

Hey, everyone,

This week we've been talking about the importance of rest and rejuvenation for both creating balance in your life and increasing your productivity.

In today's Productivity Tip, I want to tell you about a time management system that has been very supportive of these goals. It's called the Entrepreneurial Time System, and I learned about it from the Strategic Coach program with Dan Sullivan that I mentioned earlier in the course.

Dan and the folks at Strategic Coach have graciously allowed me to share one of their handouts with you to help you get started with this, so make sure to download it from the resources section.

In short, the entrepreneurial time system involves organizing your time and activities into three types of days: Focus, Free, and Buffer.

A focus day is a day that you spend at least 80 percent of your time engaged in your top three revenue-generating activities. For me, these would be seeing patients, selling programs and products through my website, and creating training programs. If you are only seeing patients and don't yet have other revenue streams, you may only have one revenue-generating activity. That's fine. The point of focus days is that you are spending the majority of your time doing whatever it is that produces revenue for your business.

Here's how I approach my focus days. If I'm seeing patients that day, that's all that I really do, other than exercise, meditation, and spending time with my family. If I'm developing content, I will generally schedule two large blocks of time in the day, say from 8 to 11 a.m. and then 1 to 4 p.m. I'll take a break to exercise and eat. I will not schedule any meetings or do any busy work—that's for buffer days, which we will talk about shortly. And I will typically only work about six hours on a focus day, since they require a lot of mental energy and attention. I might stop in the late afternoon and pick Sylvie up from school and take her to a park, or something like that.

A free day is a twenty-four-hour period completely free from work-related problem-solving, communication, and action. You are 100 percent off of work. Most entrepreneurs and business owners find this almost impossible to conceive of—especially today when the boundary between work and personal life has blurred beyond recognition for most people. And how can you take free time when there's work to be done, money to make, commitments to be kept?

But as we discussed in the lesson this week, rest, rejuvenation, and play are absolutely essential to getting more done. It's tempting to think that skipping free days and working a little more would lead to better results, but in fact the opposite is true. I know this from personal experience. Now that I am taking regular free days, I find it difficult to imagine how I would function without them. I look forward to them throughout the week, and I feel so much better at the end of them.

Here are a couple of tips on free days. First, if you're just getting started with them, I think it's helpful to plan them out in advance. That way you won't be tempted to fall into old habits and start working because you don't know what else to do. Along the same lines, it might be easier for

you to initially do free days outside of the house, so that you don't get sucked into familiar distractions.

In terms of what you actually do on your free days, that depends on what best helps you to rejuvenate. Some people are rejuvenated by energetic activities. They need to be out and about, on the go all the time. Others are just the opposite. They just want to relax, curl up with a book, listen to music, lie on a beach, or have a good conversation. Some want to be indoors, others want to be outdoors in a natural environment. And of course most people like a combination of passive and active activities.

Keep in mind that if you're not used to free days, they'll probably be challenging to implement at first—especially because so few people take them these days. But like anything else, the more you do them and the more practice you get, the easier they will be—and the more satisfying.

The final type of day is called a buffer day. Buffer Days are for planning and preparation, so you can be fully effective on Focus Days and have a clear mind on Free Days. As Dan Sullivan says, they're the time to develop your business's Back Stage—implementing new processes, training team members, delegating responsibilities, scheduling, doing paperwork, learning new skills, and cleaning up any “stuff” and messes that have accumulated.

In a way you can think of Buffer Days as “practice” and Focus Days as “performance.” And just as practice is crucial to a high level of performance, Buffer Days are crucial to having successful Focus Days. As kids we understood this naturally. We got that we needed to rehearse for a school play, or go to practice our jump shot if we wanted to earn a spot on the team. But as adults, a lot of us have the mistaken idea that we can exist in an “always on” state, where we're in constant performance mode. This just isn't the case.

Buffer Days aren't as sexy as Focus and Free Days, but they're like the glue that holds the whole system together. In terms of scheduling, it's best to schedule your Focus and Free Days first, and then the remaining days will be, by definition, Buffer Days. You should also schedule Buffer Days before and after transition times, for example, just before leaving for or returning from a vacation or prior to a conference or event.

Some people get confused between buffer and focus activities. A simple rule of thumb is if it generates revenue, it's a focus activity; if not, it's a buffer activity. But of course it's not always that simple. For example, when I write a blog article, it doesn't generate any revenue itself, but it contributes directly to other activities that do generate revenue, by attracting people to my website and private practice. So I would consider writing a blog article a focus activity.

On the other hand, having meetings; doing paperwork; doing my monthly, weekly, and daily planning; and other similar activities don't generate revenue, so they would be buffer activities.

The point of this isn't to imprison you in a rigid structure; it's to support you. I will say that I'm 100 percent with Free Days, because even allowing a little bit of work to seep in can really throw off a Free Day for me. But with Focus and Buffer Days, I'm more like 80/20. Sometimes I might let a

buffer activity slip into a Focus Day, and more often I might do some focus activities on Buffer Days. In fact, since I have delegated and automated a lot of buffer activities, my Buffer Days are probably 40 percent buffer and 60 percent focus. But since the definition of a focus day is that at least 80 percent of the day is spent on focus activities, these would still be considered Buffer Days.

Okay, that's it for now! You can use the handout I've provided in the resources for this week to start thinking about your own Focus, Free, and Buffer days. See you next time!