

Time Management for Busy People¹

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How often do you say, "I'd like to do that, but I don't have time?" Learning to manage time is a problem for many people. Employers, employees, students, and home managers alike complain that there are never enough hours in the day to get things done.

The essence of time management is to put some things first, others second, and still others third. Set goals and order them from most to least important. Then develop a time plan for meeting them. Control your actions in order to make the most of your time. Learning to manage time means learning to manage yourself.

Time management is not a device to make you work harder and longer. Rather, it is a means to help you "work smarter" to accomplish your work more easily and rapidly. Management of your time can allow for work, rest, leisure, and social activities. It isn't necessary to become a "workaholic" just because you manage all of your time.

How's Your Time Sense?

Individuals vary widely in their awareness and utilization of time. What we accomplish during a 24-hour period depends on our own motivation, our energy, our skills and abilities, and our other resources. The first step in improving your time management is to take a look at your own time patterns.

Prime Time

Your prime time is the time during which you are most energetic and efficient. We all function on different "biological clocks." Some people feel most energetic and do their best work early in the morning. Others wake up and get moving very slowly, with top efficiency in the late afternoon.

Still others are "night owls" who accomplish their work most easily in the middle of the night. Identify your prime time and plan to spend it on your creative thinking and most demanding jobs, whenever possible.

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Availability Time

During some periods of the day and week, you have to be available to be with others. For example, busy executives must schedule time to meet with office personnel, managers, production workers, and others under their supervision.

Think of yourself as a management executive! Set aside some of your available time for other members of your family or people with whom you work. Also try to reduce interruptions during your best working hours. You can accomplish twice as much in one quiet hour as in two regular hours of frequent interruptions.

Analyze Your Time Problems

Do you need to learn to balance the use of your time? Time is usually divided among work, rest, and leisure activities. Balance means there must be time for work outside the home, for developing and maintaining happy family relationships, for rest and sleep, and for individual activities, such as playing tennis.

Is your primary need to accept the limitation of time? During some periods in our lives, there is clearly not enough time to do everything we would like to do. This is particularly important for parents of small children and for individuals trying to combine home management with holding an outside job, volunteer activities, or going to school. In this case, we must recognize limited time and learn to omit less important activities in order to free up time for those which are essential.

Is minimizing work time your basic objective? It may be necessary to simplify your jobs. The family may plan simpler meals, modify standards, or use easier maintenance materials. It may be necessary to hire help, or use commercial services.

Is your primary need to find some time for yourself? A high priority sometimes must be assigned to spending some time on yourself, to clarify your own values and feelings, to start or develop a hobby or work interest, even to preserve your sanity! Improving your ability to say "No" and developing clear communication with others may be a crucial

part of time management. Saying "No" takes practice. Remember that saying "No" to one activity means saying "Yes" to another, more important one.

Set Your Goals

In order to manage your time efficiently, you must first decide on your goals. Personal, professional, social, family, and financial goals are all important and all require time in which to achieve them. Most of us want to work toward more than one goal. The essential requirement is that you think it through and decide what you want to accomplish. Decide which people, organizations, and causes are more important to you than others. After deciding what your goals are, write them down. Otherwise your goals may remain unclear and you'll never know whether you've achieved them.

Select activities that will help you accomplish your goals. Realizing that you can't do everything all at one time, you may want to divide large, long-term projects into a series of short-term projects that can be completed one by one in more manageable periods of time. Many smaller steps, or short-term objectives, must be accomplished in order to reach the long-range, final goal. Give high priority to meeting deadlines for this series of short-run tasks. Otherwise, time is frittered away and no progress is made.

Where Does Your Time Go Now?

Now that you've decided what is important to you and in which order you want to accomplish your goals, take a hard look at where your time is going now. Keep a log for several days to find out exactly where your time goes. This time log will provide a record of both job and leisure activities that should be considered in planning how to use your time more efficiently. Most people are surprised to learn how much time they actually spend doing trivial things.

You will probably find that you are very busy at certain times of the day and certain days of the week. These busy periods, or "peak loads," can be managed by temporarily reducing time on other activities and by advance planning.

You will also find that you have a number of routine tasks that must be done at times dictated by

conditions beyond your control. You must meet certain "deadlines," such as the time school or work begins and ends, meal times, time for meetings or recreational activities, and times when you must coordinate your activities with those of others.

In addition, you may find unexpectedly large amounts of time to schedule as you wish. These flexible time periods are those which you must utilize efficiently in order to make time work for you.

Typical Time Wasters

Some common time wasters will also show up in your time log. In both home and the business world, common time wasters are the telephone, unexpected visitors, meetings, junk mail, putting things off, not knowing what to do next, and clutter.

Other reasons that time goes by with nothing to show for it are personal disorganization, lack of priorities, procrastination, excessive television watching, and over-involvement in routine details.

Design Your Own Time Plan

A time plan can be a general outline of things you want to do in the near future or it can be a highly detailed schedule. Few people can keep complete track of all goals, all plans, and all activities, so get some paper and make some lists.

The easiest time plan is simply a "List of Projects," large and small, to be done as time is available and as the spirit moves you to accomplish them. When you have a lot of time, this list of reminders may be enough.

Another time plan is a list of "Series of Projects," which includes time sequences. You have to decide which activities must be done first, which second, and so forth.

A third plan, a "Time Schedule," is detailed. It includes both a sequence of projects and estimates of time necessary for doing them. Making out the schedule forces you to take a look at your entire day or week and make some true decisions as to the importance of various activities. Recognize that while planning takes time at the beginning, it saves much more time in the end.

Making Your Plan Work

No time plan works miracles. There will always be interruptions and problems. However, advanced planning can usually assist you in carrying out the task instead of becoming too distracted.

- If you are going to have unusually heavy demands on your time and energy, plan in advance those ways to meet the peak load periods.
- Start working early enough to avoid a last minute rush.
- Complete other regular jobs in advance so more time will be available for special needs.

Time Management Strategies

Regardless of the time plan you select, strategies of managing time can be helpful. Try the following:

- Make and use a "Things To Do" list everyday. List and do them in order of importance.
- Keep a notebook and calendar with you all the time. Use them for listing tasks to be completed, appointments, and shopping needs.
- Use your waiting time. Accomplish small chores while you wait, such as reading, writing letters, or making a shopping list. Look at waiting time as a gift of time rather than a waste of time.
- Guard yourself against agreeing to do things that you don't have time to do well. Learn how to say "No" or "I really don't have time to do a good job, it wouldn't be fair of me to take this on." Be firm!
- Don't let unplanned activities drain away your own plan for using the day. Refuse calls you don't want to take; don't let others drop in, especially when you are taking advantage of your best work period; and if you want friends to call, schedule a given hour of the day when your door is "open." Reasonable people will understand and respect you if you ask them to make an appointment.

- Organize an office in your home. Collect and file records and supplies needed frequently in order to reduce frustration and lost time.
- Concentrate on one thing at a time. Put all your energy into the task at hand. Tune out interruptions. Don't waste time thinking of all the things that have to be done.

Remember that 80 percent of the value of work or of life comes from about 20 percent of your activities. Use time management as a tool to set your goals in order of importance, to identify the activities that help to achieve them, and to permit you to "work smarter, not harder."

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