

How To Make Time Your Friend

By

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Everyone needs to know how to manage time. If you are unable to use your time effectively you will not follow through on the promises you make yourself to improve your life. There are many conflicting demands on your time such as balancing work, day-to-day activities, home and social life.

There are 168 hours in a week and 8,760 hours in a 365 day year and if you sleep for eight hours a night that only leaves you 6,840 hours to do all the things you need to do from working to housework, childcare and having fun. With a finite amount of time it is important that you make the most of what you have.

Time management is as much about attitude and organisation as it is about diaries and finding information. Effective time management means thinking about what you do, how you do it and how you can make the most of this finite resource. Time cannot be stored for future use and

passes whether you like it or not so you need to decide how best to put this precious commodity to good use.

If you want to be a successful time manager then you need to take four factors into account:

- Using checklists – there is nothing better than seeing all your tasks ticked off a list as this gives you a real sense of having achieved something with your time
- Diaries and organisers for planning ahead – the more you can plan the more you can fit in
- The need to focus on short, medium and long-term goal setting – when you know what you want to achieve and what you have to do to get there then breaking things down into a series of achievable goals really helps you manage the time you need to get wherever you want to go
- Balancing time between work and leisure activities – if you simply leave things to chance you may well find you have no work-life balance and can miss out on life.

The following six tips will help you claim back wasted time.

Step 1: Clear the clutter!

Whether at home or at work organisation is the key to freeing up time.

If you can't bear to throw anything out then:

Get someone to help you or ask an organised friend to share their system with you. Throw out your junk mail as soon as it arrives and file paperwork on a regular basis so you can find it when you need it.

Remember to repeat the de-cluttering exercise on a quarterly basis

Step 2 : Manage Telephone Calls

When you are bombarded with telephone calls, particularly at work, you need to ask yourself if you are efficient with dealing with these as you would like to be. If not then:

- Keep a clock nearby and allocate an amount of time to deal with the call. Many people waste time talking about nothing at all and then wonder where the time has gone. If you find you tend to get side-tracked by conversations then allocate 3-5 minutes for general chit-chat and then move on to the business in hand.
- Summarise the conversation with the action points to be taken and by whom – this ensures you have both understood and will save you time as it will help stop people misunderstanding what they have to do

Step 3 : Managing Interruptions

Very often you may find yourself being diverted from a task you wish to complete and interruptions can steal time if you allow them to. To avoid this happening:

- Visit other people - you can control the amount of time you spend with them.

- Learn to say ‘No’ – if you don’t you’ll end up using your time to do things that you do not need to or which are not your problem.

Where possible, allow your voicemail to take calls for you or have calls diverted to enable you to deal with the project in hand.

Step 4 : Diaries and Personal Organisers

To manage your time effectively you will need to have a systematic way of recording what you need to do and a diary or personal organiser will help you keep track of appointments and to planning ahead. If you use an electronic organiser you must backup the data on a regular basis. You will waste time if you do not and end up losing all your data.

Step 5 : To do lists

Record the tasks you need to do by using a simple system A, B, C system that will help you decide how urgent the item is. Without such a system you are likely to end up wasting time on non-essential items while more urgent ones get left.

A = Urgent items for *immediate* attention

B = Important items which require attention in the *near future* C

= Non-essential or non-urgent items

Step 6: Post-it notes

Place post-it notes in full view to remind you to carry out urgent tasks.

This is particularly helpful for those working on improving their time-management skills! If you are a poor time manager you will not change overnight and will therefore find you can do with all the help you can get to keep your mind focussed.

Step 7 : Home/work balance

No one is going to say that achieving a home/work time balance will be easy. However, you can help yourself by:

Using dead time such as travelling time to tidy your handbag and check your organiser so you can start to think about what you need to do.

Deciding on your personal priorities and making sure these get entered in your diary: the busier your work life the more you need to plan ahead.

Make sure you take short breaks during the day so that your brain and body have a chance to relax – a five minute break never hurt anyone.

Useful Reading

Covey, S, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, 1989, Simon & Schuster UK Ltd.

Gutmann, J, *The Stress Workbook*, 1998, Sheldon Press, London

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