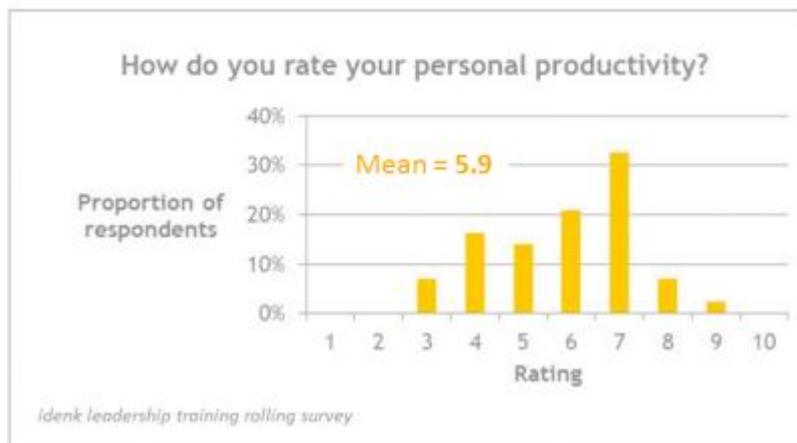


Achieving more in less time – it is possible!

Through our training webinars we help build the skills and capabilities of groups ranging in size from 10-100 people. One of the most popular of these is on '**personal productivity**'. This explores what it means to be productive and how you can increase your impact by making the best use of the time available. Before taking part in the webinar, participants are invited to complete an online survey, which includes asking them to rate themselves. The results of this rolling survey show that most people think their productivity is, at best, a bit middling.



Leaving aside those who are naturally modest in their scoring, the feedback from the webinars is that many people struggle to be as productive as they would like or feel they ought to be.

What are the most commonly cited **big challenges**?

- Being uncertain of what to work on next given the volume and range of things to do
- Handling the constant interruptions via email, phone, etc
- Trying to make progress with several things at the same time
- Responding to the priorities set by other people
- Spending time on tasks that seem unproductive
- Moving on from one thing to another without finishing the first
- Procastination – not getting started!

And the downsides of all this? Two stand out for us. First is that you spend longer at work (or working) in order to catch up on both the important and trivial things you have to do. This has serious implications for the balance you strike between work and the other important things in your life. Second, is that you go around with a persistent sense of not having achieved what you had hoped to. That's not fun.

A recent [Harvard Business Review article](#) stressed the **importance of achieving**. Indeed, making progress with the important things is what the research says is most strongly associated with what people call 'a good day' at work. Not making progress, not achieving what you set out to do, is correspondingly the thing that is most frequently linked to what happens on 'a bad day'. (This need for a sense of achievement links strongly to the ideas around responsibility discussed earlier.)

What can we do about this? Well, there are many ideas you can start to put into practice which will help you be (and feel) more productive. Here are three for a start:

- **Set your focus** – you need to find and keep to a few priorities, important things that need to be done. Don't let these be set only by others. What do you think is critical? Negotiate where necessary. Talk through with others so that there is a shared view on the most important things you should be working on. It's fine to revisit these in the light of events, but if they are important in the first place, there should be a very good reason for not keeping them at the top of your list.



- **Get into a flow** – set aside enough time to work properly on each of your priorities. This has to be sufficient to get into a ‘flow’ (see the work of [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#)) where you are totally engaged with the thing you’re working on. It needs immersion in the topic and separation from any distractions. It’s in these moments that the best work gets done in most productive ways.
- **Master your diary** – you can’t create the space to get into the flow if others (via your diary) are controlling what you do with all your time. The most powerful thing you can do here is to find at least three half-days a week when you can concentrate on one of your most important priorities. Ideally, turn two of those half-days into a whole day and work on nothing but that issue. It will also help you protect that ‘priorities time’ if you have some contingency in your diary. Try putting ‘keep free’ in for half-a-day towards the end of every week and don’t fill it until the day itself – you can choose then to use it for things that have come up at short notice, or catch up on things that have slipped or, better still, you can spend even more time on the most important stuff. If you say “I can’t manage my diary like that”, then others are setting the entire agenda of what gets done – and that’s likely to lead to the disappointment of not achieving what you value.
- **Master your inbox** – finding space to get important work done also needs you to master your inbox. We recommend having your email switched off during ‘flow time’. To help colleagues and clients, you should set an out of office message (eg “I will next see my email at 5pm today”). Before that, and to help manage the anxiety of not being available to email all the time, we find David Allen’s two-minute rule transformative: ie deal quickly with all those emails that can be processed effectively in under 2 minutes and for the remainder, use some form of system to capture and prioritise the rest for action later.

To help you reflect on your own productivity, learn how this compares with others and get more ‘top tips’ on tools and techniques you can use (on mastering your inbox for example), please try out our [personal productivity assessment](#).

And if you’re interested in the range of personal development sessions we offer, either through 45-minute ‘lunch and learn’ webinars or 3-hour online ‘webshops’, you can [see some of the topics here](#).