changes quickly.

The Daily Planner

Since our minds can store limited amounts of data, it's critical to have a trusted source of data storage at our fingertips. This data source needs to be easily accessible, simple to update, have all of our common data in one area, and be portable. This is where a daily planner comes in.

Daily Sheet		Date: _____	Goal: _____		
Priority 1	Priority 2	E-Mail			
<p style="text-align: center;">Put Your Top Six Priorities Here</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">E-Mail Goes Here</p>			
				Priority 3	Priority 4
Priority 5	Priority 6	Phone Calls			
<p style="text-align: center;">Add a Next Action To Each Priority For Added Effectiveness</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Phone Calls Go Here</p>			
To Do					
<p style="text-align: center;">Create A To-Do List From Your Priorities</p>		Meeting			
		<p style="text-align: center;">Meetings And Calendar Here</p>			
				Notes	
				<p style="text-align: center;">Daily Notes Here</p>	
All Day	After Hours	<p style="text-align: center;">After Work and Weekend Activities Go Here</p>			
Weekend					
Project Goals					
<p style="text-align: center;">Project Goals Can Be Listed Here</p>					

The MS Word based planner, which you should have received with this e-book, is easily printed on one sheet of letter size paper and can be updated easily throughout the day with pencil or pen. All of your common items are included, so you only have to focus in one central area.

It includes:

1. The Top Six Daily Priority Boxes
2. Sidebar Boxes for Email, Phone Calls, Meetings, and Planning
3. A Step by Step To-Do list
4. A Place for Daily Goal Planning
5. A Place to Capture After Hours Activities

Exercise 4: Fill Out the Daily Planner

I recommend that you print a new sheet each morning. Then take a pen and write down your top priorities for the day. Some days you may have just one or two and other days you may fill in all six. Under each priority, jot down a next action.

As you open email and throughout the day, write down people that you need to email back in the email section. Do the same thing with voicemail and phone calls. Write down any meetings or appointments in the meeting box.

Once you have the basic information filled out, create a simple to do list. It's straightforward to do when you have your top priorities right in front of you. With the next actions listed, it's easy to get started.

Chapter Four: 48 Minutes

Now that your daily planner contains your top priorities and a to-do list, it's time to get busy. Here is an easy plan of attack that will get you maximum results quickly.

Quick Success: Under Two Minute Items

Take a look at your priority and to-do lists. If there are any items that can be completed in under two minutes, do them first. If you can send a quick e-mail, pay a bill, or make a quick phone call, do those items first and check them off your list. This will give you a sense of accomplishment.

Make sure these are not time traps and really can be done in less than two minutes.

Singletasking: Do One Thing at a Time

If you have large projects to do, it's best to do them one at a time in a focused manner. I like to break each working hour into two parts:

48 minutes for working,

12 minutes for a break

Why 48 Minutes?

48 minutes gives you ample time to get into a project and provides a way to get things done without distraction. As with our stage metaphor, we are setting a time lock on our outside door and keeping all distractions to a minimum for 48 minutes.

This includes...

- Turning off e-mail
- Turning off your cell phone
- Turning off your browser
- Closing your office door

Exercise: Implementing the 48 Minute System

Get a Timer. Set it for 48 minutes

Find a quiet place

Turn off all distractions (E-mail, Phone, Web, Etc.)

Do one thing until the timer goes off

Take a 12 minute break

Repeat as necessary

The 80/20 Solution

The 48 minute time solution divides an hour into a 80/20 Pareto style time management system. We work on projects for 80% of the time and then take a break and do minor things for 20% of the time. The great thing about 48 minutes is it is divisible into many different time periods. You can divide it into two blocks of 24 minutes, three blocks of 16 minutes, four blocks of 12 minutes, six blocks of 8 minutes and so on. This gives you great flexibility in dividing large projects into smaller chunks or doing multiple smaller projects in the same time block.

Chapter 5: Don't Believe the Hoax!

Do One Thing at a Time!

Using a daily planner can help you to focus on your most important activities. Using it in conjunction with the 48 minute empower hour can really improve your productivity.

Strategies for Setting Priorities:

1. Decide on six things that you want/must to get done by the end of the day. Make sure they are truly important, not just urgent.
2. If you are usually quite motivated, list your hardest task first. The rest of the day will just get easier.
3. If you find it hard to get going, list an easy task first. Do it first thing. This will get you moving and make it easy to check off your first box.
4. Check off your priorities as you complete them. This will motivate you to go on.
5. List your after work activities like exercise in the after-hours box.

Download instructions:

- [The Top-Six Daily Planner](#) is a free download. The zip file includes a MS Word version that you can modify and a PDF version that you can use without any additional software.
- Watch the [48 Minute Empower Hour Video](#) and download additional planning sheets.

About John Richardson

I'm John Richardson, and I reside outside of Carlsbad, California.

I'm a blogger, writer, and professional speaker. My goal is making personal development easy for the average person. On my blog you'll find many helpful tools for goal setting, time management, taking notes, and becoming more productive. I also write extensively about the latest technology and how it can positively impact your life.



Website: www.successbegintoday.org/wordpress

Contact: www.successbegintoday.org/wordpress/contact/

Twitter: [@success2you](https://twitter.com/success2you)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/successbegintoday

Sign up for my twice a month [SuccessConnect Newsletter](http://www.successbegintoday.org/wordpress/newsletter) at <http://successbegintoday.org/wordpress/newsletter>

Further Resources

[The Path of Consequence](#). A Mystery Novel by John Richardson

Discovered maps. Stolen books. Hidden tunnels. Coded messages on jewelry. Not your standard weekend getaway. But when Jack and Bridget Norton stumbled onto Tor's secret, they wanted to know two things: Who is Tor -- is he still alive? – and what kind of treasure did his clues lead to?

[Your Brain at Work](#) by David Rock

In this book, we travel inside your brain as you attempt to sort the vast quantities of information you're presented with, figure out how to prioritize it, organize it and act on it.

[Empower Hour Work Templates](#)

These simple sheets allow you to divide out your empower hour into different time periods that are helpful when you have a lot of small projects to do. Use in conjunction with your daily planner.