

TIME MANAGEMENT

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(Adapted from McGraw-Hill Handbook)

“Every minute we waste in frustration over tasks that seem overwhelming is a minute subtracted from the time we allot to enjoy life.”

Unfortunately, there are only 24 hours in a day and unless we use our time more efficiently and effectively, we can expect nothing but frustration, stress, and eventually both a mental and physical breakdown! Is there a magic pill-one size fits all- model for time management? Obviously, the answer is NO since two people are exactly alike. However, it never hurts to recognize the way you personally manage ‘time’ and be receptive to consider adapting some of the following techniques presented in this article. It is not unlikely that you will be familiar with some of these time management techniques but “knowing” them and “using” them are two different things!

Before you begin, it is necessary for you to understand how you currently use your time. For example, Do you carry a daily planner and meet all deadlines? Do you promptly return emails and phone calls? Do you have a place for keeping things you always need like cell phones, car keys, purses, paper and pencils, etc.? Do you have a good filing system for all important papers, receipts, bills, and supplies? Is your closet organized to easily find and match all items of apparel? Obviously, the more times you answered yes to these questions, the better. Or, for example, Do you miss deadlines? Are you continually late for meetings or classes? Do you avoid returning calls if you do not like the call or are uncomfortable with the subject of the phone call? Do you find yourself losing slips of paper containing phone numbers, notes, and other important information that you need? If many of your responses to these questions were “yes”, you really need to re-think your time-management skills.

The following represents a list of 15 time-management factors and skills to consider either learning and/or using in your daily life.

1. **Be reasonable about the way you manage time.** You do not have to develop an “obsession” with time to have good management skills. Time-Management is made up of a series of choices and setting priorities. Believe it or not, “perfectionism” is not necessary in everything we do. Learn to recognize when “Good” is acceptable and when it is not enough.
2. **In your Time-Management agendas, plan some time to simply “enjoy” and relax.** List your most favorite activities and set aside time to engage in them at least once a week or more. It manages stress and actually promotes your creativity and overall feeling of well-being.
3. **Adapt time management strategies that work for you—one style does not fit all.** For example, recognize if you know you like to “complete one project at a time before moving on to the next task or if you enjoy handling multiple tasks at the same time. You may be a “sprinter” (you work in great bursts of energy and

- then need time to recharge your batteries) or you may be a cross-country runner (you work best at an even, steady pace. Whichever fits you, adapt your time management strategies accordingly. Also, be sensitive and accepting of other people whose time-management styles may be different from yours.
4. **Always make a list of the tasks you must complete daily, weekly, monthly, etc.** Everyone recognizes the need for lists but few really understand how to manage a list. Make a list of all your tasks and then put a grade of A, B, C, or D beside each. If a task must be immediately or soon, label it A; if the task should be done soon but is not as pressing although still important, label it B; if the task can be put off with terrible consequences occurring, label it C; if the task is not really necessary but would be nice to do, label it D. **IN PRIORITIZING, THE #1 POINT TO REMEMBER IS THAT TIME TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER IMPORTANCE.** If a task is urgent it must be done first even if another task is more critical.
 5. **For best results, make your “to do” list in random order, like brain-storming and then, assign each task a letter value.** By the way, “to do” lists should be done at least the day or evening before you plan to start these tasks. Why? Because “sleeping on them” will allow you to reassess the list the following day and sometime re-prioritize or add tasks that you omitted in the beginning.
 6. **Sometimes, you might become more disciplined if you create a “not-to-do” list so you make yourself realize “fluff” projects as opposed to critical issues.** Another suggestion is to think “time is money” while you are prioritizing. Your time should have value like your earnings in a job. Put a dollar value on your time/hour. You will be amazed how this thinking improves your time-management.
 7. **Adopt the philosophy, unless something really significant prevents you from executing it, that all tasks will be done on time.** Those top priority tasks that you dislike the most should be done the first thing in the day so you can “look forward to completing them” and having the rest of the day to either perform more enjoyable tasks or simply relax.
 8. **Always address the issue of “trying to do every task perfectly”.** Perfection can sometimes waste more time and energy than its worth. The best way to decide if perfectionism or just completing the task/project adequately is best is to consider the consequences. What will happen if the job is your best effort?
 9. **Set goals and allocate the realistic time to achieve them.** Goals must be set realistically. You must make sure that they can be attained. Goals set with absolute deadlines and the progress can be measured along the way are best. Carving out a small amount of time each week to review your goals can work wonders for providing you the focus needed to allocate your time productively.
 10. **Learn to delegate effectively and fairly and do not be afraid to “let go”.** You do not have to serve as the captain of every project /task. Try to delegate tasks to people who are best suited to the assignment and have the ability to succeed. If you delegate, make sure the task is clearly defined and understood, specify deadlines, establish a progress reporting method, and be sure to monitor the progress and be available for assistance. Do not over-delegate because it will be viewed that you are shirking your own responsibilities. Your value consists in

providing special skills that only you can bring to the task. If others are just as capable, try to delegate the job unless you have over-used this authority.

11. **Keep track of your things.** The average person loses about 3 hours a week searching for “lost” items such as important papers, assignments, car key, cell phones, etc. Adopt some sort of file system, usually on your desk with folders and trays. Label each accordingly and take the time to maintain this system. You will save literally hours of time over the long run. Although you may function just fine in what seems to be a jumbled mess, others will likely conclude that you’re disorganized, overworked, or irresponsible.
12. **Do not rely on your memory regardless how smart you are!** If something is important to remember, write it down and remember to place it in your daily planner, in your file folders, or whatever you have created for organization, so you do not lose it! It takes much less time to take a note you have written and transfer it to your organizer or computer files than to search for it when that slip of paper has magically disappeared. It is a fact that 50% of all you hear or read will be forgotten within one minute. That is frightening! **WRITE IT DOWN!**
13. **Socialize intelligently.** Too often we find ourselves caught up in conversation or idle chatter that is wasting precious time. Socializing with is very important to maintain relationships with people and to boost overall morale of the group. Just set limits to the time you can spend engaged in socializing and still completing your tasks and goals.
14. **Look for any tools that may fit your needs and then utilize them wisely.** Obviously, technological gadgets like cell phones, voice-mail systems, computers, printers, ipods, iphones, and electronic organizers come to mind immediately. Before simply purchasing any or all of these tools consider the questions: Do I really need it and all of its features? Is it reliable and easy to use? How long will it meet my needs before I have to get an update version or brand new tool?
15. **Finally, learn to “Just Say No”.** This is probably the hardest thing to do because we worry about how to be diplomatic and avoid hurting the feelings of others. If you are going to say “NO”, you must have a good reason, be tactful, and suggest a trade-off or some other way to help. Obviously do not say “NO” all of the time. Just as important as saying “NO”, is knowing how and when to say “YES”. If approached courteously and honestly, people will understand why you had to decline their request.