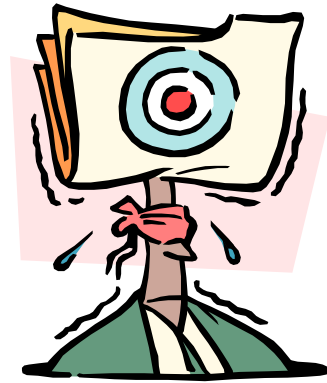


Tips for Effectively Managing your Time

In today's fast-paced work environment, time is at a premium and we are often pressed to find the resources to complete all our work tasks. Inadequate organization of your time can lead to backlogs and delays, and affect the quality of your work.

This article describes some strategies for effectively managing your time.



Tips

The following tips will help you to effectively manage your time.

- Keep a diary
- Identify your current tasks
- Prioritize your tasks
- Focus on a few main tasks
- Do not commit to more than you can handle
- Delegate
- Plan ahead
- Set aside time for administrative activities
- Don't procrastinate
- When running into problems, set the task aside
- Cut down on time consuming activities and interruptions
- Reexamine your goals

Each of these suggestions is described in this article.

Keep a diary

A diary is an efficient way to keep track of your tasks and write down important information for later reference. Meetings should each have a separate heading and include a summary of the conclusions or tasks assigned to you during the meeting.

Keep passwords and phone numbers for easy access when you need them.

Identify your current tasks

As an exercise on time management, list all the activities you normally do during a typical day. List everything, including travel, lunch breaks, answering telephones and reading your email and post. Observe your activities over a period of several days and write down how much time is being spent on average for each activity per day. This will give you an estimate of how you are spending your time.

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Priorities your tasks

Once you have identified your tasks, start categorizing them into groups:

- Tasks that are essential either to your job definition or to your day-to-day functioning
- Tasks that are peripheral or not directly related to your job definition
- Tasks that need to be completed immediately
- Tasks that have to be completed by a specific deadline
- Tasks that are not urgent and can be completed at some time in the future

Based on this, write down a short list of tasks and determine how to handle tasks from each of these categories.

Focus on a few main tasks

It helps to write down at the start of each morning a selected number of tasks that need to be completed. Do not be overzealous. Write down the minimum number that has to be done. There should be no more than seven items on this list and preferably only one!

During the day, systematically move from one item to the next and tick off the item as it is completed. Once you have completed these tasks, then any additional tasks that can be accomplished are a bonus.

Do not commit to more than you can handle

Don't demand too much of yourself. This may sound trite, but most of us are constantly committing to more activities than we can manage comfortably, for a variety of reasons – we don't want to let down our colleagues or manager, we want to be of help when requested, or we like taking on extra responsibility and proving or testing ourselves. "Go-getters", with this type of mentality are constantly reaching for new challenges. Remember that time spent on trivial or unimportant tasks detracts from the time that you could be spending on your primary objectives.

Your schedule and workload should be based on your long-term objectives. In general, you should be able to comfortably handle most of your activities, most of the time. Occasionally, there may be peak periods of tight deadlines and long hours, mainly before major releases, but this become quieter once the deadline is passed and the documentation has been delivered.

Delegate

When under stress, delegate tasks that you cannot handle or are less essential. Ask for assistance from other writers in the team or from outside the company. Some writers are afraid to delegate, either because they feel that their company frowns at wasting budget on external writers, or because they think this indicates that they are not performing up to the expected standard. Some writers like to keep control over everything and are loath to let go and allow others to have a say in their pet projects. By delegating selectively upon need, you are sending a clear signal to your company – not how lazy you are – but how vital your work is, and how busy you are. Most companies understand that in order

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to keep their employees happy and there for the long term, they need to create a pleasant working environment, which provides their employees with sufficient space and time. Companies that do not follow such a policy will be plagued with constant turnover.

Plan ahead

It's not enough to deal with your current tasks. Plan ahead. Think proactively about the tasks that will be coming up in the weeks and months ahead and plan for extra assistance during this time. Plan ways to streamline your tasks and deal with future backlogs. For example, look at workflows and how you are currently handling tasks, to see if there aren't ways in which you could improve your efficiency. Are there tasks that you currently do manually, which could be automated?

Set aside time for administrative activities

Administrative tasks include those essential day-to-day activities such as reading your email, answering phone messages, tidying your desk, filing away papers, checking up on your meetings and writing reports. Organize your online files and projects, so that you don't have to waste time searching for information you need.

The best time to complete administrative tasks is first thing in the morning, when you arrive in the office. Use this time to settle comfortably in your office and go over the tasks that need to be completed during the day. Once your administrative tasks are over, move on to the main tasks that need to be accomplished.

Your manager should acknowledge time spent on administrative tasks and budget this in to your schedule.

Don't procrastinate

Handle things immediately as they arise; don't allow piles of paper to accumulate on your desk and emails to go unread. Once you've read an email request, do your utmost to handle it immediately, while it is fresh in your mind. This saves you having to read the same material over again at a later stage, once you've forgotten about it.

When running into problems, set the task aside

Have you ever had the experience of encountering a frustrating problem and spending hours trying to find a solution? The problem could be a piece of software or a particular document or graphic that you are struggling with. As a rule, don't handle a problematic task if you are tired and cannot concentrate. When this happens, put aside the problematic task and go on to easier ones. Leave the problem for later, when you are refreshed and have sufficient energy and clarity of mind to tackle it.

Cut down on time-consuming activities and interruptions

You'd be amazed how much time is wasted each day on nonessential activities and interruptions. Many writers are able to produce their best work early in the morning or late in the evenings, when there are few interruptions from colleagues or the telephone. When really pressed for time, shut the door, disconnect the phone, and don't allow yourself to be disturbed by any interruptions. Gossiping in the corridors or talking to your family and friends on the telephone can take large gaps of your available time.

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Set up your environment to support an atmosphere that enables you to concentrate on your work without interruptions. If it's not possible to change your office setup, there are small things you can do: wear earphones, turn your desk/chair so that you are not facing distractions from people entering and leaving the office. If possible, request people not to have conversations outside your door.

The ability to focus and concentrate on a task for an extended length of time, and to do this consistently day after day, is a primary factor in success at almost all endeavors.

Reexamine Your Goals

Ask yourself what choices you have made that have placed you in a situation where you need to rush to complete tasks or are over committed? Reexamine your goals and make sure that you are focusing on completing the objectives that are really Important to you – whether these are your career goals or your personal goals.