THE ART OF EFFICIENCY

A guide for improving task management in the home to help maximize your leisure time

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Efficiency can be defined as the accomplishment of – or ability to accomplish – a job with minimum expenditure of time and effort. It sounds quite simple, doesn't it? Just do your job quickly and it is "done", thereby making you efficient in the task, right? If only it were that simple. The problem is that for many of us, if we do a task or chore quickly it tends to have the effect of being done *poorly*.

Some tasks, such as mowing the yard, just take time. These type of labor-intensive chores can be tedious, time-intensive, and don't really allow much room for improving on the amount of time it takes to complete the job. Therefore, when I look at improving efficiency I don't typically look at each individual task separately; rather, I focus on the 'big picture' that encompasses *all* of my tasks. Getting one task done 30 seconds faster than usual doesn't really have much effect. However, if I get 10 tasks done 30 seconds faster, I have gained myself an extra five minutes of "me" time. This is a favorable goal, but the key to improving your efficiency is not really in getting tasks done *faster*. Rather, the intent is to get the sum of all your tasks done in a shorter amount of time by scheduling them in a way that makes the most of your available time. If done correctly, you may easily be able to free up an

additional 30 or more minutes at the end of the day that you did not originally have.

In being efficient in your tasks you can ultimately create time for yourself to use how you want. I've had success in becoming more efficient at task completion in my own daily life, in turn maximizing the amount of leisure time I have available for myself to do as I please. Because of what I have learned about being efficient in my tasks, I wrote this book to take those tactics that I've developed and outline them for you in order to help you also become better at accomplishing your tasks in as efficient of a manner as possible.

You'll notice that I used a definition of efficiency earlier that included the word *effort*. Personally, I feel that effort spent on a task has much less wiggle-room than time. In other words, putting a lesser amount of effort into accomplishing a task will have a higher chance of causing regret than if you put less time into a task, simply because time is much more subjective in nature. For example, the amount of effort you put into cleaning the kitchen floor is directly related to how well the job gets done; less effort results in a less-favorable end result such as a still-dirty or dull floor. However, if you use a strong cleaning liquid, the amount of actual *time* spent cleaning the floor will likely be diminished, as the cleaner is more efficient at getting the job done. In other words, it takes you less time to adequately clean the floor because you chose a more effective cleaning liquid.

The same basic premise can be used to help you improve your efficiency at home to increase your free time. In this book I will outline several tactics on how to improve your efficiency through the manipulation of time rather than any alteration in effort. What that means is that you still need to do the work, but you will be able to structure the involved tasks so that the overall amount of time required is less. Like you, I wish that both time and effort could be diminished, but I have found that almost all tasks take a set amount of effort for that task to be done well. After all, if you have to repeat any task due to a lack of effort, you have effectively eliminated any gains you made by being efficient, and we certainly don't want that to happen. Instead, we will focus in this book on how to increase your efficiency through the organization of your tasks into a way that minimizes the amount of time needed to complete them.

Pretty much all of us *want* to be more efficient, yet so few of us actually do it. Why is that? Well, there may not be an easy answer. There are those generic answers, such as we are just lazy in general or not particularly motivated. I don't think that's necessarily the reason all of the time, but there are certainly days that even I am just not motivated to do seemingly *anything*. Personally, I feel that part of our lack of motivation lies in the fact that we don't plan out our tasks in order to accomplish them in the most efficient manner. Maybe we have too much on our minds already, or perhaps we don't *want* to

think about more upcoming duties that we need to accomplish. To improve your efficiency, however, you should instead *focus* on the tasks that you will need to accomplish when you get home.

Despite what may have been a long day, it takes a concerted effort to focus and plan out your method of attack specific to accomplishing tasks. This can take time and mental effort, and in many cases we simply don't think about it because there are too many other things on our minds. Through reading this book, my intent is to help you start to change this and help you get into the mindset of planning out your schedule in order to structure your tasks in a way that will maximize your efficiency.

I remember clearly the moment that I recognized that I should write this book. It occurred the second time that a colleague asked me if I had been in the military (I have not). The first time I was asked, I returned their question with my own – *why do you think that*? Their response actually took me by surprise. They pointed out that I did things very methodically, on a strict schedule, and it made them think that I likely picked it up in the military. While I certainly understood their reasoning, it dawned on me at that moment that I had never realized my own precise manner of getting things done. At first I took the comment as slightly offensive, thinking that it likely meant that I came across as a stickler and a hard-ass. However, what woke me up to their real meaning of the comment was that both times I was

asked the question, each person pointed out that they *appreciated* my mindset. They noted that they liked the detail of my personal schedule as it made their job easier. They knew I would get a task done, and I often knew *when* I would get it done. As I began to understand the source of their question it made me reflect on how I had developed this efficiency mindset over time.

After having given their comment some thought, I realized that I was indeed very particular about maintaining a schedule. I am adamant about starting something (a meeting, dinner, etc.) at a specific time. If I say something will take an hour, I'm passionate about doing my best to end within that time frame, as I'm both cognizant of and respective of other people's schedules. As I reflected on all of this after later being asked the question a second time, I realized that I should probably look into writing down my tactics in order to help others become more efficient in their own scheduling.

That initial thought has ultimately manifest itself as this book. What I present here is an expanded version of how I have found success in mapping out my own set of impending tasks in order to schedule them in a way that helps maximize my available leisure time. The resulting improvement in efficiency allows me to either get a head start on additional tasks and build up extra free time, or use the gained free time as I please – perhaps playing with my kids, writing an additional

few pages of a book, or maybe even watching television.

In looking for similar books on the topic I have found that there are a wealth of books out there that describe how to improve your efficiency, but they are focused on the job setting. While being more efficient at work is certainly a favorable quality, improving efficiency at work is typically not as simple as improving efficiency at home. This is in part due to the fact that your work duties are generally laid out in advance, and when finished with those assigned duties the employee typically must continue to engage in work duties rather than 'relax' as he or she could expect to do at home. Furthermore, work settings are vastly different than at home given the wide range of jobs that exist. In contrast, most people have relatively consistent responsibilities at home, as we all have to do laundry, clean the house, make dinner, etc., and we all get to do what we want with our earned free time. Therefore, this book's focus on improving efficiency in the home offers a unique aspect that work-related efficiency books cannot, as it looks to help you improve your own efficiency at life – whether it be in your house, doing yardwork, running errands, or working out.

You'll find that the chapters are structured to guide you through several steps involved in the overall process of becoming more efficient. Each step is presented in detail, and each step's respective relevance to improving your efficiency is outlined.

As we progress through the book, we will begin to intertwine the steps to reveal how they can be manipulated in order to improve your task management, thereby improving your efficiency at home.

I hope that the information you find in this book specific to improving your own efficiency in your home is beneficial for you in the same way that it has been for me. After my own efficiency tactics became evident to me, I quickly recognized how much I have adapted my lifestyle to them, and also how inefficient I can be when I don't stick to my own plan. These days, being efficient is just a part of life and I generally look to be efficient in most any set of tasks that I am engaged in. For you though, improving your efficiency may take some effort and discipline initially. What you must try to do is avoid letting your attempts at efficiency frustrate you; rather, allow it into your life gradually in a way that causes minimal disruption. What I think you will find is that despite a small learning curve you will notice an increase in your task efficiency, and even more importantly an improvement in your available free time.

Good luck, and let's get started on the process to increasing your efficiency.

Chapter 1: Establish your adjustable time

No matter how much time we wish we had available, we remain bound in our tasks by the constraints of nature. As humans, we developed a daily clock that has 24 hours, and unfortunately we are limited by that 24 hour time frame each day. If we don't get our tasks done in those 24 hours, they often manifest themselves again the next day regardless. In reality, of course, we have much less time than that, and the first step is to determine *how much less* time we have available for ourselves.

For the most-driven individual, you could in effect spend 24 hours on a task or set of tasks if you choose to stay awake all night. Unfortunately, there's no way can you expect to have 24 hours a day every day to complete your tasks, so it's equally unrealistic to expect that you can do it even once. Why? Because if you stay up all night completing tasks, there's a very good chance that you will need to take a nap the next day due to sheer exhaustion and fatigue. That subsequent nap will in turn cut in to your time available to work on task completion. Had you slept properly the night before, you likely wouldn't have needed the nap and could have continued working the next day.

My point in telling you this is that one of the factors that detracts from your available time to

accomplish tasks is sleep. We all need sleep, we all probably feel that we don't get enough of it, but yet sleep is important for helping us survive the ensuing day. In other words, when it comes to making you more efficient, sleep is a necessary evil – it cuts into your productive time yet also ensures that you are at peak productivity. So while sleep doesn't directly improve our ability to perform tasks, it provides a somewhat indirect factor in that if we get enough sleep at night we will likely not need additional sleep during the day.

Therefore, one of the questions you have to ask yourself is *how much sleep do you require*. There is no one answer that applies across multiple individuals, and it may entail a bit of trial and error on your part to establish your own preferred sleep requirements.   You'll want to experiment with different time frames – if you *want* eight hours of sleep but only find that you have enough time to get in six hours, it's likely that you will feel groggy and perhaps even have a few bouts of nodding off during the following day. As discussed earlier, feeling sleepy during the day can negatively influence your effort and motivation, in turn reducing your efficiency in getting tasks accomplished – both at work and at home). If you find this happening to you consistently when getting six hours of sleep, make time for seven hours of sleep for a few nights and take stock of your ensuing energy throughout each subsequent day. You will likely have to make some sacrifices to get

yourself the extra hour of sleep, but if you end up avoiding the onset of fatigue during the following day it will certainly be worth the effort as you will be more refreshed and less likely to 'bottom out' during the day. Your improved level of attention will in turn help maximize your opportunity to improve your efficiency.

Once you have established your preferred sleep requirements, subtract that amount of time from your available 24 hours. If you have found that you work best after eight hours of sleep – and you can allot yourself eight hours of sleep per day – you will then be down to a maximum of 16 hours remaining per day for both task accomplishment and personal time. Obviously, 16 hours is ample time to get your tasks done. However, there are still other aspects needing to be addressed that will require subtracting more time from your available hours.

For example, as we are only focusing on home-related issues, exclude from your available hours that time at your job as well as the associated commute, given that you cannot be engaged in any effective task completion while driving. Let's assume you're an hourly employee and you have a strict nine-hour workday schedule that consists of a 15 minute commute (each way), eight hours for work and one thirty-minute lunch, all activities during which you are not at home and thereby you cannot complete any tasks. While it is certainly likely that you "could" accomplish some tasks over

the lunch hour, that possibility varies from job to job. Therefore, for the purposes of this book we'll factor lunch in as a component of your work.

The nine hours at your job brings the available time you have per day for task completion down again – from 16 to seven hours. If you have other required tasks, such as attending religious services every day, or any other responsibility that has an 'absolute' schedule that cannot be altered and requires you to be away from home, subtract that time as well. However, if you have random events such as soccer practice or a dinner with friends, those should not be included as they are not a consistent part of your day.

So why are we looking at available time instead of first addressing how to improve your efficiency? Simple – by outlining your available time we have established the 'workable' portion of your day. In other words, using our theoretical schedule you have seven hours of your day that is not 'pre-filled'. That time may consist of two hours in the morning and five in the evening, or however you personally break them up. This represents the available amount of time that we can start assimilating your efficiency into, with the ultimate goal of trying to *maximize* your personal time and *minimize* the amount of time you spend completing required tasks. Remember, don't try to sleep less or get out of work earlier, as the whole purpose of this book is to help you get your tasks done during your "available" time. And the structuring of those tasks

to maximize your available personal time is where the fun begins.

Chapter 2: Inventory your tasks

The word "task" is used throughout this book, and therefore it is important that we outline just what a task is. For the purposes of this book, a task is any required duty that you need to perform. Therefore, any required duty you perform at home could be considered a task, and it is largely up to you as to what you feel are worth classifying as legitimate tasks (e.g. *fold the laundry*) and what less-involved events are not worth classifying (e.g. *chop up an onion*). Regardless, outlining all of your tasks is important when it comes to efficiency as it provides you a framework of what you need to accomplish each day. Therefore, in this chapter we'll look at how to categorize all of your tasks in order to establish the full list of items that must be accomplished.

Broad vs specific vs individual tasks

When it comes to task management in the home, we will group tasks into two categories. The first group are the *broad* tasks. Broad tasks are focused around accomplishing one item, chore, or duty but are actually made up of several smaller tasks. Examples of broad tasks can include:

- laundry
- doing dishes
- making dinner
- cleaning a room or cleaning the house

Broad tasks are often focused around 'events' and generally take a significant amount of time to complete.

The second grouping of tasks are *specific* tasks. These are small, intricate tasks that are each involved in accomplishing an individual broad task. Examples of specific tasks that are involved in accomplishing a single broad task such as laundry could include:

- gathering all dirty clothes
- loading and starting the washer
- switching the washed clothes to the dryer
- folding the dried clothes
- putting the clean clothes away

How many specific tasks you establish for each broad task is ultimately up to you. Personally, I like to have more detail in my tasks than less, so I generally have quite a few specific tasks comprising each of my broad tasks. You may instead feel that being less-detailed works better for you. The main goal is to ensure that you establish your broad tasks in addition to all of the associated specific items involved in those broad tasks.

The third type of task is the individual task. These are small, required duties that are unrelated

to any broader task. An example might be sending an email, feeding the dog, or perhaps checking the mail. Individual tasks don't have any association with broad tasks, and so can be completed whenever time allows. I like to use these individual tasks as 'fillers' that help fill in dead space that occurs during the normal course of my task completion. These will be inventoried separate from your specific and broad tasks.

Time Units

Regardless of your classification system, tasks represent those items that you must accomplish in order to complete your duties for whatever *time unit* you are using. Time units represent the available block of time you have while at home, and depending on the day of the week may consist of the morning, the evening, or even the entire day. Typically, tasks you need to accomplish are specific to that block of time. For example, if your time unit is the weekday morning, meaning that time from when you wake up until when you leave for work, you will typically have tasks focused on getting ready for work and possibly getting your kids ready for school. Most likely, your tasks aren't geared toward cleaning the house or any other extensive task given your reduced time unit during a weekday morning. However, if your time unit is a weekend day such as Saturday, it's most likely filled with a different set of broad tasks that may

include laundry, mowing the yard, or cleaning the house.

Outlining your tasks

In the previous chapter we outlined those sections of your day that are 'unavailable' for you to gain additional time, namely sleep and work as well as any other events that require you to be somewhere other than at home. After having outlined your unavailable time, your next step is to inventory all of the tasks that you have to accomplish in a given time frame. Typically, the time frame most people work under is one calendar day, and tasks that you will be outlining are effectively *all* those tasks that you encounter during the non-work-related portions of your day, independent of any time unit (e.g. morning vs. evening). In effect, you will want to establish a 'master list' of tasks that you need to accomplish each day.

It might sound simple in theory, but inventorying your day's tasks can actually be quite detailed and therefore require a bit of precise brainstorming. In the whole process of becoming more efficient, I feel that this step is the most involved portion of the process. You will need to start to think of *everything* that you need to get done before your "end-point", or the self-established final point of your day at which all tasks must be completed. We will later group the tasks into your

time units, such as what you need to get accomplished prior to leaving for work, or before watching television in the evening, or whatever your individual time unit is. The earlier you get the required tasks done specific to your endpoint, the more time you have available for the remainder of your day which is yours to use however you want. By taking a detailed inventory of your tasks and writing them out, you will have everything laid out for you in terms of what you need to get done. This will allow you to begin to structure the order of your tasks in a way that allows you to accomplish them in the most efficient way possible.

To create your inventory, start by listing those broad tasks that you must get done each day. Include those items that if failing to get accomplished will either 1) have consequences, or 2) have to be dealt with eventually. For example, taking a nap should not be included on the inventory as it is not considered as a task. Similarly, watching television is not a task. In other words, if you don't watch television now, there will not be repercussions later. Rather, items such as watching television, working on a hobby, or playing with your kids should be categorized as what you will be utilizing your later free time for.

Tasks you *should* include on your inventory might include cleaning the house, making breakfast, or watering the yard. Each of these broad tasks consist of several individual, specific tasks that we will outline momentarily. For example, 'getting the

kids dressed' is just one broad task in your inventory but requires getting the new clothes ready, removing the clothes your kids are wearing, and putting the dirty clothes in the appropriate place. Depending on how many kids you have, this may be a 15 minute task or more. Separately, ironing clothes could itself be considered a broad task, as it involves several steps such as gathering all the clothes, setting up the iron and ironing board, ironing, and finally putting the clothes away. Inventorying such a task as 'ironing clothes' will help you recognize that the task requires your attention, thereby allowing you to plan accordingly.

Looking at these two relatively simple examples (i.e. getting the kids dressed, ironing) points out one of the big problems that people encounter when they haphazardly take on their tasks – they tend to focus only on the broad tasks. *Tonight I need to get laundry done, make dinner,* and *do the dishes.* Those sound so much easier than they really are! As we showed in the previous paragraph, accomplishing each of those broad tasks actually requires much more detail than it seems since each of those 'big' tasks is actually a set of several smaller, detailed tasks. Think of it this way – it's nice to say that you need to 'save money for retirement', right? But what does it take to actually set aside enough money? It can end up being a long, convoluted journey of making sacrifices, putting in effort, and perhaps even making a few missteps now and then. At face value, it seems easy to simply save money.

However, once you get started you'll find that the details actually take a bit of work and can at times be more involved than you initially plan. It's relatively the same issue when you are mapping out your broad tasks. While you need to have an inventory that includes your broad tasks, the actual tasks that you will be taking on are more intricate in nature.

Specific tasks, though perhaps somewhat menial in the grand scheme of your day, require a certain amount of time and therefore takeaway from your available hours. Taking a shower, changing out of your work clothes, shaving, they're all tasks and they all take time. When we start to address how to organize all of our tasks it will make more sense as to why we need to plan for every small task you will need to accomplish during your day. Therefore, they all need to be included in your very broad but very specific task inventory.

Remember too that your inventory is not an agenda – if you have 'bathroom break' listed on your inventory it doesn't mean that you are only allowed one bathroom break after you get home from work. Rather, the inventory is simply a list of tasks that allow you to improve your scheduling. Timing of your bathroom break can occur at a point when it fits nicely into your schedule, and as we will see, you may even be able to accomplish additional tasks at the same time. Though it may not be fun to think about, going to the bathroom takes time and it needs to occur. It may seem to be time to yourself away

from your kids, but it still needs to be factored into your inventory.

Classify involvement of each task

Next, you will want to assign a label to each task that outlines your level of involvement. I will classify tasks as either active, semi-active, or passive. Active tasks require your involvement throughout the duration of the task. For example, I would classify mowing the yard as an active task. This means that to accomplish my yard mowing I am actively involved in the task from start to finish. Consequently, I cannot realistically expect to accomplish any other task on my list during that time.

Semi-involved tasks require my involvement for a significant portion of the time, but I have opportunities to complete other tasks. Cooking is something that I would classify as a semi-involved task. Sure, there are certain things that I cook that require 100% involvement, such as scrambled eggs. But dishes like soup or casseroles are not as involved. When preparing those kind of foods I will have an active period, such as during preparation of the ingredients, and a down period that will occur while the casserole is in the oven. During those times I can engage in other tasks on my inventory.

A passive task is one which requires minimal involvement on your part, typically at the beginning

and end, with a substantial amount of down time that allows you to work on other tasks. Examples of passive tasks might include watering the lawn or washing clothes, as several other tasks can typically be completed once the passive task is underway.

By labeling each task as active, semi-active, or passive, you can schedule your tasks in a way that you can get more tasks done in a shorter amount of time. For example, do you need to send a few emails or texts? If you have your phone available, this highly active task can often occur when you are engaged in the passive task of going to the bathroom! See why it was important to put 'use the bathroom' on your inventory? As you start to schedule tasks you can plan to take care of social media updates, texts, and emails during your bathroom time. While it may sound funny at first, to start to become more efficient in your life you have to start thinking with this kind of a mindset.

Daily and weekly inventories

In detailing your inventory you will ultimately want to be operating on two separate but similar inventories. The first will be a 'generic' inventory that addresses your average expected daily tasks that you must complete *every* day. Examples of what you might find on the generic inventory would include showering and making dinner. Then, there will be a second inventory (or at

least a notation on your first inventory) that is relevant to a specific day (or days) of the week. This second inventory focuses on tasks that are not 'everyday' tasks and only occur on certain days (i.e. "Mondays"), and may include once- or twice-weekly events such as cleaning the house, attending a school board meeting, or grocery shopping. You will eventually use both your everyday inventory and those specific tasks that must occur on certain days of the week (i.e. "today", or "Mondays") on your second inventory to determine what tasks must be accomplished.

Assign completion times

Once you have all of your tasks outlined and categorized, you'll next want to start to assign times to the tasks. Obviously you will need to *estimate* the time required for certain tasks, but you probably have a relatively good idea already as to how long most of your tasks take. In general you can expect that dinner (cooking and eating) can take from 15 to 60 minutes, washing dishes 20 to 30 minutes, etc. These times are then factored into your available hours. The times are not finite by any means – rather, the purpose of outlining times with each task is to combine these tasks together in a way that minimizes the time required to accomplish all of them. But outlining all required tasks, you establish a blueprint for your day's tasks and serve to provide

the framework needed to begin to organize your day into a more efficient process.

Assigning completion times will be most beneficial when you have a short amount of dead time and need to fill it with a task. By referring back to your inventory you will be able to quickly find tasks that can occupy even brief down times. For example, if you stick food in the microwave for three minutes, what will you do during that time? Habit might warrant that you grab your phone to check your email and social media, but being efficient with your tasks would require that you make much more productive use of that time. For example pulling from your inventory you might have time to check the mail (two minutes) and set the dinner table (one minute). Instead of later having to do both tasks, each is already done by the time your food is ready. If you then wait two minutes for your food to cool enough to eat it, you can quickly look for a two-minute task that you can accomplish, thereby adding five minutes to your personal time that you can later use.

Create a spreadsheet

One of the best ways to grasp all of your individual tasks is to physically put them all onto a spreadsheet. Treat your inventory like you might your household budget – most people see a more accurate picture of how much money they are spending when they see it all written out in detail on

a computer screen. Daily tasks should be no different. While you likely won't be accessing the spreadsheet daily, it will initially help you visualize everything that you need to accomplish and can allow you to start grouping your tasks into their proper category. The intent of using a spreadsheet is to not only help you organize your tasks but also to provide you a database that you will be able to mentally access at any particular time point – such as perhaps when driving home from work – in turn allowing you to begin to mentally outline the tasks that you need to accomplish once you get home. As you become seasoned in your task management you will find that you won't have to physically access your inventory spreadsheet as you will have an effective system worked out. Over time, you will likely also find that being efficient in your task completion becomes more and more effortless, which is a major goal of being efficient.

If you are a visual person, you may find benefit in physically marking off the tasks on your spreadsheet as you accomplish them. Some people find that they are motivated if they see actual progress, and you may be this type of person. I know several people that cross off the days on their desk calendar as they feel that it gives them the feeling of 'progress' through the month. If you are that type of person who is motivated by marking off your tasks, by all means print out and carry your spreadsheet around.

Remember that inventorying your tasks is designed to provide you a means to outline *all* of the tasks that you need to accomplish. It is meant to be a short-term project, as I expect that within a couple of weeks you'll know your own task inventory very well. Regardless, spend quality time detailing out your inventory so as to make planning your day's broad, specific, and individual tasks much easier on yourself. In the end, you will look to focus on your passive tasks and pull from your inventory to fill the dead time with smaller active tasks.

Chapter 3: Find your time killers

The previous chapter focused on outlining all of the tasks you have to accomplish so that you can schedule them in a way that allows you to get the required tasks done in the most efficient way. Now that you have outlined all of your tasks that you must complete, your next focus is to list out all of your "time killers". Time killers are not daily tasks but actions that you engage in that do not serve to accomplish any particular task.

Examples of time killers include watching television, talking on the phone, or surfing the internet. Granted, each of these items can be very important and may even be required in certain situations, such as if you are conducting business over the phone. However, in terms of efficiency you need to think of these time killers as *distractions* – they interrupt the accomplishment of your tasks and stop your efficiency progress. It's not that you should not engage in the activity, but rather, you should try to save each for when your tasks are done. That way you can spend as long as you want engaged in the activity (e.g. texting friends) without influencing the process of getting your daily tasks done, and the time spent engaging in the activity can serve as a sort of reward for your earlier efficiency.

Certainly you can argue that being on the internet is productive if you are, for example,

researching a product to buy. But in reality, a good portion of our internet time is spent in non-productive activity such as watching a video or interacting with social media. These are not bad events by any means, but they should have a place and time to occur – certainly not in the middle of when we are trying to accomplish our tasks. Or, save the social media checking for when you have down-time, such as we discussed doing during a bathroom break. The intent is to avoid distractions in your task completion which will in turn help you get your tasks done sooner. Remember, the goal here is to structure your tasks in an efficient manner that will ultimately increase the amount of time available for non-task activity, such as utilizing social media.

As we have noted, one major time killer that can double as a distraction is the ever-present smartphone. Given the wealth of information and communication ability that the smartphone brings to our lives, it is easy to understand how we have become so dependent upon our phones. However, in the world of efficiency the phone can be quite a problem, as not only can it distract us temporarily such as when we get a text or call but it can also turn into a long-term distraction when checking one simple text turns into a conversation or an internet surfing expedition.

Think about this scenario. You stick a microwaveable meal in the microwave and start the five minute timer. Now, you have five minutes of 'dead' time during this passive task of cooking a meal. Given that you're in the kitchen, there's a good chance that

your phone is nearby, so what do most of us do for those five minutes? We'll likely grab our phone to check messages or play on the internet, right? During this same five minutes, I am certain that I could find several tasks on your inventory that could easily be taken care of during the same amount of time that you are playing on your phone. And if you accomplish nothing on your phone other than getting a social media update – which easily could have been done later – you have effectively "killed" five minutes that could have been spent on task accomplishment and would have ultimately gained you at least five additional minutes of uninterrupted leisure time once all of your tasks are finished.

The easiest solution is to just turn off your phone when you are engaged in task completion. While this is largely true at face value, it isn't always feasible. For someone like me who has a wife and kids intermixed with long commutes and daycare pick-up deadlines, turning off my phone isn't really an option as I could miss an important call. What works for me is to turn the phone ringer to full volume – so that I can hear a call or text if it arrives – and then simply leave my phone on its charger. I don't carry it around with me and I don't check it just to see if I have received a text or email. This "out of sight, out of mind" ideal works well for me when it comes to avoiding my phone and allows me to stay engaged in my tasks without the distraction that can occur in conjunction with constantly checking my phone.

For you, if you don't choose to turn off your phone, ignoring it may take some getting used to. In

fact, it might become a textbook case of engaging in self-discipline. If you are used to having your phone with you at all times, it can initially be tough to leave it undisturbed for an hour, two hours, or more. Remember, though, that you are only avoiding it during the time that you are engaged in task completion. And, the sooner you get your tasks done, the more dedicated and uninterrupted time you will have for your phone later. Therefore, if you can turn off your phone for a while without consequence, do so. If you can't and you need to be available for important calls or texts, I at least recommend turning off notification sounds that are associated with social media as they have no real relevance to needing your attention when engaged in task completion.

Establishing time killers can be difficult and often require a bit of self-reflection on your part. How much do you really *need* to be engaged in this time-killing activity? As mentioned, using the internet can be considered a time killer if the focus of your attention is spent on issues such as shopping or social media. What you must establish with yourself is whether your time spent on the internet or in a phone conversation with a friend can be postponed until you have completed your required tasks. Ask yourself – do you *really* need to send that text or shop for a new item in the middle of your task completion phase? While the text you want to send may have relevance, it will likely lead to a *response* to that text, resulting in you being distracted again, and perhaps many times over during the course of a text conversation. By delaying your sending of a text until

after your tasks are completed, you will not only avoid the distraction of being engaged in the ensuing conversation but you will also avoid the inevitable distraction that comes with checking your phone to see if there has been a response.

When establishing your time killers, remember to think of them as not unimportant events but rather as tasks that disrupt the flow of getting your required tasks accomplished. Time killers are not required tasks, and as such can be put off until a later time. In fact, pretty much any leisure-based event should be delayed until you have accomplished your 'normal' tasks. By doing so, you will find that you are more efficient at completing your required tasks, and you will likely free up more time for your leisure-based events.

Chapter 4: Improve memory skills

As odd as it might sound to include a chapter on memory in a book about improving your efficiency, memory actually plays an important role in organizing and structuring the tasks you will need to accomplish. Therefore, an improvement in your recall skills can make the efficiency process much easier for you.

So when exactly is your memory involved in the steps required for improving your efficiency? As you are driving home from work, you need to start structuring your upcoming tasks into the most organized manner that will allow you to accomplish them in the most efficient way. This will predominantly include overlapping passive tasks with active tasks, as well as scheduling which active tasks to engage in at what times. A strong memory will help you to remember your full task inventory. This will in turn allow you to structure that day's required tasks in a way that allows you to accomplish the tasks in the most efficient manner. Therefore, a good memory can play a role in freeing up more time for your leisure-based activity such as playing with your kids or reading a book.

One of the biggest threats to motivation is the feeling of being overwhelmed. It can be hard to start or continue a task when you feel like there is just too much to do. Specific to your task efficiency, the feeling of

being overwhelmed has a much higher chance of occurring if you forget to include a task or two in your day's inventory. This can result in your suddenly realizing that there's *more* to do than you planned, which can kill your enthusiasm and will likely have a negative effect on your ensuing efficiency.

The point at which you start structuring your upcoming tasks is the point at which having a strong memory will come into play. For me, this point typically occurs either when driving home from work (for the evening tasks) or when lying in bed at night trying to plan out my morning. Sure, you could have a beautifully-drawn spreadsheet that you scan and pull your tasks from, but having that spreadsheet accessible at all times isn't always feasible and – in the case of driving – can be downright dangerous. I do some of my best thinking while driving, and those 40 minutes of my afternoon commute is more than enough time to structure my tasks, from what we'll be having for dinner to what groceries are needed to what work issues need to be addressed, all of which require a specific amount of time that I need to schedule into my task planning.

Anything to make the process of recalling tasks easier will benefit you. Therefore, I recommend that you develop a system to help your memory, such as associating certain non-daily tasks with a particular day of the week. If you don't have established days for tasks, then begin to do so. For example, maybe you do laundry on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, or mow the yard on Saturday. It may be that you have certain days more available for doing particular tasks, such as

if you get home early on Fridays you may want to mow the yard, or do the laundry.

Some tasks, such as dinner preparation, are an every-day type of task. While relatively easy to remember, it is also important that you are sure to factor the everyday tasks in with the once-weekly (or other schedule) tasks. Doing so will help you to quickly formulate your inventory of tasks that you will need to accomplish once you get home.

A final note about the benefits of working to strengthen your memory is that you will find that your tasks occur much smoother as you will quickly be able to move from one task to another. We noted earlier with dishwashing that there is a significant down time that occurs once you press the start button on the dishwasher. Having a sharp memory allows you to instantly move to the next task and the next that will allow for several tasks to be accomplished during the time that the dishwasher cycle is running. If you have to instead run and look at your spreadsheet of tasks every time one is completed, you end up adding unnecessary time to your daily duties, which will in turn infringe upon your free time at the end of the day.

So how do you improve your memory? One way is rote repetition – doing something over and over until it's essentially a habit. There are also several phone apps and internet games that are designed to work on improving your memory. In fact, using these apps might be an activity that you would want to engage in during your free time. In the end you'll find that the

time spent working on your memory is actually an investment in improving your overall efficiency.

Chapter 5: Defeat procrastination

Believe it or not, the topic covered in this chapter – overcoming procrastination – may be one of the hardest to attack. We as humans are designed to be able to work – we have ample muscle mass, a unique energy supply system, and our body actually gets stronger the more we use it. Despite our possessing the *capacity* to work, our bodies do not necessarily *want* to work. In other words, we have the ability to perform work yet we are not hard-wired to work constantly. This capacity to work served us well in days gone by, as we had to exert physical energy or we would not eat – whether it be hunting dinosaurs or plowing our fields. These days, though, with the convenience of grocery stores, fast food joints, and maid services, we simply don't *need* to physically work to survive like we used to. Three hundred years ago, we would likely have died from exposure or starvation if we failed to work hard. In the modern age, though, there's no risk of either of those events occurring and so we generally lack the survival-based motivation to voluntarily perform physical labor.

Why does discussing our ability to perform work matter in a book about efficiency? It's quite relevant, actually. When you have been at work all day, it's somewhat difficult to find the motivation to come home and immediately take on a series of 20 or 30 individual tasks. Actually, it can be quite depressing to

even think about, and most of us need a break from work that usually manifests itself as a relaxing bout on the couch. No one necessarily wants to work harder – unless perhaps there is money associated with doing so – and it's quite de-motivating to think of all the tasks you need to accomplish. So much so that many people would much prefer to *forget* about their tasks rather than purposely remember them as I am suggesting here. But, in the scope of having tasks that need to get done each day, putting them off will do nothing to improve your efficiency nor reduce any associated stress.

Mornings are no better. Most of us try to maximize the amount of sleep we get, and as a result we are typically on a tight schedule between the time we wake up and eventually head out the door to get to work. Furthermore, we often have our minds filled with work-related material, traffic, or other responsibilities, and any additional planning might seem to tip us over the edge. To increase efficiency, you will need to develop a mindset to help you organize your morning tasks in the same fashion as your evening tasks. This can help either get you out the door earlier, allow you an extra 30 minutes or so to relax, or even permit you a bit longer time asleep. Additionally, being efficient in your morning tasks can help make for a smoother, more productive day.

I will be the first to admit that I may be somewhat of an anomaly in this area. Since I was just a kid I have always preferred to get my tasks done immediately, as I can't truly relax if I have tasks hanging over my head (figuratively speaking). I had too many

experiences where I put off doing tasks until later, only to be interrupted by some unplanned event that destroyed my initial plans. The resulting consequences eventually keyed me in to realizing that the best way to deal with unanticipated events is to get everything else out of the way first, and then you will either have ample free time or you will have plenty of time to deal with whatever situation or event comes up. This mindset has transgressed into my task completion mindset as well, as I look to get as much done as I can, as soon as the opportunity presents itself. Furthermore, the feeling of accomplishment at getting all of the tasks done in a timely manner can be quite addictive as well.

For example, as my Saturdays from about April to October are typically designated as my mowing days, I prefer to mow the yard as early as possible. If I don't, and I know that I still have to mow the yard at some point, I tend to be unable to relax as I have this major task awaiting my attention. Furthermore, should something come along to further delay my mowing – such as a rainstorm – my annoyance at myself gets heightened even more given that if I had mowed earlier like I intended, it would be done already. Any delays such as those brought about by a rainstorm end up confounding the rest of my plans as well. Similarly, on those mornings that I decide to sleep in rather than going for a run, I tend to get agitated with myself when I'm awake at the same moment that my run would be finished. Knowing that I could be done with my run instead of still having it hanging over my head is quite frustrating, and I tend to be agitated with myself for an

extended period of time for choosing sleep over an early workout.

Because of these types of situations, I always recommend that you get started on your tasks as early as you can – whether that be early in the morning or early upon arriving home from work. If you make time for the tasks and take them on early you can be assured that the tasks will get done. If you procrastinate and wait to get it done later, the success of your task completion can be somewhat dependent upon whether you have time available as well as whether anything comes up that interrupts your schedule.

By engaging your tasks immediately, you will ultimately have more free time later. And remember that you are ultimately working to earn ensuing free time. This is *your* free time that lasts as long as you want (or until you go to bed), since you have no tasks left to complete and therefore the time is free to spend as you desire. If you instead choose to come home and immediately lay on the couch, that leisure time is only going to last a short while before you have to get started on your tasks in order to get them all done in time. And it may be somewhat difficult to relax with the thought of the upcoming tasks 'hovering' over your head. Therefore, I both prefer and recommend to attack your inventory of tasks at your first opportunity, so as to increase the amount of guaranteed free time for yourself.

So how do you motivate yourself? Well, for people who are trying to lose weight, the biggest motivator can often occur through seeing actual results.

A pound or two less on the scale tends to make an individual excited to continue with the process. Similar results can occur when trying to improve efficiency, as an increase in the amount of free time you have for yourself at the end of the day (or morning) can be highly motivating for continuing to find ways to improve efficiency. But being efficient takes a first step, and the easiest way I have found to get started on your efficiency is to just attack it once you arrive home and experiencing the immediate results (i.e. increased free time) appear. The feeling of accomplishment will likely contrast immensely with what you typically feel when lying on the couch wishing all of your work was already done. Similar to completing a strenuous exercise workout, it's not fun while it's happening, but when it's over you're extremely glad you did it.

A motivating factor that helped me was to *look at completion of every task as an investment of your time*. By getting one task done immediately you have freed up later time. Invest more time in getting another task done and you have freed up additional time that would be lost if you instead chose to wait to complete the task. Just like a financial investment, where you have to take money you truly want to spend and instead put it away with the hope that it will increase in its amount, your time works similarly. By investing your free time early (such as when you arrive home), you will have continuous and likely more free time later. And, once the tasks are done, you can look back and be glad that you invested the time you did, as all tasks will have been done at a time point that previously would have been

met with un-completed tasks. In the end, by taking on your tasks immediately – and avoiding procrastination – you will master one of the key steps needed to increase your efficiency.

Chapter 6: Improve your organization

As you have learned so far in this book, there are many different components involved in the process of improving your efficiency. Now, we will look at how organization plays a role in efficiency as well. Although you've likely been working on improving your organization for years, there is a real benefit that can come from being organized relative to your task completion. As we have discussed, there are two types of tasks that we all face at home. The generic task, such as *cooking dinner* may seem like one particular item on our list but it is in reality a series of several, smaller tasks that must be performed in order to accomplish the larger task.

For example, depending on what you are making for dinner, the process of cooking may include steps such as *cut up onion*, *cut up bell pepper*, *brown ground beef*, *mix ingredients*, *simmer 20 minutes*, and eventually *eat dinner*. Those tasks must occur in a certain order, and each takes a noticeable amount of time to occur. However, by improving your organization you can ensure that the fluidity with which all of your tasks get done can improve. For example, having clean cookware is a start. If you have to pull a pan out of the sink and then wash it in order to use it, you have wasted important time. This or any other delay in your task

accomplishment will almost certainly push the completion of your tasks back further.

The same concept applies to all of your tasks. If, for example, you leave the dishes on the table overnight, any remaining food particles will be dried and caked on to the plate. To clean these dishes, or even pre-rinsing prior to loading in the dishwasher, requires soaking or – perhaps the worst time killer of all when doing dishes – the fateful scrubbing of dried-on food. Had you simply rinsed the dishes once you were finished eating, there would be no significant amount of food particles remaining that would get dried onto the dish, and your clean-up time would have been greatly reduced no matter if it were in loading the dishwasher or doing a traditional hand-washing of the dishes. In other words, think of one part of your organizational improvement goals as being at setting yourself up to later be able to best accomplish your tasks.

Organization is also hand-in-hand with scheduling of your impending tasks. For example, taking clothes out of the dryer immediately after the cycle completes can reduce the overall amount of clothes that need to be ironed, as the wrinkles will not yet have had a chance to 'set in'. Conversely, leaving the clothes in the dryer for an extended period of time increases the chance that the clothes will come out wrinkled, thereby requiring extra time for you to spend ironing clothes. To solve this issue requires that you time your tasks so that whatever task you were engaged in was completed right as the dryer cycle ended, thereby allowing you to immediately fold and put away the

newly clean clothes immediately afterwards, in a time frame that occurs prior to any wrinkles setting in. This likely means that you would have been best served by having filled that time with small, quick tasks such as taking out the trash, organizing a room, or cleaning off the kitchen counter.

Similarly, organization also goes along with putting relevant tools or equipment (e.g. toilet brush, brooms, etc.) back where they belong once you are done using them. It's both easy and convenient to clean a toilet and then place the toilet brush in the closest available cabinet. However, the next time you need that tool or equipment – which may be two months later – requires you to remember where you left it after its last use. A good amount of our time is often wasted looking for items that we need when instead, time could be saved the next time you need an item simply by leaving it in a single, consistent place that eliminates the need to hunt for it the next time that it is needed. This harkens back to a bit of self-discipline as well, as it can at times be frustrating or even annoying to take the vacuum cleaner back downstairs when you're done with it rather than simply putting it in the nearest closet. But, knowing exactly where your needed items are at any given time helps eliminate wasted time and effort needed to find them and also serves to keep your tasks flowing smoothly from one to the next.

Chapter 7: Putting it all into action

Now that we have spent the past few chapters laying out the foundation for what we are trying to accomplish in terms of improving your efficiency, it's now time to put everything together. At this point, we have focused on identifying all of the tasks that you need to accomplish in a given time frame (e.g. after arriving home from work). Now, once you start to actually engage in those tasks, you will want to structure them in a way that allows you get the tasks done in the most efficient way possible. In doing so, you can expect to eliminate unnecessarily wasted time, in turn filling that gained time with additional tasks up until the point that you have completed all necessary tasks. The remaining portion of your day is then free to be filled with leisure-type activity as you see fit.

For the purpose of this chapter, we'll outline the incorporation of this book's tactics specifically for what you might need to accomplish upon arriving home from work. Starting from the time you leave work, you should utilize the time in the car to mentally establish all of the tasks that you need to accomplish from the moment you get home until the point that your time unit ends (e.g. when you go to bed).

In your mind, start organizing your impending tasks by level of involvement. For example, if laundry is on the list of what you need to accomplish, it should

occur soon after you arrive home. Why? Because this one-hour or more event requires only about five minutes of your time, mostly spent gathering up the dirty laundry and putting it in the machine. Therefore, as soon as the washing machine is powered on, the task becomes passive in nature for almost an hour while the cycle runs. This frees up an immediate hour or so of your time to engage in other tasks. In fact, one of the most productive ways to improve efficiency is to look for passive tasks that you can initiate, and then fill the passive portion with other tasks that you can accomplish.

If you instead choose to relax on the couch when you get home, you will likely burn through an hour or more of time, after which it may be approaching dinner time. If so, your opportunity to do laundry – as well as the various other tasks while the cycle runs – is gone, as you will instead need to dedicate your time towards making dinner. A more logical approach would have been to have started laundry and followed immediately by starting dinner, perhaps even being able to fit a few more specific tasks in as well. Immediately prior to dinner, there's a good chance that you would be able to switch the laundry to the dryer and eat dinner as the dryer cycle runs, and maybe even start a second load of laundry that also runs during dinner. That way, by the time dinner is eaten you could have your laundry washed and dried, leaving it only to be folded and perhaps ironed – a 30 (or so) minute active task that still allows time for many other tasks.

If you did indeed start laundry upon arriving home, once you get the washer started, draw immediately from your mental task inventory and determine what you should work on next. If there is another impending passive task with a significant amount of down time (e.g. watering the yard), I recommend starting that task next. Once the sprinkler is running, there will be two tasks (laundry and watering the yard) currently underway that require no active participation on your part. Given the significant progress made in just the first ten minutes of arriving home, you are well on your way to earning additional leisure time. If it's not quite time to start dinner, I will start my active tasks at this point (assuming all passive tasks have been initiated). This might include cleaning the living room, checking my work email, or doing some light landscaping in the front yard.

Why do it this way? Well, to me it's quite simple – getting tasks underway immediately that are passive in nature allows those tasks to proceed separately while you are engaging in another task. If you instead chose to only take on one task at a time you might load the laundry, wait for it to finish, switch it to the dryer, wait for it to finish, and then fold the clothes. That entire process might take three hours, but you would have only completed one broad task (i.e. laundry). Clearly, in the down time that occurs while waiting for the washer or dryer to run its cycle, you have ample time to engage in and accomplish other tasks. As shown above, in that same three hours you could have completed *at*

least two broad tasks, and likely several additional specific tasks.

Here's another way to look at the situation. If the clothes washer is loaded and started, some may view the impending need to switch the clothes to the dryer as an impending task, so they sit down and watch a little television while waiting for the cycle to end. Or, they may view that loading and starting the dishwasher is an accomplishment in and of itself, thereby feeling the need to take an earned break. While either method is feasible, it doesn't solve the problem of addressing the additional tasks that need to be accomplished, and it certainly isn't efficient for task completion. Consequently, if taking a break after starting the dishwasher, all remaining tasks still remain unaddressed. One hour later, as the dishwasher cycle ends, no further tasks have been accomplished during a time that you may have been able to complete 10, or maybe even 20 smaller, specific tasks. Furthermore, with a bit of diligent scheduling and a bit of hustle you may have even been able to be done with *all* impending tasks by the time the dishwasher cycle ends, leaving you only the job of putting the clean dishes away. However, by giving yourself the early break you ensure that you postpone addressing all of the remaining tasks when you instead may have been able to accomplish them within the same time frame.

The aforementioned ideal reflects how my mindset has veered from that of so many others over the years, and how your mindset *needs* to function if your goal is to improve your efficiency. Simply put,

impending tasks don't allow me to relax until they're done. As I stated earlier, I can't relax on a Saturday if the yard needs to be mowed. Any relaxing that I might be engaging in is somewhat tempered by the fact that I still have to mow the yard, which means that at some point I have to 'get back to work'. It would in fact be much more relaxing in the long run if I were to simply get all my required tasks done, which thereby allows me to actually relax to a much greater degree. Therefore, I choose – and I recommend to you – to initiate task completion immediately when possible.

So let's get back to our earlier situation regarding laundry and the dishwasher. In a perfect world, as I finish pre-rinsing dishes and then loading and starting the dishwasher, I will head back to the laundry as the wash cycle ends, move the clothes into the dryer, and start a second load of laundry. Now, the washer, dryer, and dishwasher are all running, and I still have a significant amount of time (i.e. one hour) before any of those appliances finish their cycles (and require additional active participation on my part). So, I will draw from my task inventory to fill that time with tasks needing to be done.

Most likely at this time in the late afternoon, making dinner is in order. Therefore, I will draw from my theoretical 'dinner inventory' and map out what needs to occur, all while cognizant of two of the three appliances that will soon need my attention (the dishwasher can sit idle once it has completed its cycle). Say for dinner I'm making hamburgers in a skillet. I will map out the individual tasks, all the while looking for

any down time which will allow me to move to a different task. Making hamburger patties is active, but cooking them is only semi-active. Therefore, I will quickly make the patties and then as they are cooking I will gather and prepare the remaining ingredients, such as slicing tomatoes, lettuce, and onions). At approximately the time that I am done with that, the burgers should be ready. If not, I might fill the dead time with setting the table, or whatever other task needs to occur based on the overall timeline.

If, for example, the burgers are ready but my wife and kids have not yet arrived home, what was supposed to be dinner time will be pushed back slightly. This in turn creates more dead time. Instead of pausing for an 'earned break', I'll refer back to my mental inventory. I'll look for short, active tasks that I can accomplish quickly. Examples might be sending an email, walking out to the mailbox to check the mail, or perhaps even fitting in a bathroom break. If I feel that I have enough available time I might take on cleaning up the living room, maybe even pulling out the vacuum cleaner (and then putting it back where it belongs, of course).

Can you now begin to see how coordinated scheduling of your tasks allows them to fit smoothly with each other? Think of how you try to fit puzzle pieces together – your tasks are effectively puzzle pieces based on the time required for the task(s) as well as the time you have available. With diligent scheduling all of the 'puzzle pieces' should fit nicely into a flowing,

efficient schedule for you. This is how your efficiency can be improved.

As stated earlier, a three-hour block of laundry could either 1) result in only the laundry getting done in that time frame, or 2) getting the laundry done as well as several smaller but essential tasks. This occurs simply by taking your inventory of tasks and scheduling them so that you can get the most done in a given amount of time. For example, if I did laundry – and only laundry – in one hour I would have only one of my tasks done (not to mention the eventual drying and folding of clothes that is also required). However, in loading the dishwasher during the washer's run cycle, even though 'on paper' I only accomplished two tasks, both were done in that same hour that the laundry cycle took to complete. Had I washed clothes, took a break until the wash cycle was done and then loaded the dishwasher, it would have been at least a two-hour process along with the ensuing time to put everything away.

Being more efficient through effective *combining* of tasks opens up an hour of additional personal or leisure time. However, rather than spending it doing nothing, or waiting for the first task (i.e. the wash cycle) to end, the key is to move right into the next set of tasks. Rather than spending any gained free time immediately – in terms of taking a break – I am continually 'saving' the free time for the point at which all tasks are completed. At that point, all remaining time prior to my end-point is mine to do as I wish. And through efficient task scheduling, the remaining free time in the day is

certainly much higher than had only one task been completed at a time.

Chapter 8: A sample situation

Now that you have read all of the individual components involved in becoming more efficient, let's walk through an example of my own typical task involvement during an average weekday evening. We'll assume that I get home around normal time (e.g. 5pm) and that it is on one of my busier nights. For the purpose of this book, I have written out all of my inventory here along with the total minutes and type of task (active, semi-active, or passive), although traditionally I would be engaging in task recall via memory rather than on paper.

Tasks required :

Change out of work clothes	3	Active
Laundry		Passive
Gather dirty clothes	5	Active
Load and start washer	1	Active
Run washer	55	Passive
Switch clothes	5	Active
Run dryer	40	Passive
Fold clothes	10	Active
Clean Kitchen		Active
Rinse dishes	10	Active
Load dishwasher	10	Active
Run dishwasher	120	Passive
Empty dishwasher	10	Active
Clean off counter	10	Active

Make and eat dinner			Semi-
	Boil water	7	Passive
	Brown ground beef	7	Semi-
	Cut onion	1	Active
	Cut green pepper	1	Active
	Add all ingredients	1	Active
	Cook noodles	5	Passive
	Set table	2	Active
	Clean up prep area	4	Active
	Eat	15	Active
	Remove and rinse dishes	5	Active
	Load dishes into dishwasher	5	Active
Check mail		8	Active
Clean bathroom			Active
	Squeegee shower	1	Active
	Scrub/rinse shower floor	2	Active
	Sweep floor	4	Active
	Clean toilet	2	Active
	Organize countertop	2	Active
	Wipe down countertop	2	Active
Check/address work emails		3	Active
Phone calls/texts		10	Semi-
Feed dogs, check water		2	Active
Get kids' clothes out for tomorrow		5	Active
Feed Fish		1	Active
Fix kids' flat bike tire		15	Active
Water outside flowers		10	Active
Iron work clothes for tomorrow		5	Semi-
Bathroom break		3	Semi
Make kids' school lunch		7	Active

What you will likely notice is that there are a lot of active tasks. Performed independently, the sum of these tasks would take around 400 minutes, or nearly seven hours to complete. Obviously it would be quite ridiculous to do each of these tasks independently, and no one in their right mind would realistically do that. However, given the structure of the inventory that is outlined by the time required for each task, we can now begin to look for opportunities to overlap the tasks so that the time required to finish the entire list is minimized. In the most favorable scenario, the passive portions of laundry and washing dishes are filled with tasks, thereby overlapping my workload and significantly reducing the original seven hours of tasks. Now, I'll walk you through my general method for accomplishing this list.

Immediately upon walking through the door, I am going to take on the first passive task – laundry. Yes, even before changing out of my work clothes, as despite my business-casual wear, my priority is to now save any active tasks for a point when the maximum number of passive tasks are already underway. Besides, I can easily accomplish gathering up the laundry in my work clothes without much of an issue. Because there are two loads of laundry to do, I'll wash the whites first and thereby include my work clothes in the second load. Approximately six minutes later, with the washer now running, I change out of my work clothes and aim for my next passive task – getting the dishwasher started. As I rinse off any dishes, load the dishwasher, and start

it, I have used up 20 minutes. The dishwasher is now running and I have about 35 minutes left before the laundry needs to be switched.

Because it's too early to start dinner (in order to time it to be ready approximately when my wife and kids arrive home), I take on several small tasks to fill the 35 minutes – cleaning off the counter, checking and sorting the mail, feed the dogs, and change the flat tire on my kids' bike. About the time I get my hands washed afterwards, the washer's buzzer sounds. I switch the washed clothes to the dryer, start it, and then put the rest of the clothes in the washer and start that cycle. I have now created at least 40 or so minutes to fill with tasks until the dryer cycle is done.

Perfect time for dinner preparation. Since I'm making homemade spaghetti, the first thing I do is take advantage of my most passive task – putting water on the stove to boil. As that occurs, I immediately throw on some ground beef to brown. Because browning the meat is a semi-active task, I can complete other tasks such as dicing an onion and green pepper in between stirring the meat. As those tasks wind down, it's time to add noodles to the water. This becomes a bit of a semi-active task as they need to be stirred every now and then, but I can take the time in between stirring to add all of the diced and remaining ingredients (e.g. canned tomatoes) to the meat to create the sauce.

Because my wife hasn't yet arrived home, I take the remaining time to clean up the counter, being sure to rinse the cutting board and knives so as to make clean-up easier later. As I drain the noodles and let them

sit in the sink, I immediately set the table and then return to clean up the rest of the work area while the sauce simmers. Conveniently, my wife arrives home with my two girls, and we are immediately able to go to the table and eat.

As everyone finishes, my first post-meal task is to go to the dryer and remove the now-dried clothes. I switch the just-washed clothes to the dryer and immediately start folding the dried clothes. As that finishes, I return to the kitchen to rinse off the dinner dishes, and whereas the dishwasher cycle is now done I open up the dishwasher door to let the dishes air-dry while I continue on with impending tasks. After the clothes have been folded, I immediately attack the bathroom, and about 13 minutes later that is done. Time for a bathroom break, so I grab my phone to check my email and texts.

Winding my tasks down, I plug in my iron. While it is heating up I pull out the ironing board and feed the fish. After the ironing is done I grab a small bucket, fill it up, and water the outside flowers. As the dishes have had a chance to air-dry a bit, I head back to the kitchen to empty the dishwasher. And with that, on one of my busiest days, my tasks are done with two exceptions - making the kids' lunch for tomorrow and getting their school clothes out, both of which I'll quickly do after we tuck them in for the night. All in all, by being diligent in my task completion I performed the vast majority of my tasks in effectively the time it takes to run just over two cycles of the washer, along with a

little family time at dinner. But for now, it's time to engage in some well-earned family time!

Granted, the above example went quite flawlessly for the purposes of this book. In this hypothetical case there were quite a few assumptions made – I didn't have any traffic to delay my arrival time home from work, there were no significant distractions nor any kids begging for attention, and I didn't include things like helping my kids with homework or similar events. Actually, one thing that works out well between my wife and I is that while one of us is playing with or occupying the kids' attention, the other can get tasks done so that after the girls are in bed we can enjoy our personal time. You and your significant other might choose to intermix your personal time throughout your tasks, while my wife and I work well having one person get everything accomplished in a continuous manner.

As the example shows, making a concerted effort to overlap active, semi-active, and passive tasks can make a tremendous impact on the amount of free time that you have at the end of your day (or morning, depending on your end-time). Remember that having a good memory and inventorying your tasks are key to developing a framework from which to schedule your tasks. Though the example I provide is set to my own particular group of tasks, you may have more or less to do in your day, as well as more or fewer interruptions that can work to distract you from accomplishing your tasks. Regardless, give yourself time to adapt, and maintain a realistic expectation as to both getting your tasks done as well as being able to get into the mindset

of having a smooth-flowing and efficient method for accomplishing your tasks.

Chapter 9: When to back it down

So far in this book we have focused on ways to improve your efficiency. The main premise toward improving has been to structure your tasks in a way so that you complete some tasks while waiting for others to finish. When done properly, you can save yourself an extensive amount of time that you can then spend doing whatever you want.

While I am confident that you can be successful in trying out these tactics, I also believe that there are times when you need to step back from an efficiency mindset and just enjoy yourself. When it comes to relaxation, you want to be able to enjoy yourself as much as possible, even if the required leisure time comes in the middle of your task completion, such as a trip to the neighborhood pool or when watching a live sporting event on television. After all, the whole purpose of becoming more efficient is to maximize the time that you get to spend doing what you want to do.

When you are engaged in leisure time, especially if you have additional tasks to complete, do your best to keep your mind off of those tasks and instead enjoy what you are doing at that moment. This is one of the reasons that I mentioned it is beneficial to work on your memory, as task recall can help you later to quickly line up your tasks rather than having to constantly think

about them for fear of forgetting which tasks need to be completed.

Also understand that most of what we discussed in this book is dependent upon you being able to set your own schedule. This type of smooth-flowing plan is not always the case, though. You are certain to have a variety of events pop up that are going to interrupt your task completion. For me, this might occur while driving my kids home from daycare in the summer and they blurt out that they want a friend to come over, or want to play in the local splash pad. At first glance, sitting at the splash pad is highly disruptive to my schedule as tasks on my list will get done (unless I take my phone and fire off a few important emails, thereby requiring me to stay out of the water). Yet, if I have been efficient in my tasks up to that point in the day I have indirectly created ample time to go to the pool to enjoy watching my kids swim in the water. However, if I had procrastinated earlier and delayed completing any tasks, I would likely be agitated by the unexpected splash pad interruption and would likely spend my time trying to rationalize how I will get the tasks done later despite the pool interruption. Such mental work makes it awfully hard to relax.

Remember also, though, that some tasks like mowing your yard cannot specifically be made more efficient. These tasks have to be done, they are highly active in nature (meaning that you are involved constantly), and you need to accept that you must spend a lot of time in getting only one task done in those cases. Other things, like relaxing with the family, should *not* be

made more efficient and should be enjoyed as long as possible. Don't forget that your goal is to work on improving your efficiency so as to maximize the amount of time you can spend doing what you want to do. It's kind of like the philosophy involved with retirement savings – avoid spending money when you're young so that you can save it and spend it when you're old. Therefore, enjoy those unplanned leisure times when you do not have tasks to accomplish. Don't look for ways to leave or try to avoid socializing so as to get more tasks done, as that can end up alienating others who may feel as though you are avoiding conversation. In other words, recognize that there will be times that you should back down from the efficiency race and try to enjoy yourself and those around you.

Conclusion

Hopefully you have gained some insight into how to improve your own efficiency at home. Now, it's up to you to try your hand at the tactics presented in this book so as to gain more free time to spend as you please. Be aware though, that becoming more efficient can become almost addictive in a way, such that you might find yourself constantly calculating out how to schedule and overlap tasks in various ways. If you're like me, you may progress to even taking advantage of passive tasks such as making coffee or filling up your car with gas, with the sole intent of getting something done that can potentially reduce your task requirements later.

As your mindset adapts to this new lifestyle, be aware that not everyone else will be as efficient as you. I often find myself frustrated when involved with others who are highly inefficient and thereby generate significant amounts of wasted time. One of my biggest pet peeves is being asked to do something (such as helping someone move), and the coordinator does not give explicit instructions. Consequently, I end up standing around and waiting for my next assignment, all the while wasting valuable time that – if scheduled properly – could significantly shorten our overall time involved. If you find this happening to you often, determine your place in the group – if you are in a leadership position, politely take charge and improve the group's efficiency. If you are not a leader, try to either remain patient or make a constructive suggestion,

selling the group on the fact that time will be improved with a bit of reorganizing of the schedule.

Most of all, be sure to maximize the benefit gained through the additional time that you free up for yourself. Relax, spend time with your kids or your significant other, or find a way to reward yourself for becoming better at your time management. And hopefully, as you become better at becoming efficient you will realize that less and less mental effort is required, resulting in the eventual discovery that efficiency has become a part of your daily life. And what you may ultimately question is why it took so long to realize.

I hope this book has been beneficial for you, and I wish you well on your journey to efficiency.

Other published books written by Mark Knoblauch

In addition to *The Art of Efficiency*, Mark has released four prior books, and is also working on several books focused on diet and exercise. And, and if you are interested in academic writing, be sure to watch for the release of his upcoming edited book detailing how to improve your professional writing skills.

<u>Overcoming Ménière's. How changing your lifestyle can change your life.</u>

Overcoming Ménière's provides the reader a detailed overview of Ménière's including the involved anatomy as well as the most recent research. By detailing his own Ménière's journey as well as what has worked for his own battle with Ménière's, Mark intends to provide other Ménière's sufferers a pathway which they themselves can following in order to find similar relief from the devastating effects of Ménière's disease.

Understanding BPPV. Outlining the causes and effects of Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo

Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo is a condition that triggers vertigo when the head is placed in a particular position. Furthermore, the vertigo ceases once the head is repositioned. Despite the somewhat forceful symptoms inherent to BPPV, the underlying cause of BPPV is relatively minor and can typically be fixed with a simple visit to a medical professional's office.

Because of his own experience with BPPV, Mark wrote *Understanding BPPV* so that everyone affected by this condition can have a solid resource guide outlining just what BPPV is, how it occurs, and how it is treated. Particular attention is focused on the anatomy of the ear, and how this anatomy is involved in generating the symptoms associated with BPPV. Mark also details the latest research into BPPV and provides an overview of the various diagnostic tests and treatments used to help BPPV patients in many cases get back to a vertigo-free life.

Essentials of Writing and Publishing your Self-Help Book

Some people elect to transform their own experiences and successes into a self-help book that outlines how they persevered through their difficult times. As a potential self-help book author yourself, you might be struggling to get started, get finished, or just need tips on how to finally get your advice and ideas onto bookstore shelves. *Essentials of Writing and Publishing Your Self-Help Book* is filled with information that will help walk you through the process of producing a quality self-help book. You'll be exposed to strategies that will help get you through the various stages of book production, gain insight into the options you have available for publication of your book, and review the individual steps and requirements necessary to get your advice from paper to a finished book.

Hidden down deep inside of us, we all have a book waiting to be written. The tips and techniques outlined in this book are designed to help you bring your ideas, successes, and lessons to life in the form of your own self-help book.

Outlining Tinnitus. A comprehensive guide to help you break free of the ringing in your ears.

The underlying cause of tinnitus has been described by researchers as one of the most controversial issues in medical science. Despite decades of intense research, the cure for tinnitus remains elusive. Consequently, millions of tinnitus sufferers are left susceptible to the frustration and annoyance brought about by the ever-present ringing in their ears. Mark Knoblauch has himself lived with tinnitus for over 15 years and understands the daily battles that occur in those individuals afflicted with tinnitus.

Now, despite still living with tinnitus daily, the high-pitched sound in his ear has become nothing more than an afterthought thanks to a dedicated treatment plan. And the success he had in addressing his own tinnitus drove him to write Outlining Tinnitus. This book is designed to serve as an all-inclusive guide for those individuals who suffer from tinnitus as well as those who live with or know someone suffering. Topics such as the involved anatomy, suspected causes, available therapies and treatments, and effects on quality of life are all discussed along with many others in order to provide a comprehensive overview of what tinnitus is as well as how it can be effectively eliminated.

Let others know!

If you found this or any of Mark's other books informative, *please take the time and post a review online*! Reviews help get exposure for the books and thereby improve the chances that others will be able to benefit from the material as well!