



# WATCH & LEARN: BUSINESS SKILLS

## INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY: STRATEGIES

### PRODUCTIVITY WITHOUT BURNOUT (6:02)

VIDEO Script & Vocabulary (page 1 of 2/v34981)

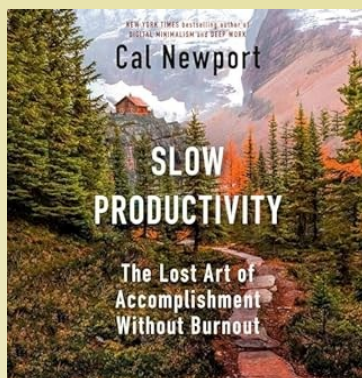
Starting  
Off

*How is it possible to do work that you're proud of and not feel like your job is encroaching on all parts of your life? Cal Newport, author of 'Slow Productivity,' explains.*

- 1 Read the **Video Script** below. The words in **bold** are defined in the **Vocabulary** section. Look up any new words in a dictionary.
- 2 Go to the **Your Turn** section at the end of this document. Practice using new words and expressions from the video script to prepare for your next class.
- 3 Look at the **Discussion Questions** and prepare your responses for the next class.

#### Video Script:

**Cal Newport, Computer Scientist and Author of 'Slow Productivity:** We're increasingly facing **burnout**. How is it possible to do work that you're proud of and not feel like your job is **encroaching** on all parts of your life? Because it's no longer you just see me in my office looking **vaguely** busy. You can actually see every email I'm sending and how active I am in a Slack chat. I could do this on the way to work, on the way home from work, at home, on the weekends. Enough is enough. We're increasingly exhausted. We have a **faulty** definition of productivity that we've been following and what we need to do instead is shift our focus onto **outcomes**. I'm Cal Newport. I'm a computer scientist and writer. My most recent book is "Slow Productivity: The Lost Art of Accomplishment Without Burnout."



**Slow productivity:** So the knowledge sector emerges in the mid-twentieth century. When it emerges, our best understanding of productivity came from manufacturing. In manufacturing, this is something that we could measure very precisely. For example, how many **Model Ts** are we producing per labor hour going in as input? And we had a number we could look at.

**Knowledge Work Emerges:** These type of **metrics** don't work anymore. Because in knowledge work, we're not producing one thing. I might be working on seven or eight different things at the same time. This could be different than the seven or eight things that the person right next to me is working on. Our solution to this was to introduce a rough **heuristic** that I call **pseudo-productivity** that said we can use visible activity as a **crude proxy** for useful effort.

**Pseudo-productivity:** So if I see you doing things, that's better than you not doing things. Come to an office and we watch you work. If we need to be more productive, come earlier, stay later. We'll just use activity as our best **marker** that you're probably doing something useful. More and more of our time is focused on *performing* this busyness, which means less of our time is spent actually doing things that matter.

So what's the solution? Slow productivity is a way of measuring useful effort that is now much more focused on the quality things you produce over time as opposed to your visible activity in the moment, and I define it to be built on three main principles.

*Video Script continued on next page...*

#### ADVANCED LEVEL (C1) AND ABOVE

- ◊ Read the script and note new vocabulary
- ◊ Write three sentences using new vocabulary
- ◊ Prepare for the discussion questions

#### Discussion Questions:

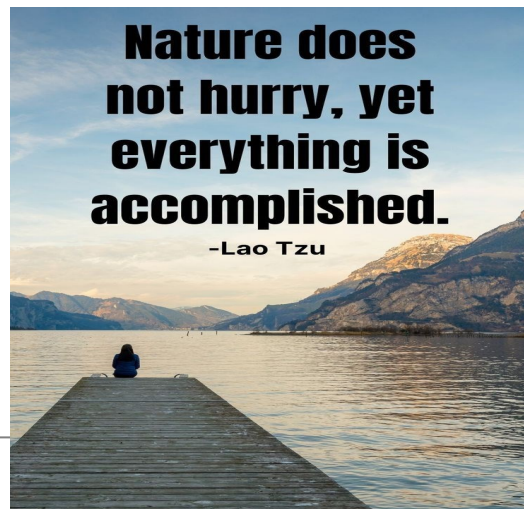
- ◊ Have you ever felt like you were close to burning out?
- ◊ What strategies do you use to avoid becoming overwhelmed by your job?
- ◊ Have you ever considered the possibility that you might actually be able to accomplish more by doing less?

#### Vocabulary:

- **burnout** - state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged or excessive stress. It is characterized by feelings of energy depletion, increased distance from one's job, and reduced professional efficacy
- **encroaching** - gradually moving into another person's area or territory, often without being noticed
- **vaguely** - in an imprecise or uncertain way
- **faulty** - something that is not perfect, not working correctly, or contains mistakes
- **outcomes** - final results or effects of an action, process, or situation
- **Model T** - first mass-produced automobile by the Ford Motor Company
- **metrics** - quantifiable measures used to evaluate performance or track progress
- **heuristic** - a practical problem-solving approach based on experience and intuition rather than strict rules
- **pseudo-productivity** -
- **crude** - the illusion of being productive while actually accomplishing little of value
- **proxy** - someone or something that represents or acts on behalf of another person or thing
- **marker** - an object used to indicate a position, place, or route

**Nature does  
not hurry, yet  
everything is  
accomplished.**

-Lao Tzu





## WATCH & LEARN: BUSINESS SKILLS

### INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY: STRATEGIES

# PRODUCTIVITY WITHOUT BURNOUT (6:02)

#### VIDEO Script & Vocabulary (page 2 of 2/v34981)

#### ADVANCED LEVEL (C1) AND ABOVE

- ◊ Read the script and note new vocabulary
- ◊ Write three sentences using new vocabulary
- ◊ Prepare for the discussion questions

#### Video Script continued...

**Principle 1 – Do Fewer Things:** The first is to do fewer things. Now this idea scares a lot of people when they first hear it because they interpret do fewer things to mean *accomplish* fewer things. What I really mean is do fewer things at once.

We know this from neuroscience and organizational psychology that when you turn the target of your attention from one point to another, it takes a while for your brain to reorient. The things you're thinking about over here leaves what's known as attention residue. This is a **self-imposed reduction of cognitive capacity**, so you're producing worse work. Even worse, it's a psychological state that is exhausting and frustrating, so the experience of work itself just becomes subjectively very negative.

So what happens if I'm working on fewer things at once? More of my day can actually be spent trying to complete commitments, which means I'm gonna complete em' faster. And probably the quality level is going to be higher as well because I can give them uninterrupted concentration.

**Principle 2 – Work at a Natural Pace:** The second principle is to work at a natural **pace**. One of the defining features of human economic activity for the last several hundred thousand years is that the seasons really matter. There was migration season when we were hunting. There were planting seasons when we were planting, and harvest seasons when we were harvesting, and seasons where neither of those activities were going on. We had a lot of variety throughout the year in terms of how hard we were working.

I think in knowledge work, if certain times of year are more intense than others, this will lead to overall better and more sustainable outcomes. So the principle of working at a natural pace says it's okay to not **redline it** fifty weeks a year, five days a week. We can have busy days and less busy days. We can have busy seasons and less busy seasons.

**Principle 3 – Obsess Over Quality:** The third principle of slow productivity is to obsess over quality. And what this means is you should identify the things you do in your work that produce the most value and really care about getting better at that. Any quest towards obsessing over quality has to start with a, perhaps pretty **thorough**, investigation of your own job. And then once you **figure that out**, start giving that activity as much attention as you can.

For example, invest in better tools so that you can signal to yourself that you're invested in doing this thing well. I did this myself as a **postdoc**. I was at **MIT**, didn't have a ton of money at that time, but I bought a fifty-dollar lab **notebook**. And my idea was this is going to make me take the work I'm doing in this notebook more seriously, and it did. So something about having this more quality tool pushed me towards more quality thinking.

So this idea that you want to slow down, that you want to do fewer things, that you want to have a more natural pace, this becomes very natural when you're really focused on doing what you do well. You begin to see all of those meetings and the email and the **overstuffed** task list not as a mark of productivity, but obstacles to what you're really trying to do.

If you are embracing these principles, a few things are going to happen. The pace at which important things are finished is going to go up. The quality of what you're producing is going to go up, and the happiness is also going to go up. This is going to become a much more sustainable work environment and you're going to be doing the work that's going to make you better.

#### Vocabulary continued...

- **self-imposed reduction** - a voluntary decision to decrease or limit something, often related to personal goals or behaviors
- **cognitive capacity** - the total amount of information the brain can retain at any particular moment
- **pace** - the speed at which something happens
- **redline it** - perform a task or job with maximum effort for a sustained period of time
- **thorough** - complete, detailed, and comprehensive
- **figure that out** - solve or understand something through analysis or deduction
- **postdoc** - (short for postdoctoral researcher) is a position held by someone who has completed their doctoral degree and is conducting research under the supervision of a senior scientist
- **MIT** - Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- **notebook** - bound book or electronic device used for writing notes
- **overstuffed** - : something that is filled or packed to excess, often referring to furniture or cushions

#### Your Turn! Using new vocabulary is the best way to learn and remember it.

- 1 Choose three words or expressions from the video that are new to you and write a sentence using each one in your notebook.
- 2 Try to use them in a context that is familiar to you to help you retain them.
- 3 Please ask for feedback on your sentences in the next lesson.

