

Handle the big challenge early in the day

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Many recent studies indicate that human beings are better able to handle challenges early in the day, rather than later. Peak energy and alertness for most people is at 8 a.m. Also, fewer interruptions are likely earlier in the day. This is not to say you can't be effective handling large tasks later in the day, and as every planner knows, often, you have no choice but to do so. The long-term odds of success, however, are in your favor when you make a note of handling the day's biggest challenge as early as you can — perhaps as the very first thing.

When composing a to-do list —regardless of what order you list the items — identify the vital challenge you face for the day, circle it, or draw an arrow from it up to the top of the page, indicating that this is the task you will tackle first. Then, clear away any minor hurdles that would impede your ability to start on this project.

Do you need to rearrange your workspace accordingly? Okay, go ahead and do so; not to stall, but because you will literally be making logistical changes to your workspace that aid in the way you perform best. Do you need to alert others that you do not wish to be distracted? Okay, go ahead and do so. Clear stretches give you your best chance of being productive, especially when you are tackling a project that is new, requires highly creative thinking, or is unfamiliar to you.

Each distraction, however fleeting, could turn into a full-fledged interruption. Interruptions in and of themselves are not so bad, and on average last only minutes. The problem, however, is that a typical interruption leads to other activities that can last up to 25 minutes. Therefore, any interruption can pull you from the task for much longer than you might presume.

You're more prone to be distracted as the day goes on versus early in the morning. So, you have a compelling reason to tackle the biggest tasks before you as early as you can get to them. Thereafter, no matter how difficult the challenge was, as you've experienced so many times before, once you finish something that at first may have seemed intimidating, the whole day tends to go better.

Major victories early in the day have a way of affecting the rest of the day. Freed from the psychological baggage of handling the task, as well as the mental and physical effort necessary to do so, you almost automatically consider, "What other great things can I accomplish today?"