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Productivity

FEATURE ARTICLE

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Farm-to-conference table.

As a metric that has been heavily relied on since the end of the 18th century, productivity continues to significantly influence how we lead our daily lives. From accomplishing a list of chores as a child to completing a set of complex commitments as an adult, productivity is a proven method for tracking one's progress.

At its core, productivity is a simple calculation: total output/total input. But why then do we see hundreds upon hundreds of articles, essays, and self-help books written about it? To answer that question, I'd like to introduce you to my brother.

Andrew Stevens, three years my senior, holds a Ph.D. in Agricultural and Resource Economics and currently resides as an assistant professor and researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (yes, it is safe to assume he got the

"smart" genes in the family). Back in 2017, while writing his dissertation at the University of California - Berkeley, he conducted **substantial research** on blueberry farming/picking, publishing a paper that took an intimate look at productivity, piece rate wages, and the influence of environmental factors like temperature.

I'm not going to lie, even my love of blueberries couldn't carry me through all 65 pages of that paper. What it does highlight however, is the vast complexities of this seemingly simple equation. While I value the intelligence and detail my brother displays in this publication, improving productivity shouldn't require a doctoral education. Whether you are managing a massive team of blueberry pickers or small group of corporate professionals, there are three elements that when reviewed from time to time are sure to improve productivity:

1. Efficiencies

Work smarter not harder. Any sort of repetitive task is a candidate for improvement. Use planning and prioritization to help identify areas for enhancement and adjust your approach accordingly. Achieving the same output with less input is a win and that's just simple math.

2. Motivations

Why do you do what you do? While financial interests are certainly the easiest to identify, intrinsic motivators like a sense of accomplishment are much more difficult to distinguish. Encourage your teams to introspectively explore to uncover what truly motivates them. Motivational support is provided by the organizational culture.

3. Boundaries

As cliché and buzzwordy as it sounds, finding an appropriate balance is essential for productivity. Burnout is a real thing and understanding when you are overextended is critical. Set boundaries that allow you to commit 100% of yourself to everything that you do. Anything less is a disservice to you and your employer.

Next time you're left scratching your head, looking for ways to improve productivity, I hope you think back to these three elements and realize it's truly not as complicated as those scholars would have you believe.

There are blueberries that need picking.

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