

5 Steps to Achieve Peak Productivity

by Jessica Krampe

Achieve your personal best by climbing and mastering the Productivity Pyramid's levels.

As psychologist Abraham Maslow explored the idea of human motivation, he pondered the concept of what really motivated people. Through his research in 1943, he identified primary needs people must satisfy before moving forward. This became known as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a five-level pyramid that illustrates the pattern of motivation. (You can see what it looks like below.)

To get from one level to the next, one has to master the basics first. Productivity can work in much the same way, according to Tamara Myles, a Certified Professional Organizer (CPO) and author of *The Secret to Peak Productivity* (AMACOM, February 2014).

Myles recognizes that people are constantly bombarded with information, and multitasking causes stress and is usually counterproductive. She wants people to step back and to simplify—to feel in control.

“Productivity is not about being able to do more, to get through your entire to-do list, but instead to be focused and able to get through the most important items, the things that are going to move your company or career forward,” she says.

Inspired by Maslow's work, Myles created the Peak Productivity Pyramid—an approach to a more productive life.

“[The system makes it] so easy to see the entire roadmap, to identify where you are and where you are headed,” Myles says. “It is, after all, much easier to get where you are going if you have directions, if you have a map.”

Like Maslow's, this pyramid has five levels, and each tier supports the next. Here are Myles' key pieces of advice for each productivity level, starting at the base:

1. Physical organization: Myles suggests employing the “Three To's” of sorting: To Toss, To Do, To Keep.

“Too often people get bogged down trying to sort and file at the same time. By eliminating everything that can be tossed, identifying everything to do and everything else to be kept (filed), eliminating clutter becomes a manageable task,” she says.

2. Electronic organization: Here, she introduces the ABCs of email processing: Access, Batch, Check, Delete, Execute, File.

“Keeping your inbox clear at regular but specific intervals should give you hours of additional time each week, decrease your stress from worrying about forgetting something, and increase your overall effectiveness at handling what is most important in a timely manner,” Myles writes.

3. Time management: Myles approaches time management from the perspective of choice management—and with the following three P's: Plan, Prioritize, Perform.

In her book, she writes, “We can't manage time. Time happens. We can manage our choices in relation to the time that we have, what we choose to do with our time.”

4. Activity-goal alignment: Here, you must make sure you're working on the tasks that best support your goals.

“Living a life with purpose means living each day thinking about the desired outcome. To do that, you need to take a step back from the chaos of everyday life and see the bigger picture. What do you want to be when you grow up?” Myles writes.

5. Possibility: Once you have your goals—and the rest of the pyramid—in order, the realm of possibility becomes available to you.

According to Myles, “Possibility means striving to be all a person can be while looking at all aspects of one’s life, exploring the possibility of achieving goals that might seem impossible.”

Thankfully, productivity doesn’t have to be an all-or-nothing process.

“Focus on one area at a time and make small improvements, build new habits. The more you start making positive changes, the more excited you will become to continue improving. It’s an upward spiral.”

It’s up to you to take control of your time. Will you make that choice today?

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

From the base—containing the most essential needs—upward, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs looks something like this:

- Level 1: Physiological, or what we need to survive. Examples: air, food, drink, shelter, sex and sleep
- Level 2: Safety. Examples: personal and financial security, health and well-being
- Level 3: Love and belonging, or relationships. Examples: work, family and partner
- Level 4: Esteem. Examples: self-esteem and others’ respect
- Level 5: Self-actualization, or fulfilling our greatest potential