



Luke Carlson - Productivity

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“**What** you do, is more important than **how** you do everything else”

~ Peter Drucker

1. Introduction

The following checklist is a collection of principles and tactics taken from all of Luke Carlson’s appearances on the Corporate Warrior Podcast and the HIT Business Membership as well as timeless principles of productivity.

These tenants and tools will make you much more productive, help you grow your HIT business faster, and help you achieve your goals.

Luke Carlson is the Founder and CEO of Discover Strength, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Discover Strength’s four personal training facilities are among the highest volume/revenue training facilities in the country. Luke is a sought after speaker to businesses and leaders in a variety of industries, and a pioneer in HIT Business.



2. Focus and Vision

Goals and focus determine action. Before you review your personal effectiveness, time management, and priorities, you must define these or your actions are aimless.

Discover Strength have a singular focus: “Personalised Strength Training”.

They ignore any opportunity that does not contribute to their goal to become the best provider of *Personalised Strength Training*. For example, Discover Strength made the decision not to *also* focus on nutrition or “cardio”. Focus enables easier decision making and greater effectiveness.



If you desire to scale your business, you must have a clear vision and core values. People are the most important part of any business and a clear vision and core values are integral to attracting and retaining the right people.



A clear vision is a very personal business attribute and you must decide on this for your own business. If you need inspiration for your core values, listen to [my podcast with the Director of Culture for The Perfect Workout here](#).

3. Goal Setting

Goals provide direction and determine actions in your business.

Decide on a 7-10 year Big Hairy Audacious Goal (BHAG). This is a highly ambitious goal that is designed to *stretch* you and your business, and inspire you to take action.

e.g. Discover Strength's BHAG (7-10 year goal) was 10 locations and \$10m revenue by 2020 (as of Dec 11th 2017). Once you're 3 years out from your BHAG, set a new 7-10 year BHAG, and thus Discover Strength's new goal is a \$100m revenue business by 2025.

A revenue goal provides you and your team with an understanding of the size and scope of your goals and it puts everyone on the same page.

Underneath your revenue goal, you should set shorter term milestones: 5 year, 3 year, 1 year, and 90 days. Break your BHAG down for each milestone, until you get to 90 days, when you can decide on the priority to focus on for this quarter.



4. Motivation

Motivation for work is fuelled by passion and enjoyment. If you focus on the work you enjoy you will be more productive. As business owners, there is always some work you must do that you don't enjoy. The focus should be on minimising this over time.

Luke uses two filters and a quadrant to decide on his work:

Filter 1 - "If I only had one year left, is this how I want to spend my time?"

Filter 2 - "at 85 years old, will I wish I would have done more of this?"

Love it and good at	Like it and not good at
Don't like it and good at	Don't like it and not good at

Once a quarter, Luke will list his current weekly activities under the appropriate section in the matrix above. As your business grows and evolves, your weekly activities will change and that is why it's important to revisit this process quarterly.

The goal is to maximise the use of "Love it and good at" whilst minimising the rest.

"Love it and good at" should be aligned with the work you most enjoy and your unique ability (the work only you can do well in your business).



Whenever Luke feels low on passion, he recalls a quote from the former CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz:

“Everyone says that if you have passion in a given topic then you will be excited to learn about that topic. But what we found in our company is the inverse. When we teach someone about something or when someone learns about a particular area, their passion for that topic begins to grow”.



Whenever Luke finds himself feeling low on passion, he surrounds himself with some learning.

e.g. he listens to the Corporate Warrior podcast with Dr Teresa Liu-Ambrose to become passionate about exercise and cognitive health research or he'll read the Biography of John D. Rockefeller to reinvigorate passion for growing his business.



5. Productivity Principles

Time management is a misnomer. The challenge is not to manage time but to manage yourself.

Focus on doing the right things (effectiveness) vs doing things well (efficiency).
Doing things well does not make those things important. New apps and tools can create more unproductive busy work, if you're focusing on the wrong things.

Clearly, in Personal Training, the most important activity is training clients.

Therefore, the question is:

“When I’m not training clients, and working ON the business, how am I spending my time?”

List out all of your activities.

Then ask yourself:

“If I could only work on these for 2-hours a week, what would I keep and what would I be forced to eliminate?”

I appreciate 2-hours a week seems absurd. This is not to suggest that you reduce your ON the business focus to just 2-hours a week, it’s a thought exercise to help you reduce or eliminate the unproductive activities.

The Pareto Law of Distribution states that 80% of the output is caused by 20% of the inputs. This exercise of identifying the important tasks will show you the 20%.



Truly productive people, use the Pareto Law or the 80/20 principle, to focus on the tasks that will have the biggest impact on their goals.

Luke will Pareto Principle his To-Do list and, with reference to the quadrant in the Motivation section previously, will minimize, eliminate or delegate as much of “Like it and not good at”, “Don’t like it and good at”, and “Don’t like it and not good at” as possible.



Here’s some powerful quotes and reminders from The 4-Hour Work Week and The Effective Executive to help you priorities and reduce overwhelm:

“What you do is infinitely more important than how you do it. Efficiency is still important, but it is useless unless applied to the right things.”

“Being busy is most often used as a guise for avoiding the few critically important but uncomfortable actions.”



“Being overwhelmed is often as unproductive as doing nothing, and is far more unpleasant. Being selective—doing less—is the path of the productive. Focus on the important few and ignore the rest.”

“Slow down and remember: most things make no difference. Being busy is a form of laziness-lazy thinking and indiscriminate action.”

“It’s easy to get caught up in minutiae. Key to not feeling rushed is remembering that lack of time is actually lack of priorities.”

6. Morning Routine

Luke and I use the 5-minute Journal to practice gratitude every morning and set priorities for the day.

Luke will write down the 3 most important things he needs to get done that day to move his personal and professional objectives forward. He also writes down things he wants to do less often in that day, such as less mobile phone use, less social media, etc.

For most people, long lists are counterproductive as they cause you to be inefficient (prioritising the easy / ineffective items) and overwhelmed.



7. Productivity Tactics

Luke's assistant schedules a 90-minute block of time in his calendar every day called the "Top 3".

By having everything schedule in a calendar, it enables you to focus on execution and free up your mind for what has to be done that day. However, since you become run by your calendar, it's very important that you prioritise time for the mission critical important tasks, like Luke's "Top 3".

Luke's prioritises the morning for the "Top 3", since he, and most of us, are more effective in the morning from 8-11am. If he cannot schedule it in the morning, Luke will tackle the "Top 3" in the afternoon and accepts that he might not be as productive.

"Top 3" filter:

- What's the most important thing that will move the organisation forward?
- What is the one thing that only you can be working on?
- What's the CEO work?

Luke recommends the book: Great Ceos Are Lazy: How Exceptional Ceos Do More in Less Time

Here's some examples of activities that Luke might work on during his "Top 3" that pass the above criteria:

1. Luke must finalise a plan for what happens when a trainer meets 10 years of tenure with Discover Strength. What do they get in terms of conference options, profit sharing, annual dinner with the leadership team, etc.



2. Luke has to help with the new annual budget. This could be in the “Top 3” for 3 or 4 days in a row, since it’s too big for 1 or 2 sessions.



Luke also has his assistant schedule a 2-hour block in his calendar every day for “save for something more important” e.g. like an emergency meeting. This has been a game changer for Luke. It always fills up 1, 2 or weeks ahead of time, but it enables Luke to schedule shorter term emergencies when required.

“When you take a meeting or make a commitment, could there be a more important commitment that comes along?”

Running a business can take over your life. You can find yourself thinking about nothing but your business 24/7 and working all of the time. A great trick to making time for recreation and relaxation is to *schedule the fun*. This might sound robotic, but, for some of us, frequent spontaneity can cause anxiety, and scheduling fun activities provides joy in terms of anticipation and increases the likelihood that the “fun” will actually happen. Otherwise, work can easily bleed into “fun”.



Discover Strength use Slack internally and email externally. Luke uses email for external communications and processes it in batches 1 or 2 times per day. He frequently uses aeroplane travel to process email offline, which avoids email back and forth.

Some time ago, Luke realised he was consuming information reactively. In other words, he'd be scrolling through social media or the internet, and consume content that caught his eye, and soon he found he had wasted the an hour consuming information that did not bring him closer to his goals or bring any value to his life.

In a business or educational context, this type of reactive information consumption reminds me of a just-in-case (JUC) mindset: learning and consuming just in case you need to use the information in the future.

It's far more productive to adopt a just-in-time (JIT) mindset: only learning and consuming specific information when you need it for a specific task.

Learn to eliminate energy and time vampires (people) from your life. This can be a really hard thing to do. Especially when you've had a close relationship with someone for a long period of time. My solution to this is to start spending more time with those that add value to your life, and by necessity, you will naturally spend less time with people that bring you no value. This can be a little easier for most people to do versus cutting people off suddenly.



8. What To Prioritise?

You have so many opportunities and tasks you can do, that it can be challenging to figure out the best use of your time. A great way to prioritise and identify the most effective task is to identify the *constraint* in your business.

The *constraint* is the single greatest bottle neck, the kink in the hose, and if figured out, will enable your organisation to be far more effective.

You're taught to try and fire fight everything, but you should be focused on the biggest constraint. Otherwise you can't move on and grow your businesses.

For example, Discover Strength's big constraint was developing an application to track workouts and replace clipboard, pencil, printed workout cards, and client file folders.

The current process is laborious and the client can't interact with their data online. This is inefficient and a problem in today's connected and online world. An application provides seamless workout tracking and provides trainers and clients with charts and graphs.

In Luke's words "throw yourself into the constraint completely".



9. The Weekly Review

With the exception of travel, Luke creates consistent weeks with the same types of activity on the same days and at the same times (where possible).

For example:

- Monday mornings - Luke trains clients (3 hours)
- Fridays - Meeting Day (inspired by Scaling Up: How a Few Companies Make It... and Why the Rest Don't (Rockefeller Habits 2.0) and Mastering the Rockefeller Habits: What You Must Do to Increase the Value of Your Growing Firm) This starts with a breakfast meeting - Leaders and managers 7-8am, then meetings all day from 8:30-4:30pm. Meetings are based around 90 day priorities "Rocks". Luke will have a 90-minute lunch meeting with his VP of Operations to resolve operational issues.
- Sunday mornings - Luke trains clients (3 hours)





Once a week, Luke will take a 1-hour Clarity Break. This scheduled session consists of pen and paper and no technology. Luke uses this time to journal on a specific topic or issue in his life or business.

You can use the Clarity Break or a period at the end of each day to review your calendar. This is a great way to measure your productivity and ask yourself questions like:

- “Did this day get me closer to my goal?”
- “Am I doing stuff that only I can do?”
- “What would happen if X were not done at all?”
- “Which of the activities on my time log could be done by somebody else just as well, if not better?”
- “What do I do that wastes your time without contributing to effectiveness?”

10. Delegation

One of the biggest mistakes HIT business operators make is holding on to too much of the work and not empowering others. By letting go of activities that others can do just as well, if not better than you, you free up time and energy to focus on important activities that will drive you closer to your goals.

Empowerment process:

- What makes me so good at X?
- How can I teach others?
- How can I systematise this? (e.g. training document / video)



E.g. Personal training, and in the words of Luke “you cannot be married to the client if you want to scale your business”.

A big constraint on growth for a lot of businesses is the entrepreneur trying to hold on to everything. This is holding the business back.

11. Information Synthesis

Luke listens to podcasts as a secondary activity, such as when he’s running and during weekly aeroplane travel. For most podcasts, Luke won’t take notes, he’ll just absorb and ponder, and may email a note or pertinent point to his team or colleagues.

Luke uses a key idea notebook to take general and action notes from action-orientated information, like my podcasts with Dr Teresa Liu-Ambrose or Dr Stuart Phillips. He’ll implement these notes into his business with new systems, staff education, etc.

12. Meetings

If a meeting is run correctly, it’s a time saver. You can learn a lot about a business by attending their main meetings.

Discover Strength use a 90-minute meeting format. All leadership team attend a weekly meeting. All trainers attend a 90-minute weekly meeting at each location and all department heads and managers attend a 90-minute weekly meeting.



All meetings are central to the productivity of each location, individual performers, and the leadership team.

Luke said he could attend the weekly leadership meeting and do absolutely nothing else, and it would be the most valuable thing he can do for Discover Strength.

Meeting agenda:

- Meeting-mode segue - professional / personal highlight round table (go around the table giving professional and personal highlights for that week).
- Rapid fire reporting mode (based on score cards against key business metrics)
- Review 90-day priorities
- Everyone reports whether they are on track or off track
- Review customer / employee headlines (NPS) - predicts if customer is loyal and how long they are likely to stay.

The bulk of the meeting is solving issues. This takes approximately 50-minutes. Discover Strength use an IDS format (Identify, discuss, and solve).

During the week, the entire team are adding issues to an issue list to be handled in the meeting. This avoids adhoc problem solving during the working day, which causes individuals to task switch, get distracted, and be less productive.

For example, a trainer might ask:

- “How are we recording the number of reps on this breakdown set?”
- “What hand position are we using on this exercise?”



If answers to the above questions are not clear, then the meeting can address this by having a standard protocol for the above and putting the information in a standard operating procedure document for trainers to access. Therefore this removes the back and forth dialogue on trivial issues.



The focus of the IDS format is to get to a “solve” on each issue as effectively and quickly as possible. Each issue is allocated to a specific owner and they are given 7-days to solve. They then recap the solves in the following week to check if done or not done, and address accordingly.

If an issue is big and strategic, it will get dropped to a quarterly issue list. The leadership team will address this issue at a quarterly offsite meeting.

An example of this is a strategic issue or a process overhaul e.g. on-boarding a new trainer. This is unlikely to get solved in an IDS meeting. It Needs a quarterly off-site meeting. This would become a priority for next quarter, where someone owns it and completes over the next 90 days.



Learn more about the details of how [Discover Strength manage productive meetings here.](#)

13. Further reading

- [Mastering the Rockefeller Habits: What You Must Do to Increase the Value of Your Growing Firm by Verne Harnish](#)
- [Scaling Up: How a Few Companies Make It...and Why the Rest Don't \(Rockefeller Habits 2.0\) by Verne Harnish](#)
- [The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing: Violate Them at Your Own Risk! by Al Ries and Jack Trout](#)
- [Great Ceos Are Lazy: How Exceptional Ceos Do More in Less Time by Jim Schleckser](#)
- [The Four Hour Work Week by Tim Ferriss](#)
- [The Effective Executive by Peter Drucker](#)

I hope this was helpful! [Start a private coaching thread to tell me what else you need help with HERE](#)