

80/20 Rule and Your Productivity

By Anne Sedler

How do you spend your time at work? It's not a challenge to identify other people who waste time, but how often do we recognize when we spend time doing things that don't really matter? Countless working people grumble about not having enough time to get everything done each day. This often means that people stay late at work or lug tote bags full of work home each night. This doesn't need to be a general daily practice for anyone who knows how to effectively use time to be productive; and it's really a simple change.

Have you heard of the 80/20 rule? It applies to many things, including how we accomplish our work. It originated with a man named Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian economist, born in the mid-19th century. In 1906, Pareto observed that 80 percent of wealth is held by 20 percent of the population. Forty years later, a quality management expert, Dr. Joseph Juran observed that in the workplace, 20 percent is vital and 80 percent is trivial. When applied to personal productivity, this means that 80 percent of your results come from 20 percent of your efforts. Twenty percent of what you are doing is vital, 80 percent is trivial. Before you shake your head in disbelief, you should know that a lot of very gifted scientific people have proven this to be reality, not just theory.

You may have a tough time coming to terms with the concept that you routinely spend much of your day doing things that don't matter and don't contribute to your productivity. But, if you often believe you should be getting more done each day, stick with me on this and try a little experiment that I bet will have a significant impact on your productivity. Let's call this experiment the 96-Minute Technique.

This is how it works. Let's use the typical eight-hour day as our standard. If you get 80 percent of your results from 20 percent of your efforts, you need to spend exactly 96 minutes a day being highly focused to be productive. Those 96 minutes of focus time represents 20 percent of your eight-hour day. Here are a few tips to help you implement the 96-Minute Technique:

- Set a timer for 96 minutes
- Work on only one task or project at a time before moving on to a new task
- Eliminate interruptions during this time
- Work on your critical, high priority tasks, not your administrative functions
- Do your 96-Minute Technique as early in the day as you can
- Avoid checking email and voice mail first

If you start your day with the 96-Minute Technique, focused on your high priority work, you will accomplish enough during that time to be productive and successful each day. Try it for a week and see if I'm right.

Additional Reading:

- *Beware the Busy Manager* by Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghosha, Harvard Business Review, February 2002 (Article)
- *The Winningest Coach in College Football History*, <http://www.gojohnnies.com/football/jg.htm> (Article)