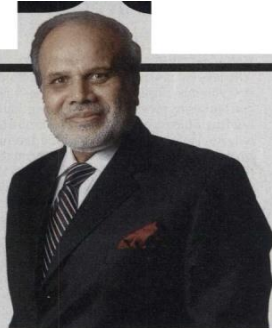


25 WORK HABITS OF SUPER EFFECTIVE CEOs

India Inc's bosses share their productivity secrets

By Dibendu Ganguly & Dearton Hector



"Spend time with your direct reports"

KAMAL K SHARMA,

VICE CHAIRMAN, LUPIN

"I make it a habit to spend quality time with my direct reports. Every week, I mark out at least an hour-and-a-half with a direct report, where we might talk about anything, not just the work at hand. Now it's usually in the office, but earlier, it was also over lunch. Another habit I have inculcated since my IIT days is to stay focused on a problem until it is solved. I don't subscribe to the idea that you should set a problem aside for a while if it is proving to be intractable. I believe you need to keep at it until it is solved."

"Don't take the phone to meetings"

ANUJ AGARWAL,

MD AND CEO, BAJAJ ALLIANZ

"I come to office early and plan out the entire day. At the end of the day, I make sure that everything I planned is done. I also make a yearly plan at the beginning of the year. This is pasted on to the wall in my cabin in front of me. I split this to monthly targets and I conduct review meetings with my colleagues for their feedback on where we are regarding targets. I only take the yearly plan off my wall at the end of a year. I don't take my phone with me when I am entering a meeting and I don't check my mails while in a meeting as I consider that as very disrespectful."



"Be approachable, day & night"

GVK REDDY,

CHAIRMAN & MANAGING DIRECTOR, GVK GROUP

"Punctuality is the cornerstone. I make it a point to always be on time to office, and this automatically sets an example for everybody at GVK. I begin work in the morning, with a meeting with the Heads of Departments (HODs) of various projects to guide them to achieve the best, followed by meetings with other people from outside the organisation. After a break for lunch, I resume office to work until end of the day. I like to be approachable at all times, whenever they feel the need for experience, and in times of crises. I ensure that I am available even in the middle of the night if someone calls me for my advice and guidance."



"Use your daily commutes to manage"

VINAY AGRAWAL, CEO, ANGEL BROKING

"Like most Mumbaikars, I have a fairly long commute to work. I use the morning ride to plan my day and the evening ride to network. I also take out three hours every week to browse the net and keep up with latest technology trends. I keep hand-written notes in a personal diary during the monthly meeting of senior executives, where I make a note of commitments each one has made. At any meeting, I have notes from at least 12 previous meetings, so I can recall what was said before and monitor what action has been taken. My direct reports know of this habit, so they're very careful."



"Seek fresh perspectives, use sticky notes"

ROHIT BANSAL,

CO-FOUNDER, SNAPDEAL

"Every morning, I drink a huge glass of water and check emails that came through the night. I clear my mailbox every night. I spend the first 15 minutes of a work day planning. On the laptop, I use sticky notes all the time. Ours is a fast growing company, so it is difficult to stay away from work completely over weekends. But I do ensure that I spend time with my family a lot more on weekends than on weekdays. I meet at least two new people every week from any stream to keep a fresh perspective on the world. Many of them are not even connected to the Snapdeal business. I meet them, sometimes at our office or at coffee shops and restaurants. I try and stay connected with most people either through phone calls or emails or social networking sites."

"Keep your emails short, interact face to face"

SHISHIR BAIJAL,

CHAIRMAN & MANAGING DIRECTOR,

KNIGHT FRANK INDIA

"I've made it a habit to wake up at 5 am and spend at least an hour at the gym or doing yoga on my sea-facing balcony. I get to the office by 8 am, an hour before everyone. This gives me time to think and plan the day. My own work, such as answering mails, is all done before anyone else comes in, leaving me free the rest of the day to meet with people and build relationships. I'm not much into email communication - I keep my replies short and terse - and prefer talking to people on the phone or face-to-face. When I'm traveling, though, I don't go to the gym or do yoga. Instead, I take a long walk."



"Walk around the office"

RAJIV KAUL,

VICE CHAIRMAN AND CEO,

CMS INFO SYSTEMS

"Over the past 20 years, I have developed a habit of walking around the office meeting people. I don't spend much time at my desk. We have a lot of conversations in the corridors, where issues are resolved. I prefer that to scheduling formal meetings. I also keep emails to the minimum. I spend 45 minutes on email daily and I don't get or send more than ten emails a day. Compare that with most other people who take pride in getting 100 emails a day and spend a lot of their time on them. Four years ago, I told everyone that I don't want to be marked on every office email."



"De-clutter your life"

SHALABH SETHI,

MANAGING DIRECTOR, SABMILLER INDIA

"I allocate 'me time' on a daily basis as well as on weekends. This 'me time' is as sacrosanct as the most important business meeting. This habit ensures that one is always ready for a marathon and not just a single race. My Saturday afternoon nap is something I enjoy and I try never to schedule anything that disturbs the routine. Over time, I have tried to de-clutter my life. For example, my formal wardrobe consists of light shirts and dark trousers. On Fridays and weekends, I wear jeans and T-shirts. I don't waste time pondering over what I should wear. I have moved most of my work on to my iPhone, so I no longer carry a laptop, though I still carry my iPad as back up. We're a beer company, so I've made it a habit to take my team out to a bar after meetings. When I visit our offices outside Bangalore, I make it a point to take everyone there out for a drink in the evenings."



"Maintain a journal & listen to people"

MUNISH SHARDA,

MANAGING DIRECTOR & CEO, FUTURE GENERALI

LIFE INSURANCE

"Since 2009, I keep a hand-written diary with a list of things to do, in which I make jottings at least three times a week. This is very useful given the hectic schedules. Another work habit I have instituted is a 'listen only' session with my team every six months. At these sessions my direct reports can say anything they want and I only listen and don't respond during the course of the meeting. A third work habit I have is to do with managing relationships. At the start of every month, my secretary gives me a list of birthdays, anniversaries and work anniversaries for my direct reports and I call and wish them."



"Travel for new ideas"

DEVENDRA SHAH,

CHAIRMAN, PARAG MILK FOODS

"Innovation doesn't come from sitting in the office. When we set up our first cheese plant, the technology here was limited, so I toured Europe. I have now made it a habit to travel abroad at least six times a year, usually for one week at a stretch. I usually go alone, but sometimes I take one of my senior technical people. I don't just go to developed countries, but also to the developing nations of Asia. My last trip was to the Philippines. I look for insights when I travel."

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"Be prompt in communication, engage in soft diplomacy"

SWARUP CHOUDHURY,

MANAGING DIRECTOR, FIRST DATA INDIA
"I have a meeting with my direct reports every fortnight, but we also have a system of "war room" meetings, which requires everyone to assemble with one hour notice. War room meetings are called when we have a big transaction coming up and they happen once a fortnight. I've set myself a standard of responding to emails within 24 hours and SMS and WhatsApp messages within two hours. As the country head of a MNC headquarters in New York, I often receive visitors from other countries. I've made it a habit to take foreign guests out to dinner. Most Americans visiting India want to go shopping and I accompany them if they're looking for antiques and handicrafts. If they're looking to buy clothes, my wife steps in."

"Ab tum batao"

SANJAY SETHI,
CEO, SHOPCLUES

"If you come to my office and speak to me, the phrase that you will most hear would be "Ab tum batao (now, you say)." Now, this has become an office joke. I have a habit of making people repeat what I said in meetings. Through this, I am able to detect whether my colleagues have understood what I have said or not. Mostly, people get only 50% of what I just said. So, when somebody is late to a meeting, I don't repeat myself, but I make someone else repeat what I spoke for the benefit of the late comer. If something is lost in communication, I clarify. I have slight dyslexia. So, I listen to audio books on my way to office. When I reach the office, I am usually half way through a book. I am interested in astrophysics and quantum physics. It makes me realise that we are very insignificant in the larger universal scheme of things. The only time we have, is now."



"Meet new people, stay updated"

VINEET TOSHWAL,

MANAGING DIRECTOR, EQUIRUS CAPITAL
"On weekdays, I talk about new ideas. This can only come from meeting people from various walks of business like entrepreneurs, investors. I meet 7-10 people a week. This helps me in ideation. I try to remain updated about global business developments. I follow articles and blogs of Warren Buffett and Jim Rogers. This gives me a long term perspective. Mornings, I dedicate to tracking news and markets. I devote the first half of the day to meetings and second half for internal office work. I try to catch up with friends offline rather than social media sites. But I am very active on LinkedIn, which helps to connect with people in the investment banking ecosystem."

"Interview all prospective employees"

ANU ACHARYA,
CEO, MAPMYGENOME

"I sleep very little - around 4-5 hours. As soon as I get up, I workout. I don't use a treadmill. Even at office, I don't pick up the phone and call my colleagues, I walk up to them. I like to come in to office before the rush begins, so that I can focus on what I want to do. I delegate my work to my colleagues, because someone is better than you at certain things. But there are certain things I don't delegate, like recruitment. I interview candidates myself."



"Start early, acknowledge performers regularly"

VIVEK GAMBHIR,
MANAGING DIRECTOR, GOOREJ CONSUMER

"On days I'm not traveling, I come to office before everyone else. 8:00-9:30am is my time when I don't take any meetings. It's for reflection and reading. I have a one day, one week and a longer term to-do list which I look at while driving to work. I also avoid checking email through the day. Instead, every 1.5-2 hours I set aside 15-30 minutes and respond to email in these blocks of time. Every Sunday, I carve out some time to reflect on the week gone by and send out emails acknowledging people who've done something stellar during the week. I've made it a habit to have coffee or lunch with my top 50 team members every quarter to get feedback. I also be a part of their special occasions - kids birthday, anniversaries, promotions - by sending a handwritten note."

"Write down everything"

RAJU VANAPALA,
FOUNDER, WAY2SMS



"I do a lot of reading - not books, but articles and blogs. These are mostly articles written by startup heroes like Paul Graham of Y Combinator. These are very insightful - like how to manage macros and what kind of people you want to hire. Another guy, who I follow is Aaron Levie, co-founder of Box. I never miss his blog posts. The other habit I have is that I write down everything from micros and macros. My room is full of scribbling pads which I have used over the years. I finish one note pad every week. On Saturdays, I review my goals, which helps you validate. I also use the ColorNote app for drawing goal setting graphs."

"Use social media to connect with people"

SWATI BHARGAVA,
CO-FOUNDER, CASHKARO.COM

"For the past 7 years, I have been doing Yoga in the mornings. I am very active on Twitter. I have found that normally people who don't reply to you via email, usually respond quicker on Twitter. I connect with my teammates also on social media so that I can get to know my colleagues better. We even have a WhatsApp group in office. My husband Rohan (also the co-founder) and I have lunch with our colleagues every day. We have a kitchen in the office. So, we don't do any other lunch meetings."



"Be prepared, have an external orientation"

D SHIVAKUMAR,

CHAIRMAN & CEO, PEPSCO INDIA
"Everybody has 24 hours and the biggest demand on any CEO is maximising time. He has to be good in time discipline. CEOs must come well-prepared for meetings. For that, they must have access to information at least 24-48 hours prior. I ensure such information is available in advance. Also, CEOs tend to get stuck up with internal issues and normally use 5%-10% of their time interacting with external stakeholders. A strong external orientation helps and I regularly take time out to interact with industrial bodies, media or just reading up."

"Don't check social media at work"

GIRISH MATHRUBOOTHAM,

FOUNDER AND CEO, FRESHDESK

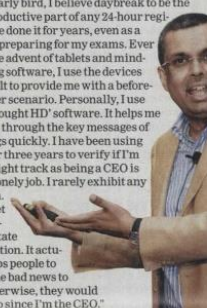
"Every morning, I play 3 sets of tennis on a clay court. During this time, if my phone rings, I won't take it. I make a lot of official calls while I drive to office. A lot of startup founders come to meet me for advice. And I try to meet at least two wannabe entrepreneurs a week. I have a rule for emails. If I am not marked in the To or Cc, I move those mails to a separate folder. That is how I prioritise. I don't check social media on my desktop during work. I only do that on my mobile phone, when I am free."



"Use mind mapping software, stay calm"

GANESH AYAR,
CEO, MPHASIS

"As an early bird, I believe daybreak to be the most productive part of any 24-hour regimen. I've done it for years, even as a student preparing for my exams. Ever since the advent of tablets and mind-mapping software, I use the devices to the hilt to provide me with a before-and-after scenario. Personally, I use the iThought HD software. It helps me to think through the key messages of meetings quickly. I have been using them for three years to verify if I'm on the right track as being a CEO is a very lonely job. I rarely exhibit any emotion. I don't let my emotion dictate my reaction. It actually helps people to bring the bad news to me. Otherwise, they would not do so since I'm the CEO."



"Plan meetings in advance"

GANESH NATARAJAN,
CEO, ZENSAR TECHNOLOGIES

"I believe in extreme planning. As of now, I know what my international travel calendar is going to be like till March 2016. When scheduling meetings with international clients, you need to give them 4-5 months notice and this also gives me and my team time to plan better, set up more meetings when I'm there etc. It's important for me to at least have a tentative schedule for the next 6-7 months and then make sure it works. I'm also associated with industry bodies like CII and Nasscom and before taking on any industry roles, I make sure that I have the calendar of activities a year in advance. Even our internal bi-monthly strategic management council meetings and monthly management council meetings are scheduled for the whole year and this is something we stick by. This is something that I've practised over the last 20 years."



"Take your vacations, de-stress"

SUSIR KUMAR,
CEO, SERCO GLOBAL SERVICES

"I take four holidays a year; one with family and friends, one just with my family, one only with my wife and yet another one with just friends. This goes a long way in keeping me fulfilled and spending quality time with the people dearest to me. Needless to say, it has a positive rub-off on my work and helps me achieve the desired work-life balance. A steady fitness regime and playing tennis has also helped. I have been doing Yoga for the past nine years and the vertical headstand is my *brahmastra* for days when I need focus and calmness. And lastly, I have taken to listening to binaural beats during long haul transatlantic flights as a way induce relaxation, sharpening of focus, creativity and other desirable mental states."



"Use calendars, junk review meetings"

ANKUR WARIKOO, CEO, Groupon India

"I'm a calendar person and have been maintaining a calendar for 20 years now. From notebooks to (Microsoft) Excel sheets, in 2006, I switched to Google Calendar. Groupon India has 240 employees and all of our email is on Google Calendar. We don't exchange emails. There were a lot of people early on who approached me on email for my time. I immediately sent them a calendar. This way, each party gets to know and block each other's time. I never have review meetings. Instead, I conduct workshops, which means we will never be sitting and evaluating what has happened in the past. Rather, I go for workshops where we are always planning for the future and where it is very clear who has actually worked—the review is implicit."



"Use WhatsApp groups at work"

RAJEEV SINGH,
MANAGING DIRECTOR, BENO INDIA

"For quicker communication, I formed a WhatsApp group called 'Projector Hotwire'. The entire projector sales and business teams are a part of it and they share everything that takes place in the market real time. I am the administrator for the group and today, it has become a template of sorts in the organisation. I have been on WhatsApp for three years now and the habit translated into agility on the work front. I tend to spend an hour every day on WhatsApp and try to use it optimally on the go or between meetings. So things are moving faster as competition activity mapping is now real time instead of weekly or monthly updates as before."



"Go back to the basics"

ALOK TANDON,
CEO, INOX LEISURE

"I am an engineering graduate. Even though my present job does not require me to brush up my knowledge of thermodynamics and fluid mechanics, I still like to flip through my old books as a form of relaxation. It gives me a lot of joy, and I think it keeps me grounded, even if it doesn't help me with day to day work. What does help me with my day to day work is the system of morning meetings which we have instituted in the company. The meeting is at 9.30 every morning and is attended by all department heads."

