



Day Crafting

The Productivity Workbook

**Crafting practice
and purpose for
work and productivity**

By **Bruce Stanley**



- Implementing process systems to produce results
- Applying craftwork rhythms to modern work-life
- Enabling productivity with rest and play
- *See inside for more ...*

Day Crafting The Productivity Workbook

**Crafting practice and purpose
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Also available now:

Day Crafting – The Introductory Workbook is the first book from the Apprentice Series and is a prerequisite for *this* workbook.

Day Crafting: The Body-clock Workbook

Coming soon:

Day Crafting: The Self-care Workbook

Day Crafting: The Change Workbook

The Productivity Workbook

At the heart of the craftsperson's day is making – turning raw materials into products – but the product is not the only measure of output. The craftsperson also wants fulfilment, flow, mastery, growth, connection and the satisfaction of producing something that makes someone else's life easier or more pleasing. To some degree we're made to be busy, fruitful, energized, valuable; living our days on purpose.

How does this workbook fit into the Apprentice Series? For comparison, the *Body-Clock* Workbook looks at the day as a whole and explores *when* we schedule work and rest. This workbook zooms in on what we do with the part of the day we call work (paid or unpaid), the *Self-care* Workbook covers rest in more depth.

This book will help you improve your productivity, but that statement needs a bit of unpacking, this is not a *tips* and *hacks* book. Maybe you have identified a problem, or a symptom, that relates to work and productivity: you're too busy and approaching burnout. Or you can't get enough done because of interruptions and distraction. Maybe there are too many meetings, too much email, poor management or a toxic work culture and you may feel stuck or cynical about the possibility of improvement. Or you're languishing; you've arrived where you always wanted to be but now that you're here, you're not experiencing any fulfilment.

If you can find a quick fix that solves the problem you've identified, that's good – *my work is definitely improved by quick-fixes and small experiments* – but this workbook takes a deeper dive to remedy the causes of problems, not just fix the symptoms. There is hard work to do to make your work less hard – but the workbook will guide you to select your own level of development.

We'll begin by defining and deconstructing your model for productivity.



What influences your productivity ideas?

You can no doubt identify a jumble of influences on your ideas about productivity (whether it's your own productivity you're thinking of, or a team or organisation). What's in the mix? If you're employed, your work culture no doubt has an influence but maybe there are strong influences from your education, society and family. These deeper influences merge with our identity and can lead to automatic behaviours, both beneficial and not so much.

Whatever your ideas are, the modern western world says that productivity is *the ongoing improvement in the ratio of inputs to outputs; doing more with the same or fewer resources*. The growth in that measure, aka *productivity*, is used to forecast an economy's competitive prospects; how one country is doing against another. This top-down definition has a huge influence on our culture.

Productivity for 250 years has meant efficiency and growth and individual workers have been swept along – always with more to do and less time to do it – which has in turn inspired products and services to help. Less time at home = washing machines, microwaves and home deliveries. Less time at work = ever improving production systems and tools including planners, shared diaries, visual project management and instant communications.

The top down definition doesn't say anything about individual wellbeing or flourishing. Of course management and HR departments understand that productivity targets are more easily met with happy and committed workers – but this can seem like a secondary concern and is often remedial, trying to fix the problems once they've occurred rather than prevent them in the first place.

Workers are busier than ever, complaining that they're spending more time busy *around* work (pseudo-work) than actually doing the skilled work they expected.

The Labourer (the mind-set explored in the Introductory Workbook) can put all the blame on the company and culture. But the Architect is going to invest some effort into questioning her ideas and make some changes – that's what this workbook is for.

It's not always easy, but it can be a valuable exercise to explore what has influenced your own ideas about productivity – specifically the influences that have coalesced into the set of automatic rules you feel most comfortable following. These rules are like internal preferences e.g. *if it's between 9am and 5pm I should be working. If someone asks me to do something, I should say yes. I should expect consistent output from my efforts across a day ...*

The pattern of rules influencing you will be totally unique. They'll be a mix of your elephant and rider, motivations, ethics, cultural ideas, internal and external drivers that pull and push you. When those rules work well with your context, your days are balanced and you feel alive and purposeful. When there's a clash, you can experience days as an empty drudge – or far worse.

Your rules are only **ideas**. They can be refreshed or replaced.

Can you capture your own working definition of *productivity* and can you describe the dominant influences?



What does **improving typical performance** mean?

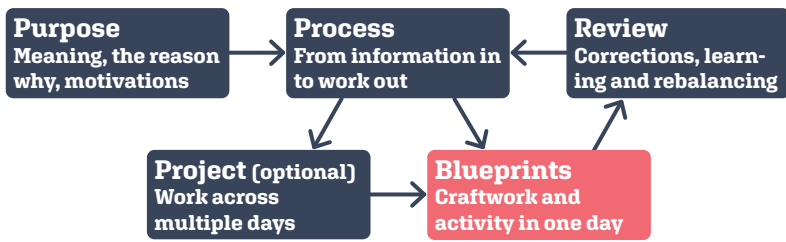
At times we may measure our performance by wins, results or outcomes but they are the by-product of consistently working, day by day, in a supporting *system*.

It is a designed system that will raise, by degrees, your **typical performance**. All the skill in the world won't help you at the working surface if you don't refine the workshop around it.

Results come from **systems**.

The Productivity System

Here is a simplified diagram of the Day Crafting Productivity System, shown here as high level headlines. It is a system that balances ease-of-use with practical depth.



What we think of as our *work* is in the red box, that's where the working surface is. That's where we're engaged with the doing of our job, so it is where we imagine the problems are, but it is more often the case that the problems are elsewhere in the system.

- If work is **too busy** then the problem might lie in the **process** stage.
- If work is **unfulfilling** the solution might involve rethinking **purpose**.
- If work is **frustrating** and you're **blocked** in making progress, the problem might be in lack of Preparation at the **project** scale.
- And if the problems are **vague** and you're not sure where the solution might be, then the **review** stage is important.
- If you want to overhaul work so you're **getting more done** in fewer hours, the **process** stage is critical.
- If your days are **unpredictable** but you want to maximise what gets done because you have a tight deadline then the **project** and **blueprint** stages work together.
- If you want to explore **new work** possibilities altogether then the **purpose** and **review** stages are important.

Seeing your productivity as the overall system is similar to taking the CEO role in an organisation where you recognise that the business is all of the operations that keep it going, not just the product or service it makes.

With the right mind-set and experience, working at a system level can take you from being reactive to reflective. You can see connections and spot patterns which creates wider choice and flexibility. You can more easily connect problems at the working surface with their root causes elsewhere in the system. This is what enables greater effectiveness, more energy and personal flourishing.

We begin our work wanting to be great at whatever it is we do, the craftwork, but that work is being done within a system that either enhances or frustrates it. But once the system gets your deliberate and careful focus, working within it is so much easier.

The purpose of this workbook is to make operating within the *system* rewarding and enjoyable for each workday.

If you want the good life and you want to succeed at what you do, it is the system itself you should focus on, and make operating within it a daily reward in and of itself, not a means to an end. De-emphasise future goals, focus on the day.

See the whole operation of your workshop today as the priority, not just the work done at the workbench because that is the only way the work at the workbench will thrive.

Next time you react or notice a problem, especially if you've noticed the problem before, stop and think if there's a pattern and ask where the problem might be in the system. As we go through the detail of the system you can be on the lookout for the *small changes* to make which will have the biggest impact.



Many new businesses run for a few years accumulating **technical** or **design debt** which needs to be paid off eventually. This is the seemingly unavoidable process of cobbling together quick fixes, using tolerable software or designs because there isn't the time or resource to do it properly. If you and how you operate were viewed the same way, your **system debt** is all the rules and habits you've picked up without much conscious care that are now slowing you down. Just like a business that wants to be *more productive*, sooner or later you need to take some time out to restructure your system for better outcomes.



From time to time it is a good idea to get some perspective to reflect on your purpose. This kind of rethinking, redefinition and support (floor 1) seems to happen best with distance and space to think. If you can't take a week, take a day. If not a day, an hour on a bench in the park ... When did you last do this? When can you set aside time to do this next?

Capturing Purpose in the Moment

Here's a final tool for working out what is meaningful or purposeful in your days. It complements the other methods in that it gets you to capture purpose live in the small details of the day, that are easy to overlook when you're asking your *rider* to review the past or predict the future (neither of which is it brilliant at and both underplay the elephant). It is also an effective way to boost your sense of purpose and Meaningful Progress *during* your day. I love using this tool from time to time to remind myself that purpose is lots of small things as well as the big stuff.



Tool: Purpose List

When I'm not sure what my purpose and meaning is or where to find it in a day, I want to capture Moments of purpose as they happen so I can boost my QIL and reassure myself that there is meaning in my days – and work out how to craft projects and Blueprints to include the possibility for more.

What is it:

A simple list that you keep open during the day, possibly in your Design Notes, to capture what was happening as you sensed Moments of purpose during the day. It can be *anything* that signalled purpose to you, small, big, odd, unexpected, actions, thoughts, experiences. Simply jot down a few words and take a mindful Moment before continuing with your day.

At the end of the day you may have a list with some surprises.

Use it to:

Train yourself to recognise purpose is not just about ultimate, big headline stuff but is there in Moments of positive feeling, pride and interactions with others. Moments when you realise or recognise that you're able to experience what is valuable to you.

Filter

Having clarity about your day's purpose is very useful for your overall **productivity**. It works with your maintenance and self-care to boost your energy and resilience. But perhaps its most important use is to simplify your *Productivity System* and help you *focus*. Without a Filter you are in *reactive mode* all the time.

Very practically, *purpose* helps you define what is and isn't important to your day, your project and your identity. It helps create a Filter to speed up your decision-making and focus your intention on what's *important* over what's *urgent*.

This Filter *protects* your practice at your working surface. You use it to focus your attention and say yes and no to external calls on your energy and time. The Filter is your practical first line of response in your reactions to input from the world. **It is the automatic expression of your purpose.** It is with you all the time and as such, *Filter* is one of Day Crafting's six methods.



Productivity Filter

In the context of productivity your Filter is a combination of your purpose, your capacity, your role and the precise details of the project you're in the middle of. It also applies at scales within the day from your Day's Intention to the specific time-blocks in your blueprint.

Do you know what your Filter is right now, for today, for the project you're in and your role?



Your Filter and saying no

Knowing what you should be saying no to isn't the same as making it easy to say no, but it highlights where the problem is (*HMI learn to say no more effectively?* – is a good place to start.)

And being clear about your Filter isn't necessarily going to change the *culture* you're in. A lot of workers complain that they're not doing the kind of skilled tasks they expected to be doing. They're *clear* about their *purpose* and about their *Filter* but the problem is at the system level. We explored similar problems on page 21.

Preparation & Design: **Blueprint Design**

The top productivity or time management tool has to be: *Preparing what you want to do, and when – and doing it.*

A blueprint in its simplest form is a development of the Day's Intention tool. It is an *intentional* design for a whole day aiming to improve on our default patterns. It can be a loose sketch or a detailed plan, it can be for just one specific day, or more typically it can be for a *type of day* you repeat, such as a standard work or a weekend day. A blueprint can be used multiple times. Day Crafting describes blueprints as having two layers.

1. The bottom layer represents the ground truth of your body-clock – which follows a pattern of high and low energy rhythms during your days – and other fixed timings.
2. The top layer is how you place the day's requirements around the fixed elements below (imagine the analogy of tracing paper showing the detail from the bottom layer through).

The **Body-clock Workbook** in this Apprentice Series explores blueprints in detail and complements this Workbook.



Tool: Blueprint Design

When I want to craft a full day with Intention, I want to use design thinking skills, so I can interrupt my default patterns, and later review the day to improve the blueprint for repeated use.

What is it:

A blueprint is a plan for a type of day. It can be a tight schedule or time block plan working to *clock time* or a loose sketch with very little timing responding to *event time*.

Use it to:

Balance the day by considering which elements to include. Blueprints work very well with Day's Intention, Design Objective Review, Meaningful Progress and other Day Crafting tools.

I have two blueprints specifically for productivity that I reuse often depending on the complexity of the day. The beginning and ending of projects or unusual, one-off workdays tend to be more complex and have shorter time blocks and lots of buffer time. Simple days have much more basic, predictable blueprints with longer stretches of uninterrupted deep work.

Blueprints for Productivity

If you want to make productivity the main focus of a day (or a run of days) then balance across Design Objectives is as important as ever. A good place to start is to design a blueprint, representing the waking hours of a work-day, divided into four types of activities. These aren't necessarily equal lengths of time.

Deep Work	Shallow Work	Effective Rest	All The Rest
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■ ■ ■ ■ Deep Work

This is where the *practice* of your *Work & Craft* gets done. All the Filtering and Preparation; all the purpose clarification and maintenance is enabling this element of your day. Deep work ideally happens when the energy rhythms necessary for it are at their peak and it should be focused and distraction free. The more demanding your deep work, the fewer hours you'll be able to sustain; at its most intense the limit might be four hours. I think of deep work as the main element within the Work & Craft stage of the Process Funnel.

■ ■ ■ ■ Shallow Work

This is all the work that isn't deep such as admin, most meetings, answering email, errands etc. It is your LVAs but it is also your Preparation activities that enable your deep work. Ideally it would be good to spend less time in shallow work and more time in deep work – if this ratio is wrong, we can experience a lack of purpose and Meaningful Progress is more challenging.

■ ■ ■ ■ Effective Rest

You might imagine that all we need to consider for a work blueprint is 8 hours or so of deep and shallow work, but in order to replenish the energy necessary for high quality deep work we must include enough effective rest each day to re-energise. This is not passive rest, just collapsing on the sofa because you're too exhausted to do anything else, it is active and effective. Rest is covered in depth in the Self-care Workbook.

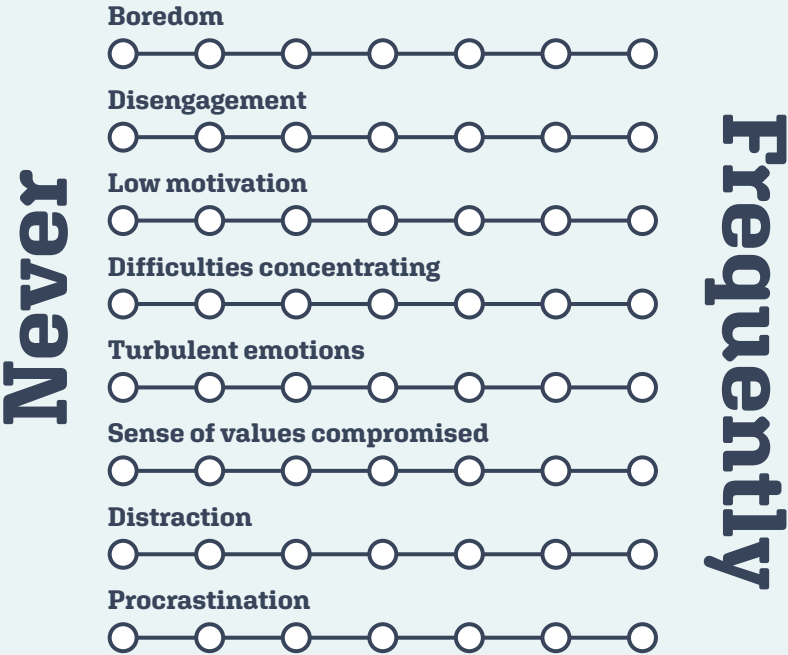
■ ■ ■ ■ All The Rest

As you might guess, this is all the stuff in your day that doesn't fit into the previous categories, some self-care and personal care, travelling, *lifemin*, caring etc.

There are some common negative states that we encounter during our Work & Craft time blocks. Their causes can include getting energy and/or elephant *Preparation* wrong.



How often do you experience these in your Work & Craft?
Score yourself along each scale from never to frequently.



If any of these are frequent problems for you then here's a list of possible *Preparation* activities to better avoid these issues.

1. **Use the basic tools** more often: *Day's Intention*, *Design Objective Review*, and *Insight* to craft your overall balance.
2. **Prepare your Projects, blueprints and tasks** more skilfully using the tools in this workbook.
3. **Simulate the obstacles.** Use mental practice to Prepare your elephant and rider reactions in advance. Look after yourself.
4. **If this, then that.** Use a risk assessment and mitigation strategy along with checklists to Prepare responses to obstacles.
5. **Get support.** Work with others to get a wider perspective.
6. **Meditation** is a good way to put you in touch with your deeper feelings, your energy budget and your *affective circumplex*.
7. **The HMI exercise** is a way to generate lots of ideas for action when you're stuck and nothing else seems to help.



Process Funnel: **Work & Craft**

Now we're at the working surface and we get to make things – or experiment, create, Play, invent, craft ...

[choose *your verbs*: page 47]. It's just a question of *starting*.

Starting work and managing your feelings

Starting is easy if someone else is telling you what to do or if there is a quantifiable target to meet (it's 8.30am now and we open in 30 minutes). It is easy if you're part way through a project and you're simply carrying on from where you stopped last time. It is easy if work is Play and you can't wait to get into flow. It is easy when the task is clear, you're focused and your energy is good to go. At this moment of starting, both rider *and* elephant are present.

Starting is difficult under any circumstances when either the task, the circumstances or your elephant is not Prepared – or when you don't *feel like it*. The elephant can cause friction and inertia because our feelings and emotions aren't in alignment with the task for reasons we might not be aware of until we try to start. This is one of the costs of autonomy, the responsibility is on us. A lot of people rely on the negative pressure of *extrinsic* motivation to tame their elephant, saying something along the lines of: *I can't start until the deadline is on top of me*. There are other ways.

Make starting simple

An effective practice is to make starting as simple and as frictionless as possible (*if you've not Prepared the first step then do that*). If the beginning of the project, day or task is complex then make the first step small enough so that you're both able and motivated enough to do it. At this point you may feel the sudden pull of 101 other things – procrastination, and it is telling you that starting is painful – so *don't start the big thing* that's scaring your elephant, make a deal with yourself to do something smaller that just takes a few minutes: just list five ideas, just put your shoes on, just make a mark. You're looking for the *oomph* to overcome the high friction of inertia and when you do, celebrate even the small steps. You might never actually *feel* like starting, as the saying goes, 'I hate writing, but I love having written'.

Starting Rituals

You can pick up a head of speed to overcome the inertia of starting by creating a **starting work ritual**. This isn't an automatic habit, it is instead a more conscious act or flow of actions. Setting a Day's Intention along with a few notes in my Design Notes is how I start.

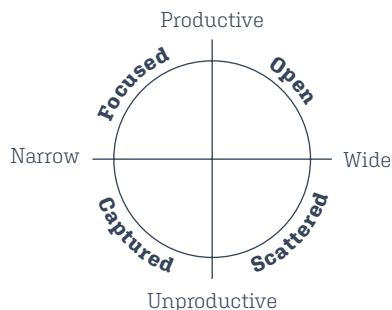
Mindfulness and Attention

When during the day could you practise mindfulness to help your productivity, if it's a practice you want to use? It's not just for rest or a morning routine. Mindfulness can fit into your Work & Craft at the start, during and at the end. Observing your attention is an effective way to assess the state of your QIL and your elephant.

Ask yourself mindfully: where is my attention now?

Is it at the working surface, *focused* and/or *open*? Or is your attention *captured* or *scattered*, usually by subjects that aren't present such as concerns about the past or future?

Check in with yourself from time to time during your working time blocks.



To be skilful at *your* working surface, do you need to sustain narrow or wide attention or somewhere in between? What can help you maintain your attention? What can destabilise it?



Work & Craft: **Deep Work**

For a craftsperson, busyness is pseudo productivity, it is a compromised metric. It is during unrushed deep work that high quality output is produced. Shallow work such as admin, comms, meetings and Preparation are vital to the *running* of the business but deep work achieves the objectives and the Meaningful Progress.



Think about how important deep work is to your purpose.

Deep work doesn't have a complicated definition, it is: energy intensive tasks that requires full attention undertaken without distraction or context switching. For many of us that is *cognitive energy* but it could be any combination of the QIL and QAB energy sources illustrated on page 75. It could be writing or research, original creation or editing – or it could be listening to a client, teaching, athletic training or practising an instrument.

The greater the demand for the energy required for your specific deep work, the less time you will be able to manage. Some deep work time-blocks can last 8 hours (with breaks), others only 3 or 4.



In order to improve your deep work, how do you rate yourself against these five factors?

- Poor

Okay

Good
- ☐

☐

☐

Preparation. Filter, tasks, tools, environment and myself are ready to start. *See from page 64.*
- ☐

☐

☐

Attention. I'm able to concentrate on the task for as long as the deep work time block lasts, often getting into flow.
- ☐

☐

☐

Distraction. My time is free from distraction from internal and external sources. I can refocus quickly.
- ☐

☐

☐

Context switching. I am able to put deep work into fewer, longer time blocks and minimise switching tasks.
- ☐

☐

☐

Balance. My ratio of *deep work* to *effective rest* in a day is such that I can continue refreshed over following days.

What one change could you make to improve the most?

Your problem may be that you never get to do any deep work but in terms of the Process Funnel, that is a *Preparation & Design* problem not a *Work & Craft* issue.

Work & Craft: **Stopping work each day**



Do you experience any problems with stopping work and making the transition to the rest of your life?

Common problems include letting work concerns spill over into the rest of your day, being distracted by open cognitive loops such as unfinished work tasks, unresolved blockers or simply by ideas not captured into your Process Funnel. You may struggle to deal with work stress, perhaps you don't recognise you're carrying it and the transition from work to home (for example) means more stress as the expectations of your family exceed your immediate, available energy. Some people struggle to stop work altogether and end up overworking as an avoidance strategy, a way to deal with difficult life issues, or the sad feeling that you've got nothing else in your day to look forward to.

Who are you when you're not at work? What do you like doing? What do you look forward to each day that sits outside your work? Where is the good life today? That's what Day Crafting is for – your blueprint is for your whole day not just for work.

Perhaps a ritual, which is a compact and rehearsed way to achieve a whole state reorientation, could help you transition.



Tool: Feierabend Ritual

When I finish work, I want to effectively shift my attention to *effective rest* and other non work considerations, so I can re-energise, and leave work distractions behind.

What is it:

A conscious, personal ritual that signals to you that you're making a deliberate context shift. You could put your work tools away. Leave the work environment. Change your work clothes. Change your activity. **Give your ritual intention + attention.**

In Germany, this transition is called **Feierabend** (*fae.er.aa.bent*)

Use it to:

Confine your work to your intended work time. Shut down your work state and concerns so that you can refuel and give your day balance so that your next work time can be productive.

We could argue that the most valuable output of your productivity system is **learning** – knowing where to make efficient improvements the next time through.

This rhythm or dialogue between making, thinking and improving, defines craftwork. It is a gradual, ongoing evolution in your practice day to day, project to project.

Design – craft – review



■■■■ Review Flowchart

■■■■ If you've chosen to take a deep dive into the stages of this ■■■■ workbook, you will have worked hard to re-design your **Productivity System**. This re-design is necessary in order to identify and fix the causes of problems rather than simply address the symptoms. Maintaining these improvements depends on ongoing *reflective practice* on the whole system.

What is reflective practice?

As adults who construct our learning, we get into problem solving mode when we're ready to – which means for most of us, that problems have to become acute before we notice and *have* to solve them. Reflective practice is a more active discipline. Instead of waiting till things get really problematic, you develop a *review* habit and make more regular course corrections.

All craftspeople have a waste pile, failure is part of the making and learning process, but if you only review what you might be doing wrong every so often, you may be off course and suffering from unnecessarily poorly crafted days. To take this to the positive extreme, if you review the first half of the day and discover you need to make course corrections, you've only wasted part of one day.

Review failures quickly and improve the day you're in.

There are lots of ways to Review but this flowchart aims to be both simple and at the *Day Crafting* scale. It should be quick to identify useful actions. The *problem* categories at the top aren't exhaustive but most productivity problems will fall into one of them.

How often are your days as they could be?

Day Crafting is a set of practices and tools to help you make a good life one day at a time.

For makers of fulfilling days

"I love the practical exercises in this book, they're varied and helpful and I was surprised at what came out for me – they make the workbook worth every penny. The book contains ways to explore productivity that I haven't seen suggested before, Bruce is so wise. This is an amazing and thought provoking piece of work, so key and so vital and I've loved working through it."



Charlie Ewer
Wellbeing Network Manager

#WorkAndCraft
#DeepWork

#SystemsThinking
#Purpose



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