HOW TO MEET YOUR DEADLINES

LEAN PRODUCTIVITY BOOKS

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Why Read The Lean Productivity Books?

Most self help advice is useful, but long. Though you have the interest to consume such material, you don't have the time. Besides, you might be interested in the actionable advice alone instead of reading through two hundred pages of detailed content.

That's why I started the Lean Productivity Books series. When it comes to productivity, actionable advice is what drives change. If you do not want to read a full fledged book on time management, these short books of 15-25 pages can help you get things done.

All books in this series will be lean, actionable, and to the point.

Introduction

A few years back, most goals I aimed for followed a typical pattern.

AIM FOR A GOAL　　　　**SET A TIMELINE**　　　　**MISS THE DEADLINE**

I would target a deadline and fail to achieve it.

People speak about the importance of achieving the goal within a stipulated time all the time. But today, we'll discuss how to make it happen.

Failing to meet deadlines has different reasons, and each problem requires a solution of its own. Finding the right answer begins right from the first step of setting the right expectations.

Before I get into methods for meeting deadlines, knowing different types of deadlines is crucial to meet them.

The types of deadlines

Deadlines fall under two major categories.

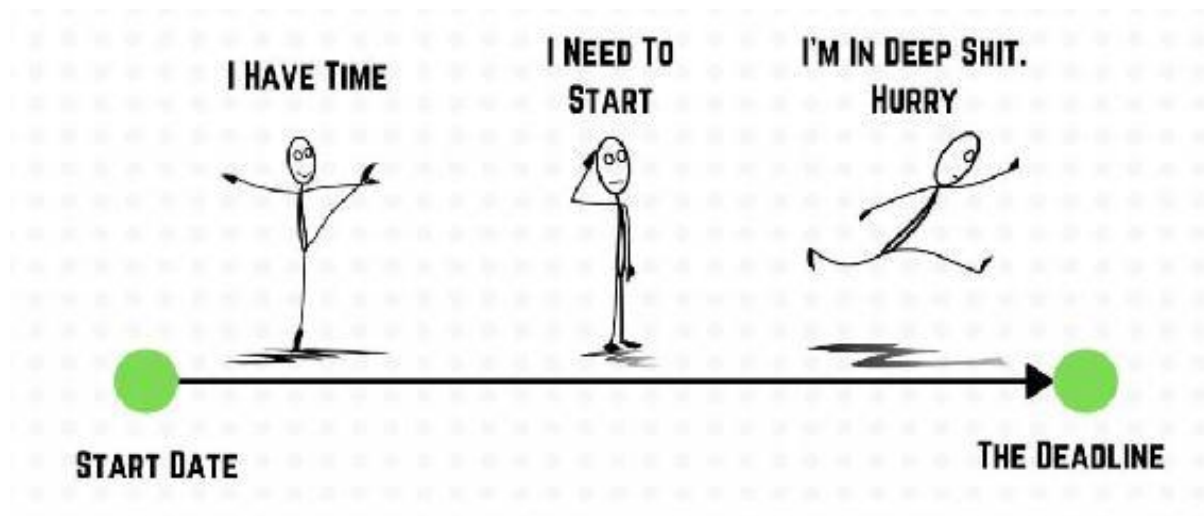## The deadlines you have no control over:

These are the projects and the timelines imposed on you by other people or circumstances. You have little to no control to modify them. For example:

- You're an employee, and your boss wants a project delivered
- You're a startup founder, and the investors want you to launch the product by a specific date
- You're an unemployed person, and you only have the cash to manage expenses for the next 2 months

As you can see in the examples, working for yourself or an organization has little to do with the timelines. You'll have deadlines imposed on you even if you're the owner of a billion-dollar company.

In this category of deadlines, you face dire consequences if you fail to achieve your target.

The typical cycle of working towards the deadlines imposed on you follow the pattern as shown below:

I HAVE TIME   I NEED TO START   I'M IN DEEP SHIT. HURRY

START DATE   THE DEADLINE

You take the first few portions of the time available lightly. **When the deadline seems far away, you believe you can afford to relax.** Instant gratification kicks in urging you to enjoy the current comfort and worry about the work later.

As the target time approaches closer, you think about starting, but decide to wait some more. Even if you begin the job, you put in bare minimum effort just to show some progress. After more time passes by and **the deadline is a stone's throw away, you panic, get into full gear, work under pressure**, **pull a few all-nighters, and deliver at the final moments of a ticking clock.**

The complexity of the work or size of the project has little to do with your behavior. If the deadline is 6 months away, you relax for the first few months. If you have to deliver the task in 6 hours, you browse social media for the first few hours. The time you waste remains proportional to the effort required to pull off the job.

The only exception is when the deadline is too right from the offset. In such cases, you jump into action right away.
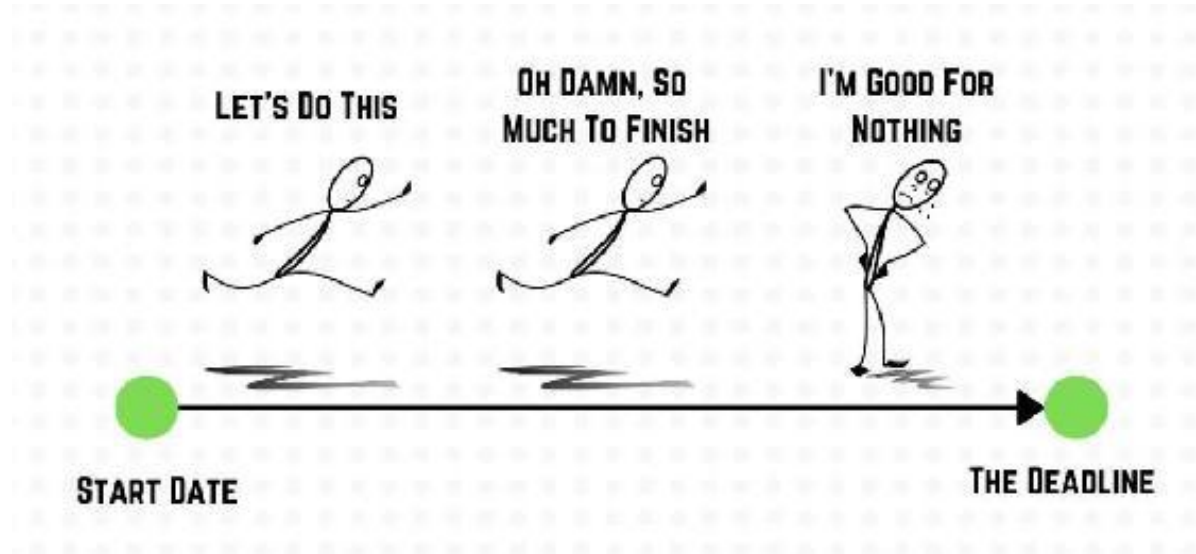
The deadlines you set for yourself

Whether you realize it or not, we all set deadlines for ourselves. Some have a habit of putting them on paper or an app, while others set a mental timeline.

The deadlines we set for ourselves fall under two categories again, depending on your personality and the circumstances.

a. Unrealistic deadlines:

These are the deadlines you set for yourself which are downright impossible to achieve unless you pull off a miracle. Go-getters often make such mistakes to reach a target quickly or by aiming for too many goals. The reasons for such deadlines vary from person to person, but false belief and overconfidence in your abilities are the most common.

LET'S DO THIS

OH DAMN, SO MUCH TO FINISH

I'M GOOD FOR NOTHING

START DATE

THE DEADLINE

Deep in your heart, you know that you won't meet the timeline, but you fool yourself to believe that you will. Finally, you curse yourself for your inability to meet deadlines.

Keeping up the target dates starts with learning how to set deadlines. If you've set deadlines that you couldn't meet in spite of pushing yourself to the limit, you should set realistic timelines with SMART goals.

b. Lethargic deadlines:

The majority of people fall victim to a laid back behavior of staying in their comfort zone. Even when you know you can complete a job early, you convince yourself that you have time**. You extend the deadline as much as possible so that you can both take it easy and feel accomplished for getting work done.**
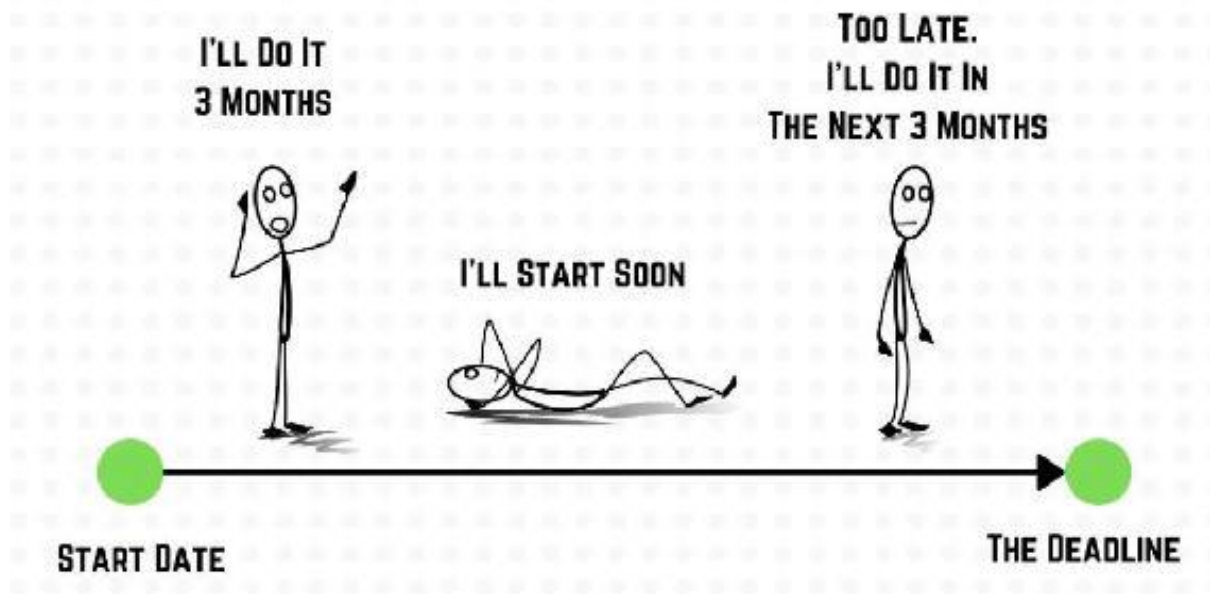
Unfortunately, you set sluggish deadlines for the goals you care about the most.

For example:

- Changing a job you hate
- Pursuing a new career
- Starting your business
- Chasing your genuine goals
- Investing/saving money

In the above examples, you control the project and the timelines. Besides, the consequences only affect you or the people closest to you like your spouse and children.

When you set such deadlines, you usually fail to meet them. The pattern for the effort you put in looks as follows:

I'LL DO IT
3 MONTHS

I'LL START SOON

TOO LATE.
I'LL DO IT IN
THE NEXT 3 MONTHS

START DATE

THE DEADLINE

You relax during the first portions, just like the deadlines set by others. After a reasonable time has elapsed, you realize you have lazed around.

But here, a peculiar change occurs compared to the deadlines imposed by others. Since you're the only person affected by the consequences, you tell yourself that you'll start soon. You know that you're going to postpone the deadline in the back of your mind, but you do not want to accept that yet.

As more time goes by, you realize the time left is no longer sufficient to achieve the target. Since you're the sole decision-maker, you finally set a new target date. What is funny is, you add the whole duration again to the deadline to set a new target date.

Example for setting lethargic deadlines:

Let me explain with an example. You're working at a job you hate, and you decide to find a new one in the next three months. You spend the first month telling yourself you have enough and more time to start hunting for another place to work at. In the second

month, you convince yourself you still have time and start updating your resume.

You already know that you won't put in the required effort in the days to come, but you do not accept it yet. You make a few changes to your resume as the second month whizzes by. When the third month begins, you realize that finding the right job in 30 days is unrealistic.

So what do you do? You give yourself another three months to achieve the target. The best part is, you allow yourself to relax for the whole third month because your new start date is your old deadline. The vicious cycle either repeats forever or takes a few iterations before you achieve the goal.

If your target is a long term goal, you repeatedly push the deadlines. The chances of never achieving the target are incredibly high.

Postponing self-imposed deadlines has killed more dreams than failure.

How to meet deadlines:

Here are five tips for doing a better job at meeting deadlines. Depending on your personality, the type of deadline and your motivation behind completing the goal, the effectiveness of these pointers will vary.

The same tips apply for students, working professional, entrepreneurs or others. Experiment with each of them and check what works best for you.

1. Do the first step early:

One of the biggest obstacles to completing a huge project is making up your mind to get started. You find one reason or the other to justify why you cannot begin. For example:

- I have a hectic day today
- I have enough time, so I will start tomorrow
- The first step is easy, so I will begin later

No matter how small the first task is, get it done right away. You might only have to make a simple phone call or spend 5 minutes brainstorming. But, if you push the task for later, you will repeatedly procrastinate.

But if you take just one baby step forward, you'll set things into motion and make constant progress. The first action builds momentum and sets the foundation for the rest of the journey.
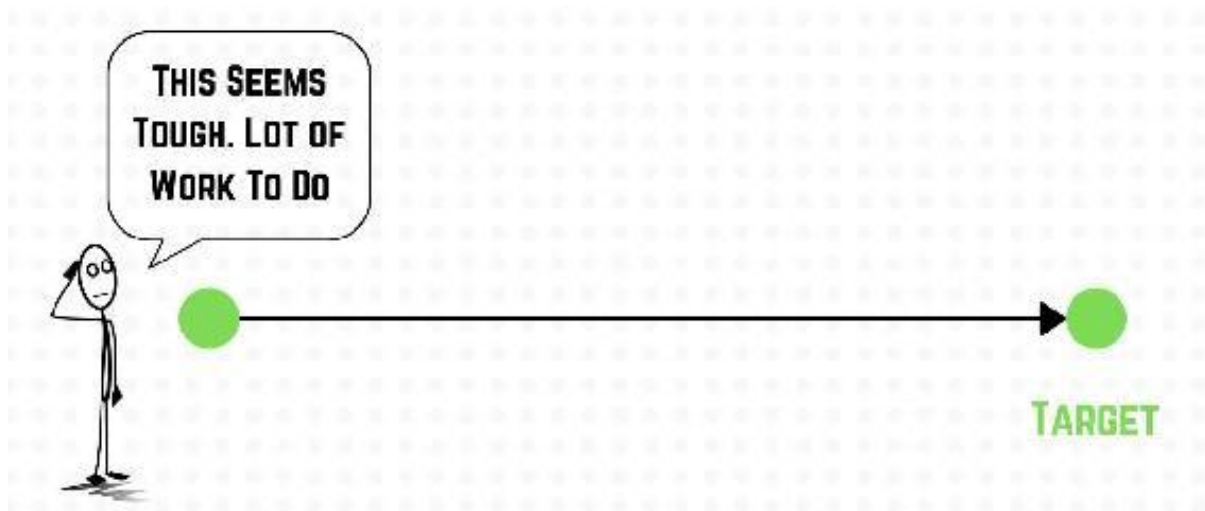
2. Set milestones

When you're on a long drive, have you noticed how the milestones invoke a feeling of inching closer towards the destination?
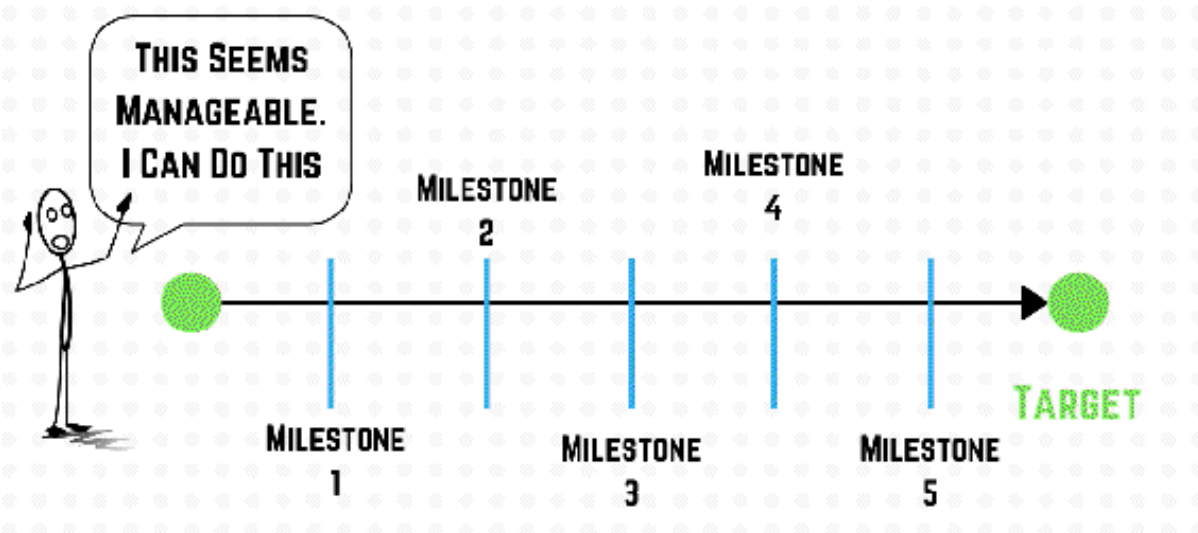
A milestone serves two essential purposes:

- Tells you where you stand
- Keeps you motivated because the target seems closer and closer

Despite the clear benefits of milestones, most of us fail to use them to achieve our long term goals. Your process of approaching a goal without any milestones looks like this:

If your destination is distant, the effort, time, and energy required can create a mental obstacle to begin.

In comparison, milestones make the same journey appear like the following:

Instead of defining your goal as one final destination, break it down into intermediate steps with a target and a timeline.

A long, arduous expedition now seems like a step by step adventure.

3. Use reminders:

Most of us do not possess the memory skills of a whiz kid. I have a hard time remembering things unless I note them down. Many of you might have the same challenge. Unfortunately, many people rely on memory to remind themselves even if it has repeatedly failed them in the past.

"I don't need to write it down. I will remember it," is one of the biggest lies you tell yourself. You ain't gonna remember it. Period. Next time you convince yourself to rely on memory, watch out.

Instead, if you use reminders, you'll stay on track towards your goals. You can pick any medium you find comfortable. You can set the alarm on your phone, mark a meeting with yourself on the calendar, or use an app to remind yourself of the unfinished work.

A word of caution here: **Do not introduce a new medium to remind yourself.** The more comfortable you are using a tool/application

already, the higher the chances of setting consistent reminders for yourself. For example, do not install a task management app just for reminders if you haven't used one before. You'll be more consistent using a calendar reminder that you're used to.

Also, do not use a platform that requires you to check for things to do manually. An automated reminder to help you recall the task necessary for an upcoming milestone works best.

4. Use a calendar view

Have you failed to meet a deadline because you forgot about it until it was too late? Don't worry. It happens to many of us.

As mention in the previous tip, you must set reminders for the tasks you have to complete. At the same time, having an overall pulse of all your deadlines helps you stay on track and make any required course corrections.

Most of us have different goals from various spheres of our life that need attention. For example:
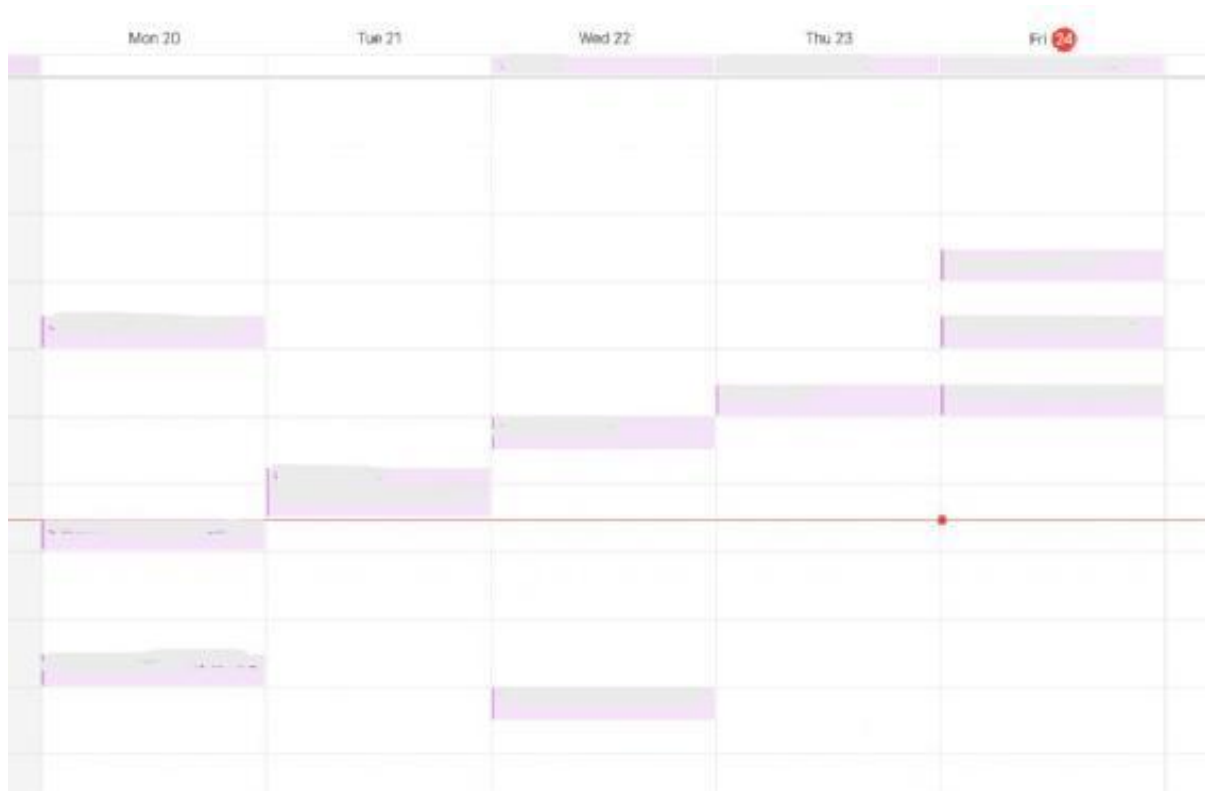
- Career growth

- Finances

- Health

- Relationships

- Relaxation/hobbies

Keeping a tab on all of these as tasks is overwhelming. Instead, if you had one place where you could glance at all your deadlines, you'd know where to focus your time and energy.

A calendar view helps you get an overall picture of your upcoming deadlines. You can use the calendar on your computer/phone to

mark an event/milestone/deadline. If you make this a habit, you only need to view the whole calendar a few times a week to keep yourself aware of the approaching targets.

Here is a screenshot of my calendar which outlines some of the milestones I have to achieve this week. You do not have to follow my model, but pick what suits your style.

Asana is one app that translates deadlines to a calendar view nicely.

Keep a tab on the things you have to accomplish because the only thing worse than missing a deadline is forgetting you had one.

5. Vision board

Though human beings are visual in nature, not everyone gains motivation by looking at a progress indicator. Using a vision board works for people who like to see visible signs of progress.

Now before you rule out this tip, hold on. Do not assume a vision board won't help you without trying first. If you've made one before and you did not benefit from it, feel free to drop the technique. But **unfortunately, people rule out ideas based on their thoughts without even giving it a shot.**

I understood the power of a vision board only after I tried it myself. Today, my walls are full of chart paper tracking the progress of different goals.

You can use your custom made vision board as far as it meets two requirements:

- Tracks the final result and preferably the progress

- Is at a place where you can see it frequently

The first requirement is simple, where you need to mark the outcome you're trying to achieve. Most vision boards stop at that. But, **you'll find more motivation if you find a way to mark your progress in some way, even if it involves a separate board.**

The second requirement is making sure you look at the vision board frequently. Creating one in a notebook and leaving it in the drawer serves no purpose. You must place it at a location where you look at it at least every few days, if not every day. Stickers/cut-outs on walls/work desks and desktop wallpapers are among the best and most common places for vision boards.

Other Productivity Suggestions

Though this is a short book, if you've made it this far, it is clear that you're keen to increase your productivity and achieve success. That in itself puts you a step ahead of the crowd because most people don't put any effort towards becoming a better version of themselves.

If you're looking to improve your productivity even further check other such short books in the 'Lean Productivity Books' series that I've made on Amazon. All of them are less than 50 pages and contain actionable advice.

If you spend more than 6 hours a day working on a computer, you should check the browser tool 'In The Zone'. It is specifically targeted towards making every day superproductive using the Chrome browser.

Conclusion

Meeting deadlines important for your career growth and personal satisfaction.

Therefore, you must look at it as a process to incorporate into your lifestyle. If you look at each project and its timeline as a standalone requirement, you'll struggle to meet them. Instead, you can use the above tips and build a system to make a habit of meeting deadlines.

After all, any goal is a dream with a deadline. Will you achieve yours? Leave a comment.

I would love to know your thoughts on this book. I would be all ears to your feedback because I am eager to find ways to improve. I will listen to negative comments with an open mind and make an effort to fix your concern.

Drop me an email on maxim_dsouza@productiveclub.com. I look forward to hearing from you.

Also, if you liked this book, do not forget to leave a review. It will help the world become a more productive place.

About the author

I am Maxim Dsouza, a self-improvement, productivity, and time management enthusiast.

I am not a certified coach. My productivity knowledge comes from the trial and error I've done over the last 15 years. Many of my experiments have failed and some of them have succeeded.

I love to share what worked for me and what hasn't on my blog, Productive Club. I don't believe in writing hypothetical motivational content. Therefore, I keep my resources short, practical and actionable. You can access them for free here.

On my blog, I shares my thoughts, ideas and tips on:

- Productivity
- Goal Clarity
- Time Management
- Decision Making