THE NEW BLACK WITH KEFENG LIU & KEVIN GAUNT
THE PHYSICS OF PRODUCTIVITY: NEWTON’S LAWS FOR GETTING STUFF DONE
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Navi Radjou
Creative problem-solving in the face of extreme limits

Navi Radjou has spent years studying “jugaad,” also known as frugal innovation. Pioneered by entrepreneurs in emerging markets who figured out how to get spectacular value from limited resources, the practice has now caught on globally. Peppering his talk with a wealth of examples of human ingenuity at work, Radjou also shares three principles for how we can all do more with less.
The physics of productivity: Newton’s laws for getting stuff done

BY JAMES CLEAR

In 1687, Sir Isaac Newton published his groundbreaking book, Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy, which described his three laws of motion. In the process, Newton laid the foundation for classical mechanics and redefined the way the world looked at physics and science.

What most people don’t know, however, is that Newton’s three laws of motion can be used as an interesting analogy for increasing your productivity, simplifying your work, and improving your life.

Newton’s First Law of Productivity

First Law of Motion. An object either remains at rest or continues to move at a constant velocity, unless acted upon by an external force. (i.e. Objects in motion tend to stay in motion. Objects at rest tend to stay at rest.)

In many ways procrastination is a fundamental law of the universe. It’s Newton’s first law applied to productivity. Objects at rest tend to stay at rest. The good news? It works the other way too. Objects in motion tend to stay in motion. When it comes to being productive, this means one thing: the most important thing is to find a way to get started. Once you get started, it is much easier to stay in motion. To overcome procrastination, find a way to start your task in less than two minutes. Notice that you don’t have to finish your task. In fact, you don’t even have to work on the primary task. However, thanks to Newton’s first law, you’ll often find that once you start this little 2-minute task, it is much easier to keep moving. Here are some examples…

Right now, you may not feel like going for a run. But if you put your running shoes on and fill up your water bottle that small start might be enough to get you out the door.

Right now, you might be staring at a blank screen and struggling to write your report. But if you write random sentences for just two minutes, then you may find that useful sentences start to roll off your fingers.

Right now, you might have a creative block and be struggling to draw something. But if you draw a random line on a sheet of paper and turn it into a dog, then you might get your creative juices flowing. Motivation often comes after starting. Find a way to start small. Objects in motion tend to stay in motion.

Newton’s Second Law of Productivity

Second Law of Motion. \( F = ma \). The vector sum of the forces on an object is equal to the mass of that object multiplied by the acceleration vector of the object. (i.e. Force equals mass times acceleration.)

There is one important thing to note in this equation. The force, \( F \), is a vector. Vectors involve both magnitude (how much work you are putting in) and direction (where that work is focused). In other words, if you want to get an object accelerating in a particular direction, then the size of the force you apply and the direction of that force will both make a difference.

Guess what? It’s the same story for getting things done in your life. If you want to be productive, it’s not merely about how hard you work (magnitude), it’s also about where that work is applied (direction). This is true of big life decisions and small daily decisions – you could apply the same skill set in different directions and get very different results.

To put it simply, you only have a certain amount of force to provide to your work and where you place that force is just as important as how hard you work.

Newton’s Third Law of Productivity

Third Law of Motion. When one body exerts a force on a second body, the second body simultaneously exerts a force equal in magnitude and opposite in direction on the first body. (i.e. Equal and opposite forces.)

We all have an average speed that we tend to perform at in life. Your typical levels of productivity and efficiency are often a balance of the productive and unproductive forces in your life — a lot like Newton’s equal and opposite forces. There are productive forces in our lives like focus, positivity, and motivation and also unproductive forces like stress, lack of sleep, and trying to juggle too many tasks at once.

NEWTON’S LAWS OF PRODUCTIVITY

1. Objects in motion tend to stay in motion. Find a way to get started in less than 2 minutes.

2. It’s not just about working hard, it’s also about working on the right things. You have a limited amount of force and where you apply it matters.

3. Your productivity is a balance of opposing forces. If you want to be more productive, either power through the barriers or remove the opposing forces.

Newton’s laws of motion reveal insights that tell you pretty much everything you need to know about how to be productive – the second option seems to be less stressful.

If we want to become more effective and more productive, then we have two choices. The first option is to add more productive force. This is the “power through it” option. We gut it out, drink another cup of coffee, and work harder. This is why people take drugs that help them focus or watch a motivational video to pump themselves up. It’s all an effort to increase your productive force and overpower the unproductive forces we face.

Obviously, you can only do this for so long before you burn out, but for a brief moment the “power through it” strategy can work well. The second option is to eliminate the opposing forces. Simplify your life, learn how to say no, change your environment, reduce the number of responsibilities that you take on, and otherwise eliminate the forces that are holding you back. If you reduce the unproductive forces in your life, your productivity will glide forward naturally. Most people try to power through and hammer their way past the barriers. The problem with this strategy is that you’re still dealing with the other force. I find it to be much less stressful to cut out the opposing forces and let your productivity naturally flow forward.
Happy Retirement Birgitta

UID bids farewell to Birgitta Nordholm. After taking care of generations of students she sets off for an incredible holiday in the sun.

IxD1 had their final concept presentation working with forestry industry machine interfaces and work flow.

The Green Pub

Saturday morning, APD1 already (or still?) busy
10 words or less about yourself
Spicy Food Lover, Sketch Monkey, Nintendo Fan

Something most people don't know about you
I’m a little bit afraid of cycling. Although I used to be a fixed gear bike lover, I got into a serious accident two years ago and broke both my arms. That experience left a shadow in my mind. But I am still surprised that I could use my broken arm to finish my internship at PATAc.

An interesting fact from your country
The population of the city I live in, Beijing, is the same as the whole population of Sweden, Norway & Finland.

The New Black in TV/MOVIES
“The Interview”, I know it’s a bad movie, but just for fun.

The New Black in SLANG
“NIU BI”, which is pronounced “new bee”, is a very popular native Chinese word meaning extremely extremely extremely good!

The New Black on the WEB
“36 Kr”, a cool website about internet and technology related comments and news. But you would probably need a google translation.

Nomination for NEXT ISSUE
Dominik Krug, MFA Transportation 1

10 words or less about yourself
Questioning everything at IDEO in San Francisco.

Something most people don’t know about you
Sometimes I feel like I am the only person not to have won a Red Dot Award in this school.

An interesting fact from your country
So as I’m in the US right now I have to share the diversity of M&M’s flavours discovered here so far: milk chocolate, dark chocolate, white chocolate, mint chocolate, peanuts, pretzel, cinnamon, pumpkin spice, candy corn, peppermint, gingerbread, peanut butter.

The New Black in TV/MOVIES
There’s a streak of really enjoyable movies coming out now: Nightcrawler, Foxcatcher, The Intimidation Game, Whiplash, Interstellar.

The New Black in BOOKS/MAGAZINES
I found Creativity Inc. by Ed Catmull quite interesting. Beware it is a “business” book, but if you’re interested in how Pixar was founded, how it protects and fosters its creativity and manages to put out excellent movie after movie then this is the book for you.

The New Black on the WEB
Given the space craze at the moment, you need to check out Ernie Button’s photographs of the dried remains of single malt scotch whiskies. They totally look like weird foreign planets.