



MANAGE YOUR TIME BETTER

2 Aug 2015

Most of us wish we had more hours in the day to get through everything we want to. Well I do. The chances of you getting more hours in the day is very unlikely. Actually, it's not going to happen. However the chances of you managing yourself and therefore your time more effectively is a very real possibility. This month I am going to deal with managing your time. Because there is quite a lot I want to talk about, I am going to split the newsletter into two parts and send out part two later this month. The first part looks at how we spend our time. The second part will look at working more productively.

Rate yourself

To start off with, I want you to consider the following statements and rate yourself as to how true they are of you. Rate yourself on a scale of 1 - 5, where 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often and 5 = always.

1. During the day I work on tasks that are my highest priority.
2. I set aside time for planning and scheduling.
3. I complete tasks on time.
4. I know what tasks I spend my day doing.
5. I manage my time and the people around me, so that I don't have interruptions.
6. I use my current goals to decide on the tasks to do for the day.
7. I schedule some free time during the day to deal with unexpected demands.
8. I know which of my tasks is of high, medium or low priority.
9. I plan and prioritise all new work assignments.
10. I am focused and concentrate on the task at hand.
11. I have a daily "to-do" list.
12. My actions on my to-do list are prioritised.
13. My daily to-do list is not more than 10 items.
14. I regularly confirm priorities with my boss (if you are the boss, then with yourself).
15. I manage my clients so I can have reasonable deadlines to complete work.

Then total up your scores. If you have a very low score (which means anything between 15 and 30) you have plenty you can do to improve. If you are someone who doesn't get through everything they want to do, or you would like to be more effective in managing your time, then read on.

Strategies for managing your time more effectively

Goal setting:

If you want to manage your time and your tasks you need to know what your objectives are. Goals help you decide what is worth spending time on and what is not. Don't spend $\frac{3}{4}$ of the day on something that does not help you meet any of your goals unless you are on vacation. Know what needs to be done and what does not need to be done. Then spend your time doing what will help you reach your goals.

Prioritisation:

For most of us there is more work than we can get through. You probably cannot do everything you would like to do. So you have to prioritise. Know what is important and work hard on the right things. Know what is going to move you or your business forward and do what matters. One of the ways to do this is to have an urgent/important matrix. Tasks fall into one of four categories: 1) Urgent and important; 2) urgent and not important; 3) not urgent and important; and 4) not urgent and not important. Too many people spend their whole lives working on their urgent list and then wonder why they never progress. These are the people who are always telling me they spend their time fighting fires.

Make a to-do list for each day. Make one list, not lists, and always keep it in the same place. Some people have 20 - 30 items on their list and then are overwhelmed when they read it. Keep it between 5 and 10 items max. Prioritise items on your to-do list and start with the most important, high value tasks. Keep your list with you. Cross off each day what is completed. If using different colours or pictures on your list helps you focus on it and complete tasks then do that. A lot of people with ADHD find this works for them.



Manage Interruptions:

It is not unusual to lose up to 2 hours in a day through interruptions. This is not guess work, it has actually been studied. That is 10 hours a week extra you could have. Interruptions and lost time can be unexpected phone calls, constantly opening and reading emails, information requests, signatures, and let's not forget social media. Block off time to deal with these. Have a set time for reading emails. And don't read them outside of that set time. The same for phone calls and social media as well as dealing with clients and staff. An open door policy is a good idea, but if you are continually being interrupted, then set specific times for employees to contact you for sign-off, requests, etc. Schedule time for you to work on what needs to be done and close your

door and be unavailable for a set time period if necessary. You may not be able to do this if your job means you have to answer client concerns immediately. There are jobs like this especially call centre and client-interfacing positions, but in most jobs you can let people know when you are available. People learn. If you are always around at any hour of the day or night, they will contact you at any time of the day or night. If they know you are only available at certain times they will learn to plan their time and requests to fit with your availability. For emergencies only you can ask people to SMS or WhatsApp you.

Overcome Procrastination:

Another reason many people don't manage time effectively is because they sit there looking at the work to do (either there is too much of it or they cannot imagine how they would do it,) completely freaked out by what needs to be done. If that is you then break the work down and just start. Break the task down into small tasks and get started on just one. It will be easier to finish it and get a sense of accomplishment from having completed something. Don't let huge piles of work build up. It just invites procrastination. If you have a big task to do then break it up into smaller tasks so that each smaller task looks easy to do. If you have no idea where to start ask someone. And then just start. Tell yourself you only have to work on this for 10 minutes. After 10 minutes you will be involved in the task and you usually find you can continue. Reward yourself for finishing a particularly big, difficult task.

Finish tasks:

Another habit that wastes time and can lead to procrastination is to not finish tasks. Complete your incompletes. Finish the task so you can tick it off and not have to think about it again. Then move onto the next task. Individual preferences play a role here. Some people can be reading three books at the same time or working on multiple projects at the same time, and others prefer dealing with one and getting it out the way. That is okay- that is personal preferences, and if it works for you it works. However if you are never finishing tasks or assignments then you know something is wrong. Set aside and diarise time to complete something. That means write down in a diary, on a wall calendar, or on a whiteboard, every task needed to complete the assignment and block out all the time needed to complete every task of the assignment in full. And remind yourself not to start new tasks until you have finished what you planned to finish. You can post reminders on the wall to yourself to that effect.

Create a schedule:

Check your schedule is aligned with goals and priorities. Know how much time each activity takes and in what order tasks need to be completed. Some people always under-, or over-estimate how long something takes. Schedule some time for contingencies. And schedule some time for breaks. Every morning do the most difficult task or most dreaded task first. Otherwise you use up energy and time worrying about doing it throughout the day until you have done it. Know which times of the day you are most productive and which times you are most creative and put those times to good use.

Okay, that is quite a lot to start doing. Later on in the month I will send out part two. In the meantime you can start implementing what you feel will work for you from among these. After all better time management usually means more time for leisure and what you love doing.