

Time Management Made Easy

In the journey of life, there are some resources we all share the need for, such as oxygen and water. On a professional journey, we may share the need for people, money or materials. But no resource is as elusive as time. We never have enough and we always want more.

There are phases in life where we find it difficult to get everything done in the time available. For some, this seems to be a permanent state rather than a brief busy period. For those people, meeting deadlines is always a challenge and showing up on time for dinner is a near impossibility. Or is it? Everyone can learn to manage time, rather than allowing time to manage them.

There are two basic ingredients to effective time management: Simplify and Prioritise.

In this electronic age we are available. We are wireless, contactable 24 hours, a flight away from any state in the country, expected to do more, give more and be more. How do we simplify so that we are able recognise the priorities and concentrate on what is truly important?

Basic principles of time management

- **Don't sweat the small stuff:** Time is a limited commodity. Management of time is partly looking at what can be done better or more efficiently. If the task is low priority, perhaps it does not need to be done at all.
- **Use one diary for your whole life:** Avoid using a work diary and a personal diary.
- **Plan:** Plan your day. Plan your week. Assess the priorities and limit or delete the things you do not need to do.
- **Create a false deadline:** Regardless of how tight the deadline is, give yourself time to review your work by setting yourself an early (or false) deadline.

- **Be realistic about how long an action will take:** Break down the task into timed components. Allow time for interruptions, delays, cross checking and unforeseen circumstances. It's better to under-promise and over-deliver than vice versa.
- **Respect others' time:** Often, procrastination and disorganisation negatively impact on those around you. Think about how you impact on those who rely on you. Respect the time and priorities of others.
- **Say no:** if you are unable to meet a commitment, say no. Most people would prefer to know up front that you cannot commit, rather than find out later that you will not deliver what has been promised. If you say no at the start, this allows them to manage with advance warning.

Reactive time

Your "to do" list, if not well planned, can be a major source of daily stress. Every day will be a mixture of planned and unplanned activities. You need to allocate time to react, as well as having time to action your plan. Reactive time is an essential part of every day. When used at its best, reactive time allows you to respond to opportunities as they arise. For instance, you may have been working towards an important business deal for months. Your potential client, Sue, has been elusive and non committal to your services but you think you are gaining ground. All of a sudden, the phone rings. Sue tells you her usual supplier has let her down and she's willing to

give you a go. Can you ship out an order immediately?

This is the sort of situation we all want to be able to respond to in an efficient and professional manner. The truth is, our reactive time is usually far less productive than this. Think about your email management system. Most of us have a new message email alert to draw us to our inbox which creates a system of constant interruption. There are more effective ways to manage these systems.

Ensuring your "to do" list allows time for reactive opportunities is important. Allocate an average of 25% of your time to reactive opportunities. This includes the opportunity for email and other unplanned communication, as well as helping others, managing delays and checking information. It may sound like a lot. Two hours in an eight hour day. However, if you were to take an inventory of your current reactive time, you may be surprised as to how much of your day is currently reactive compared to planned. If you don't utilise your reactive time well, it will simply lead to more items on your "to do" list.

The life organisation exercise

If you are ready to take an inventory of your actions, but don't know where to start, we have a simple exercise you can use in order to kick start you into effective time management.

Write down your overall goals and objectives for your preferred time frame. If you usually find time

management a challenge, start small. Write down your objectives for the week or the month as a starting point.

- Complete an inventory of all unfinished actions.
- Group the actions into categories (work, home, recreation etc).
- Assess the actual amount of time these actions will take and incorporate these times into the list alongside the corresponding action.
- Compare this list of actions with your overall objectives.
- Assess if the time you have allocated to every action is justified. At the

same time, critically assess if each action is justified at all.

- Apply the rule of the 4Ds to those items that are not a priority: Delete, Delay, Delegate or Diminish.
- The actions which maintain priority need to be transferred into your diary system with a timed schedule for each action.

Throughout your life, 20% of your actions will lead to 80% of your results. Everyone has the potential to benefit from reviewing how to better manage their time. With strategic planning, prioritisation, committed

implementation and realistic expectations, time management is within the reach of everyone. 💡

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