

Tips for more effective Time Management

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1. Spend time planning and organising.

Time spent thinking and planning is time well spent. They say if you fail to take time for planning, you are, in effect, planning to fail. Organise in a way that makes sense to you. If you need colour and pictures, use a lot on your calendar or planning book. Some people need to have papers filed away; others get their creative energy from their piles. So forget the 'shoulds' and organize your way.

2. Set goals.

Goals give your life, and the way you spend your time, direction. When asked the secret to amassing his fortune, one of the famous Hunt brothers from Texas replied: "First you've got to decide what you want." Set goals which are specific, measurable, realistic and achievable - each goal is the next stepping stone towards your ultimate destination. The best goals are those which cause you to 'stretch' but not 'break' as you strive for achievement. Goals can give creative people a much needed sense of direction.

3. Prioritise.

Use the 80-20 Rule: the rule is based on the work of the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto and states that 80 per cent of the reward comes from 20 per cent of the effort. The trick to prioritising is to identify that valuable 20 per cent. Then allocate enough time to complete these tasks properly. Prioritise by colour, number or letter - whichever method makes the most sense to you. Flagging items with a deadline is another idea for helping you stick to your priorities.

4. Use a to do list.

Some people benefit from a daily To Do list, which they construct either last thing at night or first thing in the morning. A To Do list can be combined with a calendar or schedule. You might prefer a 'running' To Do list which is continuously updated.

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The To Do list styles can be combined as well – whatever works best for you. Don't be afraid to try a new system. Innovation can lead to great things!

5. Be flexible.

Allow time for interruptions and distractions. Many time management experts suggest you don't make firm plans for any more than 50 per cent of your time. With only half of your time planned, you're flexible enough to handle interruptions and unplanned 'emergencies'. When you expect to be interrupted, schedule routine tasks. Save (or make) larger blocks of time for your priorities. When interrupted, "What is the most important thing I can be doing with my time right now?" to help you get back on track fast.

6. Consider your biological prime time.

That's the time of day when you are at your best. Are you a 'morning person', a 'night owl', or a 'late afternoon whiz'? Knowing when your best time is and planning to use that time of day for your priorities is effective time management.

7. Do the right thing right.

Noted management expert, Peter Drucker, says "doing the right thing is more important than doing things right". Doing the right thing is effectiveness; doing things right is efficiency. Focus first on the most effective way to do something (the right thing), then concentrate on the most efficient way to do it (the right way).

8. Eliminate the urgent.

Urgent tasks have short-term consequences while important tasks are those with long-term, goal-related implications. Work towards reducing the urgent things so you'll have time for your important priorities. Flagging or highlighting items on

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your To Do list or attaching a deadline to each item may prevent important items from becoming emergencies. Your goal-related tasks should be completed properly, without being rushed.

9. Practise the art of intelligent neglect.

Eliminate from your life trivial tasks or those tasks which do not have long-term consequences for you. Can you delegate or eliminate anything on your To Do list? Focus on those tasks which you alone can do.

10. Avoid being a perfectionist.

In the Malaysian culture, only the gods are considered capable of producing anything perfect. Whenever something is made, a flaw is left on purpose so the gods will not be offended. Yes, some things need to be closer to perfect than others, but perfectionism – paying unnecessary attention to detail – can be a form of procrastination.

11. Conquer procrastination.

When you are avoiding something, break it into smaller tasks and do just one of the smaller tasks or set a timer and work on the big task for just 15 minutes. By doing a little at a time, eventually you'll reach a point where you'll want to finish.

12. Learn to say 'no'.

Such a small word – and so hard to say. Getting your goals clear may help. Block time for important private priorities, like family and friends. But first you must be convinced that you and your priorities are important – that seems to be the hardest part in learning to say 'no'. Once you've convinced yourself of that, saying 'no' gets easier.

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13. Reward yourself.

Even for small successes; celebrate when you achieve your goals. Promise yourself a reward for completing each task, or finishing the total job. Then keep your promise to yourself and indulge in your reward. Doing so will help you maintain the necessary balance of life, work and play. As Ann McGee-Cooper says, “If we learn to balance excellence in work with excellence in play, fun and relaxation, our lives become happier, healthier, and a great deal more creative.”

Resources

Drucker, Peter. **The Effective Executive**. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

McGee-Cooper, Ann. **Time Management for Unmanageable People**. Dallas, TX: Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates, 1983.

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