

# PRODUCTIVITY GUIDE

## **The Ultimate Grocery Store Planning Guide**

*...stop wasting time and  
money in the supermarket aisles.*

**Jeff Doubek**  
Day-Timer Spokesperson



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## About Jeff Doubek



Day-Timer Spokesperson Jeff Doubek shares tips, methods, and secrets to better productivity at work and at home each week on the Day-Timer blog at: <http://www.daytimer.com/blog>.

### Popular posts include:

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Have a question about this article or general comments about your own productivity? Please feel free to send Jeff an email at [jeff.doubek@daytimer.com](mailto:jeff.doubek@daytimer.com).

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# That squeaky shopping cart wheel is telling you something

You think of grocery shopping as an inconvenient task. But, have you given thought to the idea that it's often a terribly wasteful experience? If you're like most people, you are throwing away money and time if you're shopping without a plan... and you're likely bringing stress into your life.

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Meanwhile, you're wasting countless hours each year from shopping without knowing what you need, from wandering the aisles looking for inspiration, and from having to return for a forgotten item. And, let's not forget money spent buying unneeded items that sit on your shelves unused or spoil in your refrigerator.

Before you make another wasteful trip to the supermarket, please consider the following essential tips for making your grocery shopping a productive experience:

## 1) Make a choice and make time

For most people the vital shopping decision is made when they choose between paper and plastic bags at the checkout aisle. The truth is that all your important purchasing choices should be made well in advance, before you ever leave the house.

This is done by first taking the simple yet decisive step of choosing to do better with your time and money, and then by making time to plan. Start by scheduling a 30-minute grocery planning session each week. You'll need to spend this time in your kitchen, so pick a time when you can be undisturbed and unhurried, and are able to concentrate on your week ahead.

This session will consist of roughly 20 minutes of creative planning followed by 10 minutes of taking inventory and making lists. It's a small investment of your week into a major savings of time and money.

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## 2) Create a weekly smart plan

We know that you would eat better and live better if you planned your meals. So what's stopping you? Create a chart for the week ahead, or write in your planner, three meals a day for the next seven days for you and your family.

Be sure to consider the following:

- **Nutrition:** Formulate your meal planning around both your family's preferences and a healthy balance of nutritious foods. Don't forget about healthy snacks. Needing inspiration? A wealth of meal recommendations is available online. [www.Mealsmatter.org](http://www.Mealsmatter.org) is a great example, but there are many others.
- **Your schedule:** Take into account what's going on this week. Check other events on your calendar including late afternoon meetings, social plans, kids' activities, and guests you may have. Remember your own personal schedule. If you're the chef, you'll need to plan your own availability to prepare these meals.
- **Prep time:** Consider preparing several meals for the whole week at once. It's productive use of your weekend time to whip-up a batch of soup or spaghetti, or grill and freeze chicken breasts.
- **Deals:** Be sure to check your newspaper for store specials that you can plan meals around. It's a good idea to keep a running file of grocery store coupons, newspaper fliers, and online deals from manufacturers' websites.

A great way to stay on top of your food planning is by keeping meal planning section in your day planner. *For more tips, please see the sidebar.*

### Start a Kitchen Journal Today!

By following-up on your purchases you can better plan your future grocery spending. For this purpose, I recommend you create a dedicated kitchen journal. This journal can be a stand alone planner, or a section of your existing day planner.

Your kitchen journal will enable you to track all of your grocery activities. After each shopping trip, make an entry under the date of trip and attach your shopping list, your weekly meal plan, and your receipts.

This information will prove itself valuable for planning your upcoming purchases. As you go through your week, update your journal on grocery status including those items you run out of quickly, those that you throw away because they get spoiled, and those that you don't particularly like for quality, taste, or otherwise.

#### More thoughts on your kitchen journal:

- **Keep your list of staple items updated,** making note of items that may be bought in larger quantities, or by generic equivalent for cost savings
- **Maintain a master list of items purchased,** including date of purchase and purchase price, to analyze your spending
- **Create a monthly/weekly budget** based on your demonstrated spending patterns

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### 3) Gain better control from a two-list system

The grocery list is the grandmother of all to-do lists. For as long as you can remember, it's been the universal reminder of what to buy. The unfortunate reality is that, as a tool, it is highly ineffective at telling you what you *should* buy. A two-list system will take your meal planning and grocery store organization to the next level.

Begin by writing out all the ingredients necessary for you to create the meals on your schedule. Next, separate these items into two categories: essential items, and staples.

- **Essential items** are the unique ingredients in your meals (salmon filets, for example) that you might not purchase every week. This is a category that will likely change from week to week depending on the variety in your meal planning.
- **Staples** include the common ingredients of your daily meals, such as milk, bread, eggs and sugar. Also include household items such as detergent and toilet paper.



Once you've separated these two categories into lists, go on kitchen patrol. Your KP duty includes taking a detailed inventory of the food in your cupboards, pantry, refrigerator, and freezer with particular attention paid to the items in your staples category that you likely may already have.

This is important: once you find an item on your list, you may only check it off if there is ample quantity to create all the meals on your schedule; otherwise you will need to replace. It's a good idea keep these lists handy as you go through your week, and update quantities as they change.

### 4) Don't go yet – schedule first!

With your lists in-hand you're well on your way to a better grocery shopping experience, but first you must decide when and where to go. Prepare yourself by answering the following two questions:

**When do you go?** This is an important decision, but it is largely based on your available time and the traffic volume at your preferred market. Grocery shopping

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during off-peak hours can save you tons of time in your shopping. Consider the amount of time you could save if you could avoid waiting at the deli, inching along crowded aisles, or standing in check-out lines.

- Experiment with different times of day and time your trips.
- Grocery shopping on your commute home from work may be the last thing on your mind, but imagine the free time you'll enjoy later.
- Also, remember to make your productive use of your errand time by combining grocery shopping with other activities and errands.
- Do you pick your kids up from activities? Bring them to the grocery store and enlist their help in finding groceries for additional time-savings.

**Where do you shop?** You may have the option of considering where you get the best deals for various items on your shopping list, but make sure the trip is productive. Paper towels may be more affordable at the local big box store, but not if you have to make a special trip. Group together supplies and necessities for a productive shopping experience.

## 5) Be more supermarket-friendly

Your final step for enhancing productivity comes at the store itself. This is done by learning about the layout of your store and knowing where to find the typical items of your shopping trip.

Create a routine that you follow on every shopping trip, it will eliminate any back-tracking and the chance for forgotten items. Study your store's layout, keeping in mind the counter-clockwise flow pattern of typical grocery stores that features perishable items on the outer loop.

Industry studies have shown that 60-70% of all grocery store purchases are unplanned.

Here are some useful ways to avoid impulse purchases:

- **eat first:** shop hungry and you'll choose with your stomach and not your brain

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### Shop the Perimeter First

Always keep in mind that grocery stores organize their layouts in a way to get you to spend the most money.

Costlier, prepackaged foods usually sit in the middle of the store, while staple foods, such as milk, eggs and bread line the perimeter.

If you buy your staple items first, your cart will already be filled with food and you'll be less likely to indulge in prepackaged goodies on your way out of the store.

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- **have a budget:** pre-set your limitations on how much you can buy
  - **don't fall for marketing strategies:** end of aisle displays, recipe-related suggestions, and eye-level product placement are all there to influence you
  - **stick to your list:** simple and effective, keep with your purchasing plan and you'll save

*Tip: Plan to start using reusable shopping bags. There are lots of convenient options out there and truthfully there is no excuse for not investing into a handful of these to keep in the trunk of your car. Grocery store bags are a waste of resources, not too readily recyclable, and often don't make it into the landfills.*

## **A final note...**

Once you've established your grocery store plan you will begin to see patterns in your life that are successful, and those that have room for improvement. Furthermore, you will likely find that you have your own processes that can expand the usefulness of this plan to better fit your lifestyle.

Did you enjoy this Productivity Guide? Do you have any comments or suggestions? If so, please send a message to [jeff.doubek@daytimer.com](mailto:jeff.doubek@daytimer.com).