

The ABCs of Time Management

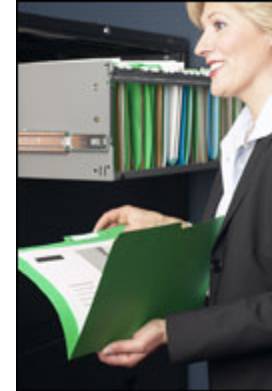
We all know that time is valuable, especially when it comes to work. Use this guideline to maximize your efficiency and become a master of time management.

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A Place for Everything

Make sure everything has a place, and return everything to its place after you use it. Many people tend to clutter their work space with all sorts of materials. Work neatly and find a home for it all, returning it to that place if it will not be used again in the next 2 hours.

Having an organized filing system and a clean working environment will do wonders for focus and productivity.



Audit

List everything that you do for one entire week. At week's end, review the prior week and ask:

1. What activities took up the major elements of my time?
2. Where has my time gone?
3. What have I been doing?

Answer these questions as a great starting place for improving the use of your time. Be objective and look for areas that you can improve, control or eliminate. Ask yourself what it is you want to spend your time doing, and balance these appropriately against undesirables in the future weeks.



Big Tasks

If a project seems overwhelming, break it down into manageable steps. This technique is referred to as "Eating an elephant." You would struggle to finish it in one bite, but over many meals, you would be able to consume the whole beast! Perhaps not very appealing, but the principle is obvious.

Spend a few minutes (15-20) every day and schedule these slots into your planner during a quiet period when you have minimum distractions. Keep going until the task is finished.

Date It

Whenever you write something down, (an action, a minute, a post it note) always include the date on it.

This prompt will remind both you and others when this particular issue was raised. The focus this brings may surprise you.

Drop Ins

When someone drops in, do one of two things. Tell them, "Unfortunately, this isn't a good time right now. Can we meet at ...?" or set a time limit on their visit. "Thanks for dropping in, but I only have 10 minutes right now."

File What You Need

Most filed papers are never again accessed. Be extremely choosy about the amount of energy you expend on filing. Never file documents that will be available elsewhere, especially when there is an electronic copy.

File only that which you know you will need again. Liberate time and effort in discarding the rest.

Handling Email

Most of us are inundated with emails. One tip: immediately deal with all those short, quick solution emails.

If you can complete it in a few minutes, do so. You will only waste time later, reading and dealing with it. Print out emails that require responses later and place in your planner.



Stop the repetition. Open the email, see if it's a short and quick task, and complete the appropriate response.

High Energy

Each day, you have time when your energy levels are higher than at other times.

Know both your high points (when you feel alert and active) and the times when you feel slow and lethargic. Recognize and plan around it. Use your energetic periods to plough through the important or complex work and use the low periods wisely, too. This might mean scheduling tasks that get you away from your desk, so that you do not shut down your effectiveness.

Invest Time

Two tasks to perform before you leave the office each night:

1. Clear your desk or work space. Never be tempted to walk away leaving paper, tasks, books, in fact, anything, on your desk unless it's part of the setting (which includes phones, pictures of the dog, and PC's). Walk in the next morning without having to face a disorganized office setting.
2. Plan tomorrow. This is one of the best tips that you can implement. It makes a huge difference to your sense of well being, allowing you to relax once home. You arrive the next day ready to work, rather than having to wind up and decide what to do.



Invest in 15 minutes before you leave, and see what a difference it makes to tomorrow.

Late for Work

Tardiness sets a bad example for other Team Members. With so many distractions (children, animals, snail mail, breakfast, traffic), no wonder it's so easy to be late.

Tonight, make a change: prepare before you go to bed. Place your coat, keys, telephone and briefcase by the door, and set your alarm fifteen minutes early. This really makes a difference.



Manage Calls

Here are a number of good practices that improve your time management of telephone calls:

- Plan your call in writing before you dial
- Get to the point quickly
- Listen carefully
- Focus your concentration on the job at hand. Do not be tempted to play with the keyboard, etc.
- Set a time limit for the call before you dial
- Always stand up to use the telephone

Print this list and put it under your telephone as a reminder. Implement these practices and you will be able to take control of the call.

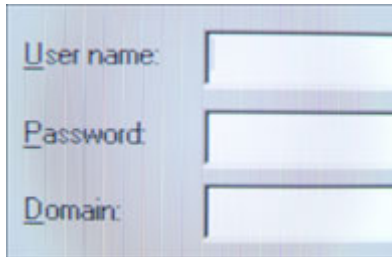
Own Your Morale

In today's work place and busy social schedules, it can be very easy to allow things to weigh you down. Realize that you are in charge of, or at least can be in charge of your own morale.

Have a positive attitude (especially amidst others who do not) to set the scene for managing your tasks and workload.

Passwords

How many passwords do you have? In this electronic age, we are all to be inundated with passwords.



Here is a simple tip that can help. Set your password to something that you can type with one hand.

This may sound too simple, but it really makes a difference.

Phone Control

The way you begin a call affects the way you complete it. You can start a telephone call by saying "Hi Sally, I only have 5 minutes, so I want to let you know that ..."

When answering a call, the same practice can apply. "Hi, Robert speaking. I've only got a few minutes, but how can I help you?" Take control and watch your time management of telephone calls transform.

Plan, Plan, Plan

To become efficient in managing your time, have a good grasp of the short, intermediate and long term. This provides a feeling of general well being and allows you to stay in control.

Plan at three levels:

1. Plan the next day the night before. Go to bed or leave your desk with the confidence that you are ready for tomorrow. You will not find issues overtaking you before starting the day.
2. Plan the week on Fridays. Have a plan for the coming week.
3. Plan the following year. Focus on the big picture, continuously updating it as entries occur.



Procrastination

If you have time management trouble, there is often a hint of procrastination. It can be spotted in phrases such as "One more day won't make a difference." "I'll just put this off until tomorrow." "Everyone is late for meetings, so I can be late, too."

Always be on the look out for this enemy of time.

Protected Time

Protect some quality time in your planner, whether each day, or on a certain day of the week. Reserve this time for your own activities and tasks; don't allow others to take it away from you. Write it in your planner and treat it as a preplanned appointment.

This practice will allow you to tackle key tasks in an efficient, timely way before they become overdue.



Refresh

Minimize the amount of work that spills over into the weekend. The old adage that "Seven days makes one weak" holds true.

Use the weekend to switch off. Refresh from any pressures of the week, whether they be at home or work.

Review Goals

Keeping goals up to date is an important factor in efficient time management. Set clear goals and frequently review them. Keep both long-term and intermediate objectives in mind, listing them in a visible location.

Say Thank You

Say "Thank you" to Team Members for a job well done (however small the job). Everyone thrives on praise.

"To Do" Tray

Eliminate your "To Do" tray. Instead of placing items in it, complete the job. Touch each item once. Don't leave a piece of a task lying in some tray, with the danger of it being forgotten and rapidly growing in depth until it's a genuine problem. File it, post it, deliver it, complete it, pass it on and completely finish the job.



Treat Yourself

Create an incentive for yourself by promising a reward upon completion of a task. This can be your next cup of coffee, or a holiday in Venice, but make it appropriate to the task at hand.

Waiting for a Reply

We often need a response from someone else in order to complete a task. It may be the answer to a simple question or something much more significant. While necessary, it is an opportunity for you to set aside the task and forget about it until the reply is received. Have you heard people say “Yes, but I cannot complete until so-and-so replies”?

When you face this situation, stop procrastinating, and get that reply. Do not see the task as belonging to someone else. Retain ownership and push for the needed information. Make your request verbally. This is a vital aspect of getting a reply. Do not email, fax or send a letter unless it is impossible to communicate in any other way. It is much quicker to define your requirements through a conversation. If necessary, follow up with some kind of written note.

Wear a Watch

So this is obvious – or is it?

It is extremely useful to have an audible reminder for appointments. Whether on a wristwatch, Palm Pilot or desktop PC, alarm features remind you a few minutes prior to your next meeting or appointment. It is easy to get caught up in the current activity and discover you are late for the next appointment. Set an alarm every time, and arrive on time.

