Pomodoro Technique

Idea In Short

The Pomodoro Technique is the method that teaches to work with time, instead of struggling against it. This revolutionary time management system helps you power through distractions & hyper-focus, getting things done in short bursts with frequent breaks to come up for relaxing. Productivity gurus Neil Patel & Tim Ferriss recommend using the Pomodoro technique to overcome procrastination & get more done.

As consultants, we sometimes struggle to balance our time & energy to make sure we get our tasks done. Yet, there are days when we push ourselves to the limit, only to discover we've accomplished little at the end of the day. Furthermore, there is an adage called Parkinson's Law that states:

> work expands to fill time

That is, the more time you allow your project, the longer you'll take to complete it. If you have a week deadline, you'll probably take the full week to do it. Hence, it is extremely important to properly ration our time among external, client projects & internal activities, such as time tracking, client billing, practice development, knowledge sharing, etc. The Pomodoro Technique can be a useful tool to help us buckle down & get more things crossed off our to-do lists.

what is the Pomodoro technique?

The Pomodoro Technique is a simple yet effective way to manage your time & improve your work habits. It is probably one of the easiest productivity methods. Francesco Cirillo, a software developer & entrepreneur, created this technique in 1987 & named it after a tomato-shaped kitchen timer that he used to keep himself focused & productive as a university student. According to Cirillo:

> Every day I went to school, attended classes, studied, and went back home with the disheartened feeling that I didn't really know what I'd been doing. The exam dates came up so fast, and it seemed like I had no way to defend myself against time. I was easily distracted and unable to focus. So, I decided to give myself a challenge: study without interruption for 10 minutes

This technique recommends breaking down your workload into small, manageable chunks. This helps you stay focused on tasks that require long periods of concentration. All you'll need to implement it is a timer. Beyond that, there are no special apps, tools or tutorials required. Each 25-minute work block is called a Pomodoro. The principle behind it is to have you focus for a short period of time, then take a break afterwards. Most sources suggest linking four Pomodoros together, and then taking a longer break.

Why this technique works?

This method trains your brain to focus for short periods & assists you to stay on top of deadlines or constantly refilling your To-Do list. This is a cyclical system; you work in short sprints that make sure you're consistently productive. You also have regular breaks that keep your motivation & creativity. The timer instills a sense of urgency. Instead of feeling like you have endless time in the workday to get things done, you know you have just 25 minutes to make as much progress on a task as possible. & the forced breaks help to cure that burnt-out feeling people experience toward the end of the day.

Rules of the Pomodoro technique

1. You can't interrupt a Pomodoro. A Pomodoro marks 25 minutes of pure work
2. You can't split up a Pomodoro. There is no such thing as half of a Pomodoro or a quarter of a Pomodoro
3. If someone or something interrupts a Pomodoro, then you should consider that Pomodoro void, as if it had never been set. You should then make a fresh start with a new Pomodoro
4. You are not allowed to keep on working just for a few more minutes, even if you're convinced that in those few minutes you could complete the task at hand
5. When the Pomodoro timer rings, mark an X next to the activity you've been working on & take a break for 5 minutes

Handling interruptions

Experience shows interruptions can happen when you're in the middle of a task. Cirillo designed an effective strategy for minimizing unhandled interruptions while increasing the number of Pomodoros that can be accomplished consistently. Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of interruptions:

1. Internal, and
2. External

Internal interruptions occur when you initiate the interruption. These actions are often associated with having little to no concentration to focus on the task at hand. Standing up to look for something to eat or checking your social network are internal interruptions. **External interruptions** happen when others disrupt your workflow. External interruptions can be very common if you work in a social environment. These can be an incoming phone call, or a colleague asking for your help. Cirillo recommends the Inform, Negotiate, Call Back strategy:

- **Inform** effectively. Politely tell the person that you're busy now
- **Negotiate** quickly to reschedule the interruption. Tell the person that you'll get back to him/her after you're finished working
- **Call back** the person who interrupted you as agreed. Get back to the person when your Pomodoro ends

Make sure you write include interruptions in your To-Do list. Whenever an urgency emerges, add a symbol. Cirillo proposes using an apostrophe (') for internal interruptions and a dash (-) for external interruptions on the same column where you score your Pomodoros. Then, add the interruption. This could also be a task you needed to pay attention to immediately. Add this task to the end of your to-do list as Unplanned & Urgent. Ultimately, strive to finish the current Pomodoro. Remember that if you start a Pomodoro, you should finish it at all costs. In both cases, we reverse the nature of these interruptions. Simply put, we are no longer dependent on interruptions, rather, the interruptions depend on us.

How to apply this technique?

There are 6 steps to apply the Pomodoro Technique:

1. Choose a task you want to complete. It's important to choose a task that deserves your full & undivided attention
2. Set the Pomodoro [timer] for 25 minutes. Try to spend exactly 25 minutes on this task & not to interrupt yourself
3. Work until your Pomodoro rings. Dive into the task for the next 25 minutes. If you suddenly realize you have something else you need to do, write the task down on a sheet of paper
4. Put a checkmark on a paper when your Pomodoro rings
5. Take a short break to relax. Grab a cup of coffee, go for a walk or do something else to make your brains relax
6. Take a longer break every 4 Pomodoros. You can take a longer break after you've completed four Pomodoros. 20 or 30 minutes should be enough. Your brain will use this time to assimilate new information & rest before the next round

Since you have only a timer as the only Pomodoro tool, you can get started with any timer app or a clock. In the time-poor environment, it's normal to want to regain some control over your day, that's why the Pomodoro method as the simple management method looks like a proven solution. As a Manager, using this technique, you have an opportunity to develop a shared set of practices that protect your team from the frequent & aggressive pressures of time. They simply transform this pressure into the opportunity to improve.

Summary

The Pomodoro is often popular among developers, consultants, designers & others who must deliver regular work packages or those that must produce something to be reviewed by others. The method can be also useful for people who don't have such rigid goals or packages of work. The frequent breaks will give you the opportunity to step back & review what you're doing & think about your next steps. The system is remarkably adaptable to different kinds of work.