

15 Actions for Good Time Management

Although many articles on time management are geared toward busy executives and managers, the principles are for everyone. You can use your time more effectively to accomplish more tasks, achieve more goals and fulfil more of your needs.

By applying time management techniques, you'll feel less hurried and stressful, knowing that you are in control of your most valuable possession - your time.

What is time management?

You might say that time doesn't need to be managed; it goes along just fine on its own.

"Self-management" would be a more appropriate term. People need to manage themselves to more effectively use the time available to them.

Try not to think of time management as a set of complicated procedures or difficult skills to be mastered. Instead, think of it as a series of behaviours which are consciously practiced until they become natural and routine habits.

Practicing and using the following techniques will help you in your job and at home.

1. Plan your activities

Planning saves time, gets better results in the long run and ensures that your efforts will be in the right direction.

You should consider both short-term and long-range goals in your plans. They should be flexible enough to allow for unexpected obstacles and opportunities.

Put your plans in brief, written form and routinely check them to ensure that you're on the right track.

2. Establish your priorities

There will never be enough time to accomplish all your tasks and goals. Therefore, rank them according to their importance and urgency to you.

An activity is important if it's something you really want to do, such as improving your communication and leadership skills.

An activity is urgent if you have to do it immediately, such as submitting your tax returns before an impending deadline.

If you spend more time on urgent activities than on important ones, you need to practice better time management.

3. **Eliminate unnecessary tasks**

Carefully analyse your routine to see if it's efficient. There's a good chance it's loaded with time-consuming non-essentials. Get rid of them if they hinder you in achieving your primary goals.

4. **Get organised**

Organisation takes less of your time than you will waste working in a disorganised environment.

Avoid wasting time searching for things by establishing specific locations for all your tools, materials and paperwork. Frequently used items should be kept close to where you work.

Organisation applies not only to objects, but to people as well. A major responsibility of employers and managers is to organise the efforts of their staff so as to obtain the maximum desired results with the minimum investment of time. A lack of business organisation results in a failure to reach goals, and wastes time.

5. **Combine or consolidate tasks**

Whenever possible, do two or more tasks simultaneously. If you spend too much time on trips to the bank, visiting your professional advisers and the post office, you could combine all those stops in one trip.

6. **Improve your skills**

When you increase your skill efficiency, you save time. For instance, the time spent improving your typing skills saves you time in the long run.

7. **Avoid unnecessary interruptions**

Going back and forth between different activities is an inefficient use of time. Once you've begun a task - unless it's exceptionally lengthy or complex - try to finish it before beginning another.

Gather all needed tools and materials before beginning a task.

Try to keep interruptions to a minimum. If someone phones you at an inconvenient time, ask if you can call back later. Another possibility is to use a hands free telephone so you can continue working while talking.

8. **Be decisive and don't procrastinate**

When you have something that needs to be done, do it. Don't needlessly postpone making decisions, or stew over them once they are made.

Businesses sometimes waste time by leaving a decision to a committee. Committees have their purpose, but it isn't to postpone making a decision only to have the issue brought up again at further meetings.

9. **Do an adequate job, but don't overdo it**

Perfectionism can prevent you from accomplishing many tasks. Parkinson's Law states, "Work expands to fill the time available in which to do the work."

If you have all day to clean your house, you'll spend all day doing it. But if you only have two hours, you'll find that you do an adequate job in that time.

Meetings will also expand to fill the available time. Keep that in mind next time you draw up an agenda for a meeting.

10. **Hold effective meetings**

Schedule, plan and organise your meetings for maximum efficiency and effectiveness. Meetings should be held only when necessary, and with specific purposes. They should begin and end on time. And you should always stick to the agenda.

Control both internal and external interruptions; don't let meetings get bogged down by personalities and differences of opinion.

Ineffective communication wastes time.

Bulletins or newsletters help people stay informed of activities and remind them of their assignments. Don't assume people are aware of this information; make sure of it. Follow-up calls are important. Keep memos and notes short and to the point.

Minutes should indicate actions agreed upon, and who's to be responsible for what action.

11. **Be an effective manager**

Effective managers concentrate their efforts on understanding key management techniques, duties and responsibilities; planning and organising activities; and increasing personal productivity.

12. **Delegate**

Don't try to do everything. Not only do you place excessive demands on your time when you fail to delegate, but others don't gain the experience and involvement to which they're entitled.

If the demands are overwhelming, you probably aren't delegating enough.

13. **Make effective use of waiting time**

Waiting for meetings to begin, transportation, appointments and performances are some of our greatest wasters of time.

While you may not be able to completely eliminate the waiting, you can make use of it. Take along reading materials. Doctor's offices may not have your favourite magazine - that's why you should take one with you.

Write notes and letters, or do some planning.

Tidy your desk while you wait for someone to give you a lift to your meeting.

Some of your waiting time can be eliminated by doing errands during hours when queues are shorter and traffic is lighter.

14. **Use labour saving devices**

Take advantage of modern technology and processes.

15. **Take a break**

Your efficiency decreases as you become tired. When planning, allow for personal time to take a break and relax.

Breaks are important at meetings and conferences - "The mind can learn no more than the seat can endure".

Summary

Time management is highly personalised - what works for someone else may not work for you.

Experiment to find out what practices work best for you.

To be effective, time management skills must be incorporated into the daily routine. At first, determination and self-discipline will be required, but eventually they will become habits.

The results are definitely worth the effort. You will accomplish more and have more time for other activities. Time management works. Let it work for you too.

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