

The Complicated Mental Side of Productivity

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1

Quick fixes fail quickly.

Meaningful improvement takes effort and time.

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2

Willpower is really important.

But never enough.

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3

Knowing Is Always Easier

- Listing strategies is easy
 - And kind of insulting
- But people are complicated
 - A lot can happen between the intention and the action
 - Or the knowing and the doing
 - Our minds can be messy

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4

AMIBGUITY: WHAT AM I
SUPPOSED TO BE DOING HERE?

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5

Ambiguity is Uncomfortable

- Ambiguity drives procrastination
 - What needs to be done?
 - How does it need to be done?
 - What's the purpose or desired endpoint?
 - When does it need to be done and how long should it take?
- Not knowing is uncomfortable, so it's tempting to avoid dealing with it
 - Especially if you feel *you* somehow missed something

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6

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Clarify the Unclear

- Sometimes job one is to figure out what the job is
 - Need to invest the cognitive effort to figure it out
 - And maybe the emotional effort to tolerate the discomfort—go towards it, not away
- Why are you trying to accomplish this?
 - **Tangible**: the benefits from completing the task
 - **Intangible**: feeling good about yourself for a job well done
 - These are your motivation to do the work

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7

7

Keep Clarifying the Unclear

- Do ask, do tell
 - If you're not sure what to do, who can you ask?
 - Will it save you more time than figuring it out yourself?
 - And will your not knowing even be a secret if you don't ask?
- Be willing to flounder around and have faith in the process
 - Perhaps with something of an intentional plan—or not
 - Bite the bullet on some choice point decisions
 - Accept the cognitive and emotional work

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8

8

Put It to Work

- Identify what feelings or insecurities ambiguity brings up for you. How do you tend to respond?
- Create a list of things to tell yourself when you're tempted to avoid clarifying ambiguity.
- Identify one current task or project where ambiguity is holding you back. What next step can get you moving?

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9

9

HOW PERFECT DOES THIS NEED TO BE?

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10

10

The Sweet Temptation of Perfection

- ADHD hyperfocus can make it easy to overdo something
 - Lose track of time or the purpose of the task
 - Or making the task extra interesting may be a motivation tactic
- Over-doing a task can also be a form of procrastivity
 - Am I doing this or not doing that?
- Perfectionism can also compensate for prior sins
 - But do you actually owe this person something extra?

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11

11

Was Goldilocks Right?

- **Front-end perfectionism**: the idea that circumstances need to be just right in order to be productive
 - An understandable belief with ADHD
 - Especially when you don't understand ADHD
 - But also really limiting
- Yes, set things up well when you can
 - What helps you get those wheels turning?
 - But also tolerate the less than perfect—and believe in momentum

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12

12

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Eyes on the Prize

- Are you clear on what you're doing and why?
 - And where this task fits relative to other demands?
 - And where this time will come from (opportunity cost)?
 - This takes cognitive effort—and knowing what else is out there
- Are you clear on what the other person wants and why?
 - Do you have negotiating power?
- Can you tolerate the uncertainty of less than perfect?

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13

13

Put It to Work

- Identify the types of tasks or situations where you might overdo it. What drives that?
- How can you stay more on top of demands so you don't feel like you owe too much? What do you need to do earlier?
- What can you tell yourself to accept less than perfect?

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14

14

OVERWHELM: BREAK DOWN BIG TASKS

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15

15

Wrap Your Brain Around It

- Some tasks feel too big to fit into your brain
 - Or are too vague, confusing, complicated, frustrating. . .
- Cognitive overload leads to emotional overwhelm
 - Get me out of here!
- Start with a few deep breaths (or push-ups)
 - Then invest the cognitive effort to start breaking it down
 - **Commit to do five minutes—then see how you feel**

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16

16

Start by Starting

- Do you need to clarify others' expectations or requirements?
 - Or pull someone in for input or advice?
- Does it matter where you start?
 - If so, figure out the first step
 - If not, just start somewhere
- Have faith in the process
 - You will get feedback along the way to fine-tune your next decisions

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17

17

Start at the End

- Do you know where to end up?
 - Why am I doing this?
 - What problem does this solve or purpose does it serve?
 - Why does this matter?
 - What's the problem if I don't do it?
 - . . . Invest the time to figure out the endpoint then work back
- Maybe breaking it down into steps/phases is the first step
 - Even if they are kind of arbitrary

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18

18

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Make the Job Easier

- Do you need to just make some choices to constrain your (excessive) options?
 - Too many similar options is too hard to sort out
 - Which criteria get the most weight?
- Externalize (write down) all the moving parts to free up some working memory
 - Then move them around, scribble notes, highlight, color code, etc.
 - Ideally everything is in sight at one time (unless it's better hidden)

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19

19

Put It to Work

- Think of a project that started overwhelming, but you figured it out. What lessons can you remind yourself of for future overwhelming projects?
- Identify a current large project that feels overwhelming. How can you break it into more manageable parts?
- Identify how you could externalize information for upcoming large projects.

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20

20

Just keep showing up.

Make today a good day, regardless of what happened yesterday.

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21

21

The ADHD Productivity Manual
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More information will be posted at
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22

22