

## The Olympic Athlete's Trick to Finishing Work in Less Time

In this video I'm going to share with you a trick, pulled from the way Olympic athletes train, as a way to finish more work in less time. But first, I want to share three common problems, brought to me by readers.

The first was a person whose main problem was procrastination. She had a lot of work to do, but she was constantly procrastinating.

The second person had difficulty balancing his work life and his social life. He wanted to have both, but he found it difficult with the workload.

The third person was constantly feeling exhausted and burnt out. He had so much work to do, that he found it difficult to keep up.

Maybe you are like one of these people. Maybe you procrastinate, feel burnt out or find it difficult to balance your social life and work. The goal with this technique, is it can actually help solve all three problems.

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This idea was taken from the book, *The Power of Full Engagement*. I strongly recommend if you're interested in this idea, to get that book as it goes into a lot more detail:

[http://www.amazon.com/Power-Full-Engagement-Managing-Performance/dp/0743226755/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1313168344&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Power-Full-Engagement-Managing-Performance/dp/0743226755/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1313168344&sr=8-1)

The key idea in the book was that **Olympic athletes do not train non-stop**. They carefully alternate between periods of intense exercise and deep relaxation. The insight of the book was that if you're doing mental work (i.e. creative tasks, learning) then you should work the same way Olympic athletes train, alternating between intense periods of work, followed by periods of deep relaxation.

The way you can do this is through top-heaviness. Something is top-heavy when there is more weight on the beginning than on the end.

- In the context of a day, that means doing most of the work in the morning, and relatively little in the late afternoon/evening.
- In the context of a week, that means doing more work on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and relatively less on Thursday, Friday or even Saturday.
- In the context of a project or assignment, it means doing most of the work in the beginning of the timeline and less right before the deadline.

Now how does top heaviness solve the three problems I brought up?

### **Problem 1: Procrastination**

If you think about it, even people who procrastinate a lot, don't procrastinate all the time. Usually, right before a deadline, they are able to summon up the energy and accomplish their work.

That's because procrastination is like an on/off switch. It takes a certain threshold of self-motivation and pressure to flip the switch and start working. But, once it's flipped, it's fairly easy to keep working.

If you spread your work evenly throughout the week, you may have a large amount of total work, but the amount of pressure to work at any one moment isn't always high enough to flip that switch. Having a top-heavy schedule builds up the pressure in the beginning part of the week allows you to build the pressure in the first part of the week so that it doesn't matter if you procrastinate later (because most your work is finished).

### **Problem 2: Balancing Social Life and Work Life**

Here the same issue applies. When you have an even schedule, it's very difficult to know when you should be working hard and when you should be relaxing. If you have a top-heavy schedule, you know which days you should be working and need to be focused on work. On the other days, you can relax more and socialize.

The key to balance is separation. Top-heaviness let's you achieve this.

### **Problem 3: Burnout**

It's a common misconception that burnout is caused by working hard. While this is partially true, the real culprit is not relaxing enough afterward to recover that energy.

Think about exercising for a short burst of time. Usually, right after they have more energy than before they started exercising. This doesn't fit with the model of work draining your energy directly. But the key is that work gives you energy, provided you relax afterward to recover your energy reserves.

If you have a top-heavy schedule, you can work really intensely and longer than you would normally be able to, because you're able to follow that up with a period of relaxation.

If you want to avoid burnout, the key is to avoid the continuous non-stop schedule which never allows you to recover your energy, and focus on a top-heavy schedule which forces you to work even harder for a short period of time, but allows you to follow it with a period of relaxation where you can recover your energy.

### How Do You Implement Top-Heavy Scheduling?

If you're using my Weekly/Daily Goals approach, which uses a weekly and daily to-do list, it couldn't be easier. All you do is add more work to your Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday goals.

(Read more about Weekly/Daily Goals here:

<http://www.scotthyoung.com/blog/2008/04/08/how-to-finish-your-work-one-bite-at-a-time/> )

What if you're using a scheduling approach, such as Cal Newport's Fixed-Schedule Productivity? The same thing applies, you just make your Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday schedules a bit harder. Working 10 hours and waking up early on those days. Then, on Thursday, Friday or Saturday, you might only work 4 or 6 hours, because of all the work you got done early in the week.

A lot of people bring up, "How would you actually implement this? It would be nice to be so proactive, but I have a hard time doing things by the deadline, never mind doing work way in advance."

Part of the key is having a system like Weekly/Daily Goals or Fixed Schedule Productivity which can help tell you when to do certain activities. But, the other part is that top-heaviness is easier than it seems—by having that relaxation time at the end, it gives you the energy to focus and work really hard during that short period of time. The reason it's hard to do 12 hours of studying normally is that it's hard to sustain that without having a period of relaxation time at the end.

Try this out on your own schedule. For the next week, try to get most of your work done on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and in the morning. It can help you avoid procrastination, maintain work/life balance and avoid burnout so you can have energy to enjoy your life.