

# Spend Time to Save Time

## Introduction

Effective time management allows you to increase your productivity and decrease the amount of stress in your life. Learn how investing time to improve your skills in this area can help you save time in the long run.

Time is a valuable resource. Why? Because you can't buy it, keep it or stop it in its tracks. Every minute that passes has gone, forever. You can't recover it, rewind it or recycle it. So it pays to treat time with respect and try to get the best result out of every precious moment. If you want to maximize its potential, you need to manage your actions well.



### **Rookie Buster**

Being good at managing your time means being organized, efficient and using your time wisely.

No one can remember everything, however good a memory they have. Being good at managing your time means being organized, efficient and using your time wisely. One thing that's very useful is spending a bit of time thinking about your priorities, working out what needs to be done by when. This is not time wasted. In fact it's a wise investment of an hour or so.

Most people from time to time experience the problem of not knowing how to get everything done in the time available. This is quite normal. It doesn't mean that you are bad at managing your time. However, if this sort of problem seems to be constant in your life to one degree or another, you do have a time management dilemma. There are times for everyone when things seem to conspire to prevent work going ahead as planned. But if you're about to confess to living in a state of near-permanent chaos, you need to take action.

You probably do have too much to do, and too little time in which to do it. Perhaps while coping with the urgent tasks you never get around to the really important ones. Is your desk piled high with untidy sheaves of paper? Are you bombarded with interruptions on a daily basis and impossible deadlines foisted on you?



### **Rookie Buster**

The effect of getting to grips with your time management has several positive (immediate) benefits. It improves your efficiency, effectiveness and productivity. And it can influence how you are perceived by others in your workplace.

Time management should be seen alongside self management. To be a good time manager demands discipline, but discipline reinforced by good habits. The effect of getting to grips with your time

management has several positive (immediate) benefits. It improves your efficiency, effectiveness and productivity. And it can influence how you are perceived by others in your workplace. It can also shift the pressure that goes with the job so that you are not suffering from negative stress. (There's more about stress in the next chapter.) Working effectively certainly helps, because being effective is about getting the right things done. But you have to keep an eye on what's ahead of you – this requires some planning skills too.



Many people think they are good at managing their time because they are doing things in an efficient way. But if you aren't doing the right things, you've fallen into the common trap of confusing efficiency with effectiveness. Effective time management means knowing what's important and focusing on those items rather than the insignificant ones. It doesn't matter how well you do routine or unimportant tasks if they are time wasting activities.



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## **Making it work**

To be successful, you need to develop skills and habits which, when used correctly, work positively for you. These skills aren't only necessary for doing your job successfully, they are also essential if you want to be seen as competent and capable.

First, it helps to be organized. This applies both at work and at home. If you are being led by events rather than being in control, it is quite likely that this impacts on your leisure time too. Every constructive habit you learn will help. In other words, there's good news. It gets easier as you go along. Good time management habits help ensure a well-organized approach to the way you plan and carry out your work. Bad habits, as the saying goes, are like beds. They are easy to get into but difficult to get out of.



**Rookie Buster**

Making time management work for you relies on two key factors: how you plan your time and how you implement the detail of what you've planned.

There is nothing worse than getting to the end of the day feeling you've achieved little or nothing. Making time management work for you relies on two key factors: how you plan your time, and how you implement the detail of what you've planned. Some of the skills you will be learning later on are: how to plan; self-assessment; making a plan; and setting goals.

# Develop Good Habits

## Introduction

Good time managers follow six fundamental principles. Discover why these habits are important and how you can integrate them into your day.

Getting things done is rarely a problem when we feel passionately about what we do. It is at its most difficult when we face an unappealing task and we feel unmotivated and even resistant to doing it. This is when getting things done can become a challenge, and so you need to manage your time actively.

If you are overly present-oriented, you will hardly see the purpose in dealing with unpleasant matters – you will prefer either to do something more fun, or will take the pessimistic view of 'why bother – it won't change anything'. It is future-orientation that allows us to invest time doing things we'd rather not do, for a future benefit or to avoid a future penalty.

## A proactive approach to getting things done

If we study how future-oriented people tackle tasks and projects, we consistently find that they take a proactive approach that allows them to take command of their affairs before their affairs take command of them. If you want to be in control of your time, this is a necessary first step, and here are the six fundamental principles that future-oriented people use.

1. Communication
2. Discipline
3. Memory
4. Planning
5. Review
6. Organisation

We will look at each of these in turn.

## **Number 1: Communication**

One of the biggest wastes of your time can often be the consequences of either miscommunication or failure to communicate. Investing time in making sure you communicate well and in a timely fashion can reduce misunderstandings and failures of other people to do what you expect of them.

When someone asks you to do something, confirm back to them your understanding of what you are going to do and seek their agreement. When you set up a meeting, always confirm it in writing with a brief email. If you are coming up to a meeting that you arranged more than a week ago, send a reminder.

The secret to good communication is simple: always take responsibility for your communication. Say to yourself: 'it is my job to ensure you understand what I am saying' and also 'it is my job to ensure I understand what you are saying'. This is hardly fair, but it will save you a lot of time and no little heartache in the long run.

## **Number 2: Discipline**

Of all the habits that will help you succeed in managing your time, discipline is the most important. It will get you through the tough times and help you to build a valuable reputation. Discipline is about remembering what you must not forget, planning what must go well, reviewing what you must learn from and organising what must not get lost.

Discipline goes further than gritting your teeth and doing what you need to do. It is about being punctual, keeping your promises and remaining courteous and gracious under pressure. When you get these things right as a habit, people will start to grant you some leeway when things get difficult.

Discipline is rarely about doing things that are hard: it is more often about making the effort to do things that are easy, when you would really rather do nothing at all. And don't be tempted to think that discipline is only about the things you 'have to' do; often it takes discipline to stop doing those things and relax for a while.



Establish routines that work. Once you practise a routine for long enough (between ten and twenty times, usually) it becomes habit. Now you will have a way to cope with your crisis next time.

## **Number 3: Memory**

Punctuality does not just require discipline, it also requires planning, which we'll talk about in the next section, and memory. You may well be thinking 'but I have an awful memory' – it's quite a common belief. Never fear, there are three loaves of comfort – crumbs are for the truly impoverished.

1. You have a phenomenal memory. If you are not getting the best out of it, then the major reason will be that you just don't care enough about the things you forget. How many people forget their child's name – even after they have just named him or her? And if you really don't care, but need to remember anyway ... file that conundrum under D for 'discipline'.

2. There are a stack of methods to help you use your memory effectively and an even bigger stack of books on the market to tell you how. I forget how many.
3. You don't even need your memory. Modern-day humans have invented all sorts of tools to supplement the 1.1 kilos of organic matter our ancestors had to rely upon. You can have everything from notepads to iPads.

Your memory will help you to get done the things that you need to do before they become so pressing that you feel you have no control over them and that they are starting to take over your life. When you lose perspective like this, even the simplest of tasks can seem over-bearing. Worse still, if you do not remember to do certain things, then the consequences can be unpleasant.

#### **Number 4: Planning**

Planning is the mark of the proactive person. Figuring out in advance what you are going to do, and when, puts you right in the centre of events with the best chance of controlling them. Notice, however, that this is not the same as suggesting that if you have a plan, you will be 'in control' of events.

General (later President) Dwight David Eisenhower said: 'In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.' You will notice that the universe often has a habit of kicking your plans up the backside and then laughing at you. But, as Eisenhower observed, it is the process of planning that prepares you to understand what is going on and what your options are. When you can combine effective planning with flexible responses, you are in the prime position to manage your time in any circumstances. We'll cover planning in more detail in [Chapter 11](#).

#### **Number 5: Review**

'Keep working at it and it will work out okay in the end' is the sort of wisdom repeated by parents and guardians up and down the country. Sadly, it is not always true. This approach leads to a blinkered focus on what is immediately before you and can lead to you missing the ten-ton truck coming at you from the left.

Far better to take breaks and:

- review your progress;
- review your priorities;
- review your successes;
- review your failures;
- review your process.

Heads up, polish your binoculars, take a look around, then onto the next step.

#### **Number 6: Organisation**

Being organised may not save you time, but it will allow you to use the time you have well, and look forward to tasks without that foreboding sense of 'it's such a mess'. An important part of being organised is being tidy, but it is important to apply your own sort of 'tidy'.

Some people need regimented neatness, while others like their work space to be a Spartan blank slate, and yet others need the cosy familiarity of their own objects filling their space – what to anyone else would seem like clutter. However you like your work space, regularly make time to organise it.



The old saying goes: ‘A place for everything and everything in its place’.

It is no coincidence that professionals in many disciplines have systems for organising the tools of their trade; whether it is the systematic sequencing of a surgeon’s instruments so that theatre staff can find what they need instantly, or the shadow boards that always store tools in an engineering workshop on a wall to keep surfaces clear, with a painted silhouette of each tool so gaps are immediately obvious, as is each tool’s home.

### **Keeping tidy**

For many of us our most valuable tool is our desk (whether you work from home or in an office). If this is the case with you, try to keep your desk as tidy as you can manage and remove everything that you are not currently working on. If you have several projects, then gather the books and papers for each project into a pile, a file, or a box and find it a location in a drawer or cupboard, on a shelf, or, if you are comfortable with this, on a patch of floor.

If you have a workshop or work-room where you build, repair or make things, the same principle will apply. You need to know where all of your tools, supplies and materials are so you can access them quickly, and you need to have your projects conveniently grouped, and out of the way, so that the project you are working on now will not be hindered by the clutter of another on-going activity.

For some people, clearing their space is more than a good habit, it’s a necessity. I am not talking here about people working in a secure environment or who work on confidential or valuable data; I mean people for whom visual clutter is a terrible distraction. If you are like this, you will recognise the feeling of almost frozen inaction when faced with a disordered, over-full desk or work space. Deal with it immediately, or face a period of procrastination and slow working.

Other people like the comfort of a cluttered environment. If you are like this, then you will find yourself somewhere on the following scale.

- Your ‘clutter’ may look random to me, but it has a very distinct pattern to you. You can find what you need quickly and easily and you have just enough space to do the work you need to do. Everything else is neither a distraction nor inconvenience.
- Your clutter is indeed random. You cannot find anything and waste a lot of time looking. When you do find what you need you cannot work efficiently because the other stuff gets in your way.

If you are towards the top end of that scale, then keep your clutter: it works for you. But if you are just kidding yourself and you know that the clutter is killing your productivity, then it is time to do something about it.



You'll find plenty of books recommending the layout of a workstation, but there is no substitute for knowing your habits and workload and ensuring that the things you need often are easily in reach and the things you don't need often are stored out of the way. However, there is one absolute 'must' that I learned the hard and very painful way.

Always ensure that what you are working on at any time is square on to where you sit and straight ahead of you. Too many books show, for example, a computer screen neatly placed in that dead corner of the desk. It is great for optimum use of space, but awful for your posture. Nothing will spoil your time-management plans more than two weeks of agonising back pain. So, ergonomics first; then convenience; then aesthetics.

### **Organised filing**

Who would declare filing to be their favourite job? Love it or loathe it, a good system, applied with discipline, will serve you well. Here are a range of helpful tips.

### **Your process**

When paperwork comes your way, call PAT. There are three things that you can do; you can either:

- Pass it on – to someone better able to deal with it;
- Act on it – in your own time, then file it;
- Throw it away – file it in the round filing cabinet on the floor.

Always do the filing on current projects immediately, so you can find things when you need them. All other filing is most economically done in batches. Create a 'to-be-filed' tray to collect papers that you need to file, and then do the filing once a week, once a month or quarterly, according to the volumes of papers you gather.

### **Your system**

One simple system, used by everyone, will be far more valuable than a complex 'perfect' system that few use and even fewer use properly. As with much in life, keep it simple. Here are two simple approaches to filing that may work well for you, if you don't already have your own.

Simple system number one: proximity filing. Every time you remove a file from a shelf or drawer, return it to the most accessible end of the shelf, or the front of the drawer. This way you will soon find you rarely have to go far to get a file or folder.

Simple system number two: chronological filing. If each file covers a single topic, then put papers into it in date order with the newest at the front where they are easy to find. When the file is full, start volume two and you have the other one ready to archive.

If your current system doesn't work and you want to change it, don't start by re-filing all of your historic papers. This could be a lot of abortive work. Instead, create your new system and only file old papers into it when you access them. That way old papers you don't access will work their way to archiving in a functional (even if sub-optimal) filing system.

### **Your files**

Label all of your files clearly and prominently. Some people also like colour-coding, while others like pictures, but what is most important is that the contents of each folder, file or box are completely obvious without having to open it.

Small current projects can sit nicely in clear plastic slip folders. Create a template file front sheet for these (download examples at [www.brilliant-timemanagement.com](http://www.brilliant-timemanagement.com)) onto which you can write the file name and any key data. When you are working on a project it often pays to type up a 'key information sheet' to go into the front of your file. Update it by hand and, from time to time, type up amendments and print an updated version.

If you like keeping magazine articles and snippets from papers, keep a cuttings file. An easy way to do this is to get a scrapbook or A4 bound notebook and paste the articles in. You can now annotate them with your thoughts. If you want to find things easily, rather than try and think of a total classification scheme at the outset, label pages as you go and create an index at the back.

If you keep lots of notebooks, it is a good idea to number them and always put your name and phone number on the front page, so if you lose it there is a chance it will be returned. If you think you will want to refer to material in them, it might be a good idea to number each page, so that you can refer to the meeting notes at 3–57 – page 57 of notebook number 3.

### **Buying an organiser**

Paper and electronic organisers can be brilliant and there are a wealth of options to try out. And that is exactly what you should do; invest some time in trying a few out, one at a time, for two or three weeks each. Get to experience what you like and don't like about each one and decide what sort of organiser (or none) is right for you. Then go looking for one that most nearly meets your specifications. As you go through this book, make a note (in the margin, on sticky notes or in a notebook) of ideas that strike you as useful for your ideal organiser.



- Good communication will prevent time-wasting misunderstandings.
- Discipline comes from an inner resolve to do something, regardless of what you would rather be doing.
- Remember to do the things you need to do, and to be punctual. You can either choose to train your memory with powerful techniques, or use tools like notebooks, diaries or computers to help you.
- Effective time managers plan what they are going to do, and then review the outcomes, so that they can plan more effectively next time.
- Be organised by keeping things tidy and getting an efficient system for your filing.



# Be Productive, Not Just Busy

## Introduction

We all know people who either brag or lament about the number of hours they work each week. But just because someone is busy doesn't mean they are being productive. Take away tips for ensuring that you're using your time wisely.

### BEING BUSY VS. BEING PRODUCTIVE

If you're like most people, you probably feel that time itself is the problem: you just don't have enough of it to accomplish everything you have to do. All you need is a few more hours in the day.

That might be true to a certain extent, but not having enough time is a little like not having enough highways. Not long after new highways are built to reduce traffic congestion, they're filled to capacity again. It's the same with time. A few extra hours in the day would relieve the pressure for a little while, but you'd quickly find ways to use up that time, and then you'd feel as overworked as ever.

Viewed from that point of view, the real problem isn't time. There is only so much time, after all. It can be used productively or it can be wasted. One thing is certain: Few of us use our time as well as we could. Take the case of Anna.

Anna, a middle manager in a growing software company, is a veritable dynamo on the job. She arrives early and leaves late. When she does leave, she carries her laptop and a briefcase bulging with work to finish at home. She also frequently comes into the office or works at home on weekends.

While she's in the office, Anna has a hand in everything that goes on. There is a constant stream of people in and out of her office. These visits are often interrupted by telephone calls because Anna always tries to answer her calls as they come in.

Anna is proud to be thought of as confidante, mother confessor, and consultant to her staff. She helps them make decisions, is always available to help with a problem, and certainly isn't above rolling up her sleeves and pitching in, even on minor tasks, when their workload gets too heavy, as it frequently does. In fact, Anna would consider herself an extremely busy manager who makes every minute count.

There's no doubt that Anna is a hard worker, but what do you think about the way she uses her time? Does she use it efficiently? Or do you see ways in which Anna might not be managing her time as well as she could?

You might have noticed that, although Anna is constantly busy, she is often busy doing things that either do not need to be done or that she does not have to do herself. As a matter of fact, instead of being a model of a manager who makes every minute count, Anna could be considered the prototype of a person who fails to use time to its best advantage. Let's take a closer look.

Even though she works long hours and on weekends, Anna frequently fails to meet her deadlines. Her quarterly budget was two weeks late and contained several errors. She often misses or is late to

important meetings because she's involved with something else. She still hasn't gotten around to doing her staff's annual performance appraisals. Privately, some staff members grumble that it takes them longer to get things done because Anna always wants to be involved.

Anna is typical of a person who equates being busy with being productive. But activity and progress are *not* the same. Productive people are not identified by the number of hours they put in, but by the results they achieve.

It's important to do things right, do them quickly, and do them well, but it's much more important to do the right things. People like Anna, who are known for doing things right, quickly, and well, are efficient, but they are not necessarily effective. That's because they often waste their time doing things that do not need to be done, or that they do not need to do themselves.

In [Chapter 3](#), Goal Setting and Prioritizing, when you learn about the relationship of goal setting to time management, you will see how important effectiveness—doing the right things and doing them to achieve the right results—is to achieving your goals.



#### Think About It

Can you think of any work you have done within the past few weeks that did not really need to be done, or that you did not need to do yourself? Did you spend any time on “busy work” —activities that you enjoyed or did well but that did not achieve the right results?

## Take a moment to reflect

The lessons in this subject focus on taking a proactive approach to time management. What action steps could you take to improve your skill in managing time? For instance, when someone asks you to do something, you could confirm to them your understanding of what you are going to do and seek their agreement. You could regularly take breaks to review your progress, successes, and failures.

# Determine Your Values

## Introduction

To perform at your best, you need to know what's important to you. By determining your values and aligning your activities with them, you can unleash your energy, creativity, and productivity.

## Determine Your Values

**Since time management** is really life management, improving your personal productivity begins with an examination of your values. One of Murphy's Laws says that before you do anything, you have to do something else first. It's not possible to manage your time properly unless you know exactly what your values are.

Good time management requires that you bring your control over a sequence of events into harmony with what is most important to you. If it is not important to you, then you will never feel motivated and determined to get control of your time.

Ask yourself this: “Why am I doing what I am doing?” Why do you get up in the morning? Why do you do the job you do? What is your reason for working where you work?

## **Meaning and Purpose**

Each person has a deep need for meaning and purpose in life. One of the major reasons for personal stress and unhappiness is the feeling that what you are doing has no meaning and purpose as it applies to you and your innermost values and convictions. You must always start off by asking the question “Why?”

You can become more efficient with time management techniques, but it won’t do you any good if you just become more efficient at doing something that is meaningless to you. Greater efficiency will simply increase your sense of alienation, frustration, and anxiety.

## **What Do You Value Most?**

The next question you need to ask is, “What do you value most in life?” What do you really care about and stand for? What will you not stand for?

You will only feel really happy, valuable, and worthwhile to the degree to which your day-to-day activities are in harmony with your values. Almost all stress, tension, anxiety, and frustration, both in life and in work, comes from doing one thing while you believe and value something completely different.

There are many reports about executives experiencing burnout as the result of the stress of their work. But people who love what they are doing, and put their whole heart into their work because it is a reflection of their values, seldom experience stress or burnout of any kind. When you are living consistent with your values, you seem to experience a continuous flow of energy, enthusiasm, and creativity. Stress comes from working at things that are not consistent with your highest values.

Examine your values, your innermost beliefs and convictions, and ask yourself what changes you could make to bring your activities, on the outside, and your life priorities, on the inside, more into alignment with each other.

## **You Are Extraordinary**

Realize and accept that you are a unique and wonderful person. Your values have grown and evolved over the course of your entire lifetime. They have emerged as the result of countless influences and experiences. They are part of your psychological and emotional DNA. They are part of your character and personality. They seldom change over time. Your job is to determine what your innermost values really are, and then to organize your life so that you are living and working consistent with those values.

## Analyze Yourself

Here are four sentence completion exercises that you can use to gain better insight into the person you really are inside. Complete each sentence:

1. *"I am . . ."* If a stranger were to ask you, "Who are you, really?" what would be your answer? What are the first words that you would use to describe yourself? Would you describe yourself in terms of your work, your qualities as a person, your hopes, dreams, and aspirations? Select three to five words to complete the sentence, "I am . . ."

If you were to interview the people around you, the people you live with and work with, and ask them the same question about yourself, what would they say? How would other people describe you in terms of your values and the person you really are? Based on the way you behave and treat other people, what conclusions would they come to about the person you are inside?

2. *"People are . . ."* Think of people in general, in the world around you. How would you describe the human race? Are people good, warm, and loving? Are people lazy, devious, or untrustworthy?

Your answer will have a major influence on how you treat other people in every part of your life. It will determine just about everything you will accomplish as an executive and as a person with family and friends.

3. *"Life is . . ."* Your response here may seem simple, but it speaks to your entire philosophy of life. Positive, healthy, happy people see life as a wonderful experience, full of ups and downs, but certainly a great adventure overall.

One of my favorite stories is about a young man who goes to an old philosopher and says, "Life is hard."

The philosopher replies, "As compared with what?"

As Helen Keller said, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all." What is life to you?

4. *"My biggest goal in life is . . ."* If you could wave a magic wand and accomplish a single big goal in life, what one goal, either short or long term, would have the greatest positive impact on your life? Now, complete these sentences:

"My biggest goal in my career is . . ."

"My biggest goal for my family is . . ."

These are some of the most profound and important questions you can ever ask and answer for yourself. When you become clear about your answers—which will not be easy—you can then ask yourself what changes you would need to make to bring your time usage and your life priorities more into alignment with each other.

Napoleon Hill observed that life only begins to become great when we decide clearly upon our most important goal in life.

What are your most important goals?

# Set Goals

## Introduction

Being clear about your goals and the steps needed to accomplish them is key to improving your productivity. Follow a seven-step formula for identifying and making progress on your most important goals.

In this lesson, the phrase “eat your frog” is a metaphor for tackling the day’s most challenging tasks.

## 1

### Set the Table

There is one quality that one must possess to win, and that is definiteness of purpose, the knowledge of what one wants and a burning desire to achieve it.

NAPOLEON HILL

Before you can determine your “frog” and get on with the job of eating it, you have to decide exactly what you want to achieve in each area of your life. *Clarity* is perhaps the most important concept in personal productivity. The number one reason why some people get more work done faster is because they are absolutely clear about their goals and objectives, and they don’t deviate from them. The greater clarity you have regarding what you want and the steps you will have to take to achieve it, the easier it will be for you to overcome procrastination, eat your frog, and complete the task before you.

A major reason for procrastination and lack of motivation is vagueness, confusion, and fuzzy-mindedness about what you are trying to do and in what order and for what reason. You must avoid this common condition with all your strength by striving for ever greater clarity in your major goals and tasks.

Here is a great rule for success:

Think on paper.

Only about 3 percent of adults have clear, written goals. These people accomplish five and ten times as much as people of equal or better education and ability but who, for whatever reason, have never taken the time to write out exactly what they want.

There is a powerful formula for setting and achieving goals that you can use for the rest of your life. It consists of seven simple steps. Any one of these steps can double and triple your productivity if you are not currently using it. Many of my graduates have increased their incomes dramatically in a matter of a few years, or even a few months, with this simple, seven-part method.

Step one: *Decide exactly what you want.* Either decide for yourself or sit down with your boss and discuss your goals and objectives until you are crystal clear about what is expected of you and in what order of priority. It is amazing how many people are working away, day after day, on low-value tasks because they have not had this critical discussion with their managers.

One of the very worst uses of time is to do something very well that need not be done at all.

Stephen Covey says, “Before you begin scrambling up the ladder of success, make sure that it is leaning against the right building.”

Step two: *Write it down.* Think on paper. When you write down a goal, you crystallize it and give it tangible form. You create something that you can touch and see. On the other hand, a goal or objective that is not in writing is merely a wish or a fantasy. It has no energy behind it. Unwritten goals lead to confusion, vagueness, misdirection, and numerous mistakes.

Step three: *Set a deadline on your goal; set subdeadlines if necessary.* A goal or decision without a deadline has no urgency. It has no real beginning or end. Without a definite deadline accompanied by the assignment or acceptance of specific responsibilities for completion, you will naturally procrastinate and get very little done.

Step four: *Make a list of everything that you can think of that you are going to have to do to achieve your goal.* As you think of new activities, add them to your list. Keep building your list until it is complete. A list gives you a visual picture of the larger task or objective. It gives you a track to run on. It dramatically increases the likelihood that you will achieve your goal as you have defined it and on schedule.

Step five: *Organize the list into a plan.* Organize your list by priority and sequence. Take a few minutes to decide what you need to do first and what you can do later. Decide what has to be done before something else and what needs to be done afterward. Even better, lay out your plan visually in the form of a series of boxes and circles on a sheet of paper, with lines and arrows showing the relationship of each task to each other task. You’ll be amazed at how much easier it is to achieve your goal when you break it down into individual tasks.

With a written goal and an organized plan of action, you will be far more productive and efficient than people who are carrying their goals around in their minds.

Step six: *Take action on your plan immediately.* Do something. Do anything. An average plan vigorously executed is far better than a brilliant plan on which nothing is done. For you to achieve any kind of success, execution is everything.

Step seven: *Resolve to do something every single day that moves you toward your major goal.* Build this activity into your daily schedule. You may decide to read a specific number of pages on a key subject. You may call on a specific number of prospects or customers. You may engage in a specific period of physical exercise. You may learn a certain number of new words in a foreign language. Whatever it is, you must never miss a day.

Keep pushing forward. Once you start moving, keep moving. Don’t stop. This decision, this discipline alone, can dramatically increase your speed of goal accomplishment and boost your personal productivity.

## **The Power of Written Goals**

Clear written goals have a wonderful effect on your thinking. They motivate you and galvanize you into action. They stimulate your creativity, release your energy, and help you to overcome procrastination as much as any other factor.

Goals are the fuel in the furnace of achievement. The bigger your goals and the clearer they are, the more excited you become about achieving them. The more you think about your goals, the greater become your inner drive and desire to accomplish them.

Think about your goals and review them daily. Every morning when you begin, take action on the most important task you can accomplish to achieve your most important goal at the moment.

**EAT THAT FROG!**

**1.** Take a clean sheet of paper right now and make a list of ten goals you want to accomplish in the next year. Write your goals as though a year has already passed and they are now a reality.

Use the present tense, positive voice, and first person so that they are immediately accepted by your subconscious mind. For example, you could write. “I earn × number of dollars per year” or “I weigh × number of pounds” or “I drive such and such a car.”

**2.** Review your list of ten goals and select the one goal that, if you achieved it, would have the greatest positive impact on your life. Whatever that goal is, write it on a separate sheet of paper, set a deadline, make a plan, take action on your plan, and then do something every single day that moves you toward that goal. This exercise alone could change your life!

## Prioritize Your Goals

### Introduction

When you have a multitude of demands competing for your time, it can be difficult to stay focused on the highest priorities. Find out how to prioritize your goals so you can schedule your time efficiently.

Not all of our goals are equally important to us. Some are critical to success in our professional or personal lives, such as finishing a college degree, taking a licensing examination in our profession, or buying a house. Others, such as learning to design Web pages or spending a month in Paris, might be nice to achieve but are not essential.

Exhibit 3–3 on page 28 lists the six-month professional goals of Lara, human resources director of an electronics company. Notice how Lara prioritized her goals:

A goals: Essential, must be achieved

B goals: Important, should be achieved

C goals: Not essential, but would like to achieve



#### Exercise 3–1

### Writing Out Your Goals

What are your goals? Write them down and examine them carefully. Be sure to apply the SMART criteria to your goals and review your list of goals for balance.

Don't stop to think about them—just write. (If you need more space, continue on a separate sheet of paper.) When you're finished, follow the steps in Part 2 to review your list.

**S**pecific  
**M**easurable  
**A**ttainable  
**R**ealistic  
**T**ime-Related

[illegible]

- Which are long-range goals, and which are intermediate-range or short-term goals? Write LR next to the long-range goals, IR next to the intermediate-range goals, and SR next to the short-term goals.
- Review your list of goals for balance. Have you included personal as well as professional goals?
- Circle the three most important long-range goals on your list. Think about what you need to do to achieve them. Which of your intermediate-range and short-term goals are related to those long-range goals?





(Important, should be achieved)

“Hutchinson needs a new, totally revised performance appraisal system. However, it does not have to be complete within the six-month period. We do have a plan in place that is adequate.”

Join Toastmasters:*C*

(Not essential, would like to achieve)

“I have always wanted to join Toastmasters to improve my public speaking skills. It would be nice to complete this goal, but it certainly is not essential that I do it in the next six months.”

Hire two new engineers:*A*

(Essential, must be achieved)

“Two engineers recently left the company, and the workload is very heavy in their area. They were key people, and they must be replaced as soon as possible.”

Attend a workshop in lattice-structured organizations:*C*

(Not essential, would like to achieve)

“I’ve been hearing about a concept in organizational structure, called a “lattice plan.” This refers to having no titles, no narrowly defined responsibilities, and the ability to move around within an organization depending on the area’s needs and the employee’s skills. This is a fascinating concept, and one that might fit our company. I would like to attend such a workshop, but it is not essential that I do it in the next six months.”

Analyze training needs:*B*

(Important, should be achieved)

“While our training program is solid, there are areas we need to add, such as training in business writing skills and presentation skills.”



### Think About It

You have already identified your most important long-range goals. Look again at those and at the other goals you listed in Exercise 3–1. Think about which goals you would rate as top priorities if you could only accomplish a few of them. Which would you rate as important, but not essential? Which do you consider “nice to achieve”? Use the A (essential)–B (important)–C (nice, but not very important) system that Lara used.

## Take a moment to reflect

To improve your skill in handling competing priorities, think about your most important work or personal goal. How can you use your time differently to help you get closer to achieving that goal?

# Audit Your Time

## Introduction

Before you can improve the way you spend your time, you need to understand how you are currently using it. This lesson teaches you how to track and analyze how you use your time. You may be surprised by what you learn through this process.

To manage your time so that you work productively and effectively, you must first understand how you use it. In [Chapter 1](#), *Why Take Time to Manage Your Time?*, you identified some of the time challenges that make it difficult for you to get your work done and still have time for your personal life. In this chapter, you will use a time audit to determine where your time really goes.

A time audit is similar to a financial audit. If you consulted a financial manager, chances are that he or she would begin by asking you two key questions: How much do you make, and where do you spend it?

Those questions are also key to a time audit: How much time do you have, and how do you spend it?

The first question is relatively easy to answer. Just as you already know the amount of money you make, you already know how much time you have: twenty-four hours in each day, and not a minute more. The actual time in your workday might be a little more difficult to pinpoint, because working hours differ. But if you work a normal workday, from 8:00 to 5:00, you have a total of eight hours, plus one hour for lunch (if you ever have time for lunch).

Chances are, however, that you won't be able to answer the second question so easily. Few of us really know how much time we spend on the phone, answering e-mail, in meetings, talking over a problem with someone in the hall, trying to find a parking space, waiting in a client's outer office, waiting in the cafeteria line to pay for a cup of coffee, rewriting a report, or engaging in the many other activities that comprise our day.

But answering that question is the first step in learning to manage your time. A detailed audit of the way you spend your workday gives you the information you need to identify your "time wasters" and determine what changes you can make to work more productively and effectively.

## WHAT IS A TIME AUDIT?

The purpose of a time audit is to help you identify activities you can eliminate or do differently so that you make better use of your time. To conduct a time audit, you will do the following:

- Keep a daily log.
- Summarize your data.

### Keep a Daily Log

Every day for a week, record exactly what you do and how much time you spend on each activity. Be careful not to wait until the end of the day to estimate how your time was spent; instead, keep

the log with you at all times and write down *every* activity when it occurs or right after you've completed it. Include the following in your log:

- Phone calls: Whom did you speak with? For how long? What did you discuss?
- Interruptions: When were you interrupted? For what reason? For how long?
- E-mail: When did you review incoming e-mail? Answer e-mail? What were the subjects?
- Breaks: When did you take breaks? What did you do during breaks?
- Lunch: When did you eat lunch? Where? What else did you do during lunch?
- Meetings: What meetings did you attend? How long were they? What was their purpose? What did they accomplish?
- Casual meetings: When did you meet casually with one or two people? For how long? Why? What did you accomplish?
- Reading and writing: When did you spend time reading, writing, revising, and editing reports, proposals, research material, books, marketing materials, letters (other than e-mail messages), performance appraisals, and other documents? How much time?
- Thinking and problem solving: When did you spend time thinking about issues, strategies, problems, and so forth? How much time did you spend on these activities?
- Planning and organizing: When did you spend time setting or reviewing goals, making up schedules and to-do lists, organizing files and information, and so on? How much time did you spend at these activities?
- Socializing: When did you spend time talking with others about non-work-related subjects? How much time?
- Personal time: When did you spend time on personal telephone calls? Going to the gym or for a run? Going to the doctor?

Exhibit 2–1 shows a sample daily log for Toby, who manages a department that handles online and telephone orders for a large art supplies company.

### **Summarize the Data**

At the end of the week, transfer the information to a weekly chart, separating it into general categories and finding the total amount of time you spent on each type of activity. For example, how much of your time did you spend in meetings called by others? Socializing? Reviewing and writing e-mails? Solving problems?

### **PINPOINT YOUR TIME WASTERS**

Examine your daily logs and your weekly charts closely to determine which activities were productive and which were not. How much did those phone calls actually accomplish? Are you using the time you spend on e-mail in the most effective way? How productive were the meetings you attended? Which activities could you *not* do, and which ones could you do differently?



### **Think About It**

Examine Exhibits 2–1 and 2–2, Toby’s Daily Time Log and Weekly Summary. What indications do you see that Toby could improve the use of his time?

Toby’s daily log shows that he spent a lot of time trying to reach Hans to discuss the conference. Perhaps he and Hans need to set up a telephone appointment so that they do not have to keep leaving messages or interrupting one another. Or perhaps they could conduct at least some of their conversation via e-mail.

From his daily log, it also appears that Toby might be doing some work that he could delegate to others: checking his travel arrangements, for example, or having someone else screen résumés for the clerical position.

The daily log indicates that Toby’s most important job for the day of October 2 was to prepare the conference presentation. Yet he couldn’t seem to find time to do that job, so he had to take it home with him. Perhaps he could have asked Susi to take the database problems to someone else, or maybe he could have missed all or part of the monthly meeting so he could make time for this important task.



### **xhibit 2–1**

#### **Toby’s Daily Log**

Date: October 2

6:45-7:45: Gym

7:55-8:10: Phone w/Hans re conference on way to office; p/n cappuccino & brioche; connection lost in middle of conversation

8:25-9:15: in office, tried to reach Hans again (1 min.); tried to check e-mail messages but Susi came in w/database problem

9:15-9:25: Made notes for conference presentation

9:30-11:30: Monthly department mtg; nothing important; ducked out in middle to check travel arrangements (1.5 min.)

12:00-12:20: To deli for sandwich; tried to reach Hans again on way back to desk

12:20-1:15: Ate lunch, started drafting conference presentation but Susi came in—still having problems

1:15-2:00: Screened résumés for new clerical position

2:00-3:15: To library w/laptop to work on presentation; Hans called—second speaker can't come

3:15-4:40: Doctor's appt. (waited 3.5 min.) Made calls to look for substitute speaker

4:40-4:55: Ran into Sylvia—just got back from Hawaii (sounded great)

4:55-5:30: Sat in car and made calls re conference

5:30-6:30: Ran errands—p/n cleaning, takeout for dinner

6:50-7:30: Dinner w/family

7:30-10:00: Worked on presentation; packed for conference

If this daily log is typical, perhaps Toby's biggest time challenge might be a lack of planning and organization. For example, if he had thought about how to use his time that day, he would have scheduled the time for preparing the conference presentation instead of having to take it home and do it at the last minute.



xhibit 2-2

## Toby's Weekly Time Summary

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Hours Spent</i>	<i>Average Hours/Day</i>
Phone calls	<u>4.5</u>	<u>.90</u>
Formal meetings	<u>4.5</u>	<u>.90</u>
Casual meetings	<u>5.5</u>	<u>1.10</u>
E-mail	<u>7.5</u>	<u>1.50</u>
Thinking, planning, scheduling	<u>3.0</u>	<u>.60</u>
Writing	<u>1.5</u>	<u>.30</u>
Problem solving	<u>4.5</u>	<u>.90</u>
Lunch	<u>3.5</u>	<u>.70</u>
Gym	<u>5.0</u>	<u>1.0</u>
Socializing	<u>4.5</u>	<u>.90</u>

Toby's weekly summary shows clearly that he spends very little time on the thinking, planning, scheduling, writing, and problem-solving tasks that are so important to managers. Instead, the bulk of his time is spent in meetings, on the phone, and handling e-mail. He was also surprised to find that he spends nearly an hour a day "socializing." Even though he does not want to eliminate friendly conversations, he might want to take back some of that time for more productive activities.

For Toby, as for most people, the time audit was an eye opener. He had never thought much about how he was spending his time, and he was unaware of the problems that were making it hard for him to get everything done.

Time audits can uncover a variety of interesting time problems. The next sections discuss the most common time wasters: doing the wrong things, misjudging time, and oversocializing.

### **Doing the Wrong Things**

Latoya, a manager for a small marketing firm, enjoys searching the Web. If asked, she would say that she spends only a few minutes a day doing Web research on topics related to her company's products. But her time audit revealed that she was spending more than an hour a day searching the Web, and only about 15 percent of that time was related to her priorities. The audit helped Latoya see that she spends far more time searching the Web than her job requires.

### **Misjudging Time**

Megan is a marketing director who has suspected for some time that she spends too much time waiting for customers, taxis, and planes. Still, she felt that only a small percentage of her time was spent in nonproductive waiting. But her time audit reveals that she spends more than 20 percent of her time waiting. Once she saw that figure, she decided to find ways to reduce her waiting time or use it more productively.

## **Oversocializing**

Isaac, a busy sales manager in a large investment company, often takes clients and coworkers for long lunches. He also takes frequent coffee breaks during which he has long conversations with subordinates. Only after doing a time audit did Isaac realize that he spends an average of an hour and a half for lunch and an equal amount of time having coffee and chatting. These three hours a day represent nearly one-third of his total work time. The information about how he was spending his time allowed Isaac to determine whether the long lunches and lengthy conversations were productive, or whether he needed to reduce the time he spent on them.

## **Lack of Delegation**

Sara is an engineering manager who prefers solving problems to managing people. The more difficult the engineering problem one of her subordinates encounters, the more involved she becomes. A time audit helped Sara see that she was short on time because she does other people's work instead of managing it, a common problem among managers who have not mentally given up their old jobs. In fact, the inability or unwillingness to delegate properly causes so many time problems among managers that we will explore it in depth later in this course.

Of course, there are many other time wasters. You'll learn about them—and strategies for dealing with them—in later chapters.



### **Exercise 2–1**

## **Conduct Your Own Time Audit**

Record your activities every day for a week. Use pages in your personal organizer or handheld electronic organizer, or a small notebook that you carry with you. Immediately after each activity, including interruptions and casual conversations, note the time, what you did, and how long it took.

At the end of the week, summarize the data below. Then identify your “time wasters,” activities you could do differently or eliminate altogether.

Week of \_\_\_\_\_



<i>Activity</i>	<i>Hours spent</i>	<i>Avg. hours/day</i>
Phone calls	_____	_____
Formal meetings	_____	_____
Casual meetings	_____	_____
E-mail	_____	_____
Thinking, planning, scheduling	_____	_____
Writing	_____	_____
Problem solving	_____	_____
Lunch	_____	_____
Exercise	_____	_____
Other (specify) _____	_____	_____
Other _____	_____	_____
Other _____	_____	_____
Other _____	_____	_____
Other _____	_____	_____

Examine your daily time logs and weekly summary. Use the space below to list your “time wasters,” the four or five activities that consume your time without moving you closer to your goals.

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The first step in learning to manage your time is to analyze the way you use it. You can do that by conducting a time audit. A time audit helps you identify activities that you can do differently or

eliminate altogether. To conduct a time audit, log all your activities for one week, including the time you spend on each activity, and then summarize the data. This will enable you to pinpoint your time wasters: doing the wrong thing, not delegating work, and oversocializing. Once you know which activities are not helping you achieve your goals, you can make a commitment to change.

# Plan Ahead

## Introduction

When your brain is swirling with hundreds of things you need to do, you may not feel like you can take time out to plan. Find out why planning is a must and how to approach it.

### Because You're Worth It

If you want time management to be easy, you need to “take-it-easy” for 30 minutes by yourself every day. Be a “lone arranger” and let your mind, your subconscious, and your heart guide you.

Let's discuss the process of arranging the day. It's not only an enjoyable experience, but it can increase your effectiveness exponentially. You'll also discover it can help you reduce stress. The resources you'll need to arrange your day are

- A place to be alone
- 30 minutes
- A best time
- Your time management tools

Let's begin with **resource number one**, a place where you can be alone to plan. This place needs to be away from any noise or distractions that apply to you. It also needs to be a place where you can sit, think, and write. These criteria eliminate your shower because, while a shower is a great place to think, it is a lousy place to write. The criteria also eliminate your car while you are driving or riding with somebody else.

A final word about your special alone place is that you'll find it works best if you use it consistently as the place where you plan/arrange. Think of this as your *space-place*. It's great to have some space in a place you can be alone for a while.

**Resource number two** is 30 minutes each day reserved for arranging time. Why 30 minutes? A planning/arranging advantage seldom talked about is this important concept—when planning is not rushed, your subconscious mind and your heart have a chance to engage and assist you with the planning process.

Your subconscious mind will feed to you considerations you might otherwise overlook. It will give you a chance to evaluate with your heart the plans you've made for the day. When you do this—listen for intuitive promptings and follow them—it is likely that you will make better decisions.

Thirty minutes also benefits you in other ways. It gives you a chance to take a deep breath and reduce your stress. You will feel more in control, and you *will* be more in control.

## Five Times the Outcome

Depending on the nature of your tasks, some will require more than 30 minutes to plan. Maybe that makes you even more nervous about setting aside sufficient time to plan. Consider this old axiom, “For every minute you plan/arrange, you get three times the execution.” In our opinion, that’s conservative. We believe that for every minute we plan, we can actually get five times the execution. You can, too.

There is nothing more crucial in activity management than taking 30 minutes each day for arranging the order for accomplishing activities. It pays huge dividends.

Sadly, for many, it never happens because of the big lie some people tell themselves. The one that goes like this: “I don’t have time to plan/arrange today!” Isn’t that the very reason they need to plan? Everybody has time to plan. If they don’t plan/arrange, then “lack of planning” or “lack of arranging” becomes their plan. This is a negative, hazardous habit. It is hazardous to your health because, without a plan, stress is increased. It is hazardous to your work-life balance because, without careful planning and purposeful arranging, personal life and family life suffer. It is hazardous to your career because without planning/arranging you operate less efficiently than you could. All of these hazards make time management tough instead of ridiculously easy.

Don’t cheat yourself. This is the fastest way to get attacked. Set aside sufficient time daily for you and attack your day. Yes, YOU. It is time for you to slow the pace; time for you to be isolated from chaos; time for you to activate a friend and partner called your subconscious and to engage your heart.

**Resource number three** is a best time for you to arrange your day. What do we mean by a best time? Some of us are morning people and others of us are night people. If you are a morning person, then set aside time in the morning to plan/arrange. If evening would be a better time for you to plan the upcoming day, then that’s when you should do it.

Just remember, the best time to plan is connected to when your best place is available. As we’ve already mentioned, this place is a place of solitude, totally free of interruptions and distractions. At first, some people think such a place does not exist. With some creativity and a desire to find such a place, almost everyone can.

**Resource number four** is your time management tool(s) of choice. The specifics of those tools were discussed in [Chapter 2](#), “[Color Your Choices: The Art of Choosing and Refusing](#),” where you were advised to use the tool or combinations of tools that serve you best. As a reminder, the resources you’ll need to arrange your day are

- A place to plan in solitude
- 30 minutes reserved for planning/arranging time
- A best time of day for you to plan
- Your time management tools

You are now ready to arrange your day, and it’s as easy as one, two, three! Practice these three easy steps each day during your 30 minutes of alone time. If you do, you’ll have the assurance nothing

will fall through the cracks. Also, your ability to accomplish value-added activities should increase substantially.

# Schedule Your Time

## Introduction

None of us can keep everything we need to accomplish in our heads. Learn how to make the most of your days by creating a to-do list and planning your daily activities.

The key to successfully organizing yourself is knowing what works for you. Some people need to make detailed to-do lists, and they get a lot of satisfaction from crossing things off their list as they accomplish various tasks. Some of those people make several to-do lists a day, while others find that a weekly list works just fine.

Some people make detailed to-do lists and schedules, but then seldom look at them. It seems that the very act of writing down a task or activity or entering it into a computerized calendar etches it into their brain.

Of course, not everyone needs to write everything down or schedule every minute of the day. Some people are very good at keeping things in their heads: They don't need lists to remember appointments or to know which phone calls they need to make. (In the same way, some people appear to have messy workplaces, with papers strewn around in no apparent order, yet they always seem to know exactly where everything is.) But most people use some form of a to-do list. What's important is figuring out a system that works for you.

In addition to having different ways to keep themselves organized, people also differ in terms of when they are at their most productive. Some people are bright and energetic at 7:30 in the morning, and sluggish after lunch. Others don't really wake up until late afternoon but can keep going until midnight.

To use your time to best advantage, you need to think about when you do your best work, and then try to schedule your activities accordingly. For example, if you think most clearly early in the morning, try to arrange your schedule so that you have some quiet time for thinking and planning, or to work out difficult problems, before everyone begins to demand your time. If you tend to be sluggish after lunch (as many people are), try to avoid scheduling important meetings for early afternoon.



### Think About It

- How do you organize yourself? What actions do you take to keep track of correspondence, e-mail, appointments, and meetings? How do you make sure that you know what you need to do every day and whether you've done it? Is the process you're using now working? Or do you need to make some changes?

- What are your best times of the day? When are you most alert? The most energetic? When do you do your best thinking?
- What is your worst time of day? When do you tend to make the most mistakes?

## **SCHEDULING YOUR TIME**

No matter what your individual style of organizing, making the best use of your time means thinking carefully about what you need to do to accomplish your priorities. Realistically, that means making some kind of daily, weekly, and monthly schedule.

There are guidelines later in this chapter to help you determine which of the many scheduling and planning systems would be useful for you. But no matter which system you use, the basic element will be some type of to-do list: the list of tasks and activities that you need to get done during your workday.

### **Guidelines for Making a To-Do List**

- *Keep a written list.* Although a few people can keep everything they need to do in their heads, most people need to write things down. Your list doesn't have to be neat; it can be a bunch of yellow Post-it™ notes on a wall. You don't need to look at it all the time. But, at the least, writing down the things you have to do will relieve you of the stress of trying to carry information around in your head.
- *Make or revise your to-do list at the same time every day.* Keeping a to-do list is a habit you want to develop, one which will soon seem like a necessity to your more organized life. Each day is different, and your tasks and appointments will change each day.

Many people like to make or revise their to-do list at the end of the day, just before they leave work. It's a way of getting closure on the day. By the end of the day, you know what needs to be moved to the next day, or the next week, because you weren't able to finish or accomplish it. It provides stress relief because you don't have to worry about forgetting. Finally, doing it at the end of the day prepares you for the next morning, no matter how busy or chaotic it may be, by providing a framework for the day.

- *Prioritize your list.* If you don't bother to think about which tasks are the most urgent and important, you may spend all your time on the things that are interesting or easy. You might not get to difficult but critical tasks, or if you do get to them, you might not have enough time to do them right. Also, prioritizing your to-do list helps you identify tasks that can be postponed if something else comes up or you don't have enough time.
- *Keep it brief.* You don't have to write down absolutely everything that you need to do. Record only key items. Keep your list short but specific. Remember, your to-do list is merely a tool to help you organize your work, not a total record of that work.
- *Keep the list in the same place.* If you move around a lot, carry your to-do list in an easily accessible place, such as your planner or briefcase. If you do most of your work in your office, put it where you can see it easily. If you work on your computer a lot, you might put it on the computer.

- *Revise the list as needed.* If priorities change during the day, you might want to revise the list, or scrap it and do a new one. Your to-do list is a work in progress, a tool to help you stay on track and use your time to best advantage.
- *Consult the list as needed.* As mentioned earlier, some people never look at their to-do lists once they're written; the act of writing things down is enough. But many people find that a glance at their to-do list brings them back to their work after an interruption, and they find it helpful to cross off tasks as they're completed.
- *Use your to-do list to schedule your day.* Once you've identified and prioritized what you need to do in a given day, decide when to do each task. First, estimate how long the task or activity should take. For example, suppose you have a weekly meeting to attend at 10 A.M. on Friday. The meeting has already been scheduled, but you'll need some time to prepare. How long? The night before? Just before the meeting? First thing in the morning?



Exhibit 4-1

### Sample To-Do List

*12:30: Lunch mtg w/ Sam re Annual Fund Drive*  
*E-mail reminder to staff re project status reports*  
*Practice using PowerPoint*  
*Send out agenda for Fri team mtg*  
*Clean up e-mail folders*  
*Memo to Tran w/talking points for proposal mtg*  
*Review Web designs*  
*2:30: Dentist appt*  
*Get Melva started on new project*

If you need to delay a task because it turns out that you won't have time, decide when you will do it. The next day? The next week? Also, leave lag time between activities, because things usually take longer than you think they will. If emergencies and unexpected problems often come up during a typical day, save time to handle them.



Exercise 4-1

### Make Your Own To-Do List

Look at the sample to-do list in Exhibit 4-1, then make your own to-do list for tomorrow (or for the next workday if this is a weekend day). Use the To-Do List worksheet at the end of this chapter to list everything you can think of that you need to do by the end of the day.

## Prioritizing

Once you've identified what you have to do, the next step is to prioritize your activities. Remember, no matter how much you need to do, you have only so much time, and it's your high-payoff tasks and activities that help you achieve your goals. Although you always have to spend a certain amount of time doing less important things, you must reserve enough time for the things you have identified as your top priorities.

In 1893 an Italian economist, Vilfredo Pareto, pointed out a startling fact: 80 percent of the wealth in Europe's new industrial economy was held by only 20 percent of the population. (Power had shifted from a handful of nobles to 20 percent of the population.)

To this day, the 80/20 relationship has proved true in many scenarios:

- 80 percent of charitable donations are contributed by 20 percent of donors.
- 80 percent of airline accidents are experienced by 20 percent of aircraft models.

But most importantly,

- 80 percent of your success comes from 20 percent of your tasks and activities!

How do the 80/20 principles apply in today's workplace?

- High-payoff tasks represent 20 percent of your work and 80 percent of your results.
- Your high-payoff tasks help you accomplish your goals.
- Low-payoff tasks represent 80 percent of your work and only 20 percent of your results.

To determine which tasks provide high payoff, you need to understand your roles and goals. Prioritize your high-payoff tasks and decide which ones to handle first.

Here's what that means for time management purposes: To achieve your goals, you need to set aside time for the 20 percent of your activities, the high-payoff tasks, that will help you accomplish your goals. Dedicate your best work time to those activities, the time when your energy is high and you can focus on your work.

Look at Exhibit 4–2, Guidelines for Prioritizing, on page 40. It shows five categories into which you can place each of the activities that you need to do in a given day or week.

- **Category 1: *Important and Urgent*.** These are tasks that you must do, and you must do right away. They take priority over everything else. Crisis activities fall into this category, and sometimes they are there because no one paid attention earlier. To avoid having too many activities in this group, devote enough time to the activities in Category 2.
- **Category 2: *Important but Not Urgent*.** The high-payoff activities in this category are where you should dedicate your best work, when your energy is high and you will have few interruptions. Not only can paying attention to these activities help prevent crises, it can go a long way toward helping you achieve your goals.



xhibit 4–2

## Guidelines for Prioritizing Effectively

The chart below shows a new way to classify incoming tasks/voice mail/e-mails. Use these categories to prioritize your work.

## DAILY PRIORITIES

[illegible]

- **Category 3: *Urgent but Not Important*.** Sometimes you need to do tasks that are urgent but are not, in the scheme of things, important. These might be things that other people have asked you to do, and sometimes you will want to say yes. But if you allow these activities to become your top priority, you are likely to neglect the not-yet-urgent but much more important, high-payoff activities in Category 2.
- **Category 4: *Routine and Important (Urgent if Neglected)*.** These are vital, but routine, tasks that need to be done but that should not take up too much of your time. If you forget to pay attention to them, however, they can move into Category 1 by creating problems that need to be handled right away.



- Category 5: *Not Valid*. Keep looking for tasks that you can cease doing entirely, either because they really do not need to be done, they can be automated, or you can delegate them to someone else.



### **Apply What You Learn**

#### **Prioritize Your To-Do List**

Using the categories in Exhibit 4–2, prioritize the activities on your to-do list at the back of this chapter.

## **Identify Your Most Important Tasks**

### **Introduction**

With so many demands on your time, it can be difficult to stay focused. Find out how to identify and attend to the activities that will help you make progress toward achieving your goals.

Here's another technique that you can use for setting priorities: Make up your daily list of activities and then ask yourself, "If I were called out of town for a month, starting tomorrow, what activities on this list would I want to be sure to complete before I left town?"

The greatest enemy of time management and personal productivity today is "majoring in minors." Because of the natural tendency for each person to follow the path of least resistance and to settle into a comfort zone, it is normal and natural for people to begin with small, easy, fun, enjoyable, and usually unimportant tasks and activities at the beginning of the day.

But alas, whatever you start doing at the beginning of the day quickly becomes the pattern that you will follow in the hours ahead. By the end of the day, you may find that you have spent all of your time on small and meaningless tasks, and you will have accomplished nothing of real value.

### **Get More Important Things Done**

Another technique you can use is to imagine that you come into work on Monday morning and your boss approaches you with a dilemma. He has just won a fully paid vacation for two people, with first-class airfare, to a beautiful resort. His problem is that he is too busy to take advantage of this prize, but it is time dated. It must be used starting first thing tomorrow morning.

Your boss makes you a deal. If you can get all of your most important work done by the end of Monday, he will give you and your spouse this wonderful, all-expenses-paid vacation.

If you had this kind of incentive or motivation, what would you do? You would probably be astonished at how much work you could get done in that single day. You would probably complete the top 20 percent of the tasks that you had planned for the entire week.

With that kind of an incentive, you would not waste a single minute. You would have no time at all for idle conversation with your coworkers. You would start early and immediately work through

coffee breaks and lunch and concentrate single-mindedly on clearing your desk by completing your most important tasks. You would become one of the most productive people in your organization, virtually overnight.

This is a great exercise for you to practice on yourself. This exercise just illustrates the fact that your efficiency and effectiveness is largely a matter of choice. With a sufficient incentive, you would be astonished at how productive you could be, virtually in a few minutes. With a sufficient incentive, and a decision on your part, you would almost immediately become one of the most valuable people in your organization.

## **The Law of Three**

This principle is probably worth the cost and time of reading this book. It is based on an amazing discovery that I have made over the years, working with many thousands of executives and business owners. It is that, no matter how many different things you do in a week or a month, there are only **three** tasks and activities that account for 90 percent of the value of the contribution you make to your business.

If you make a list of everything you do in the course of a month, it will probably include twenty, thirty, or even forty different tasks and responsibilities. But if you review that list carefully, item by item, you will find that only three items on your entire list account for 90 percent of your value to your business.

How do you determine your “big three”? Simple. Make a list of all your work tasks and responsibilities, from the first day of the month to the last day, and throughout the year. Then, answer these three magic questions.

**1. If I could only do one thing on this list, all day long, which one activity would contribute the greatest value to my business?** Your most important task—the one that accounts for the greatest contribution you can make to your business—will probably pop out at you from the list. It will usually be quite clear to you, as it is clear to the people around you. Put a circle around that item.

**2. If I could only do two things on this list, all day long, what would be the second activity that would make the greatest contribution to my business?** Usually, this item will jump out at you as well. It may require a little bit more thought, but it is usually clear and obvious.

**3. If I could only do three things on this list, all day long, what would be the third activity that would contribute the most value to my business?** When you analyze your answers, you will clearly see that only three things you do account for almost all the value that you contribute. Starting and completing these tasks is more important than everything else you do.

Here’s an important point: If you do not know the answers to these three questions, you are in serious trouble. You are in great danger of wasting your time and your life at work. If you do not know the answer to these magic questions, you will always end up working on lower-value and often no-value activities.

If you are unclear for any reason, go to your boss. Ask what your boss thinks are the three most important things that you do to make your most valuable contribution at work. Ask your coworkers. Ask your spouse. But whatever you do, you must know the answers to these three questions.

## **Pass It Along**

Once you are clear about your “big three,” you must help all the people who report to you gain clarity about their “big three” as well. There is no kinder or more generous thing that you can do for your staff members than to help them become absolutely clear about the most important things that they do to make the most valuable contribution to your business.

In a well-managed department or organization, employees know exactly what the most important things are that they could do to make the greatest contribution. At the same time, every worker should know what every other worker’s big three are. All day, every day, everyone should work, both alone and together, to complete one or more of those three big tasks.

People who are dominated by “fast thinking” naturally react and respond to the demands and pressures of the moment. They continually veer off track and away from working on their highest-priority tasks. But this practice is not for you.

Before you begin work, take some time to think slowly, select your most important task, and then start work on that task to the exclusion of everything else.

# **Use Time Management Tools**

## **Introduction**

Numerous tools exist for tracking events, activities, and information. Learn about the different “buckets” you can use to manage your time and activities.

## **Chapter 3. Carry Your Time in Buckets**

### **Fine-Tune Your Tools**

The next crucial self-management skill is activity tracking. This involves keeping track of intangible things such as thoughts, ideas, talking points, dates, promises, reminders, and strategies.

These intangible things must be organized and tracked so nothing falls through the cracks. This is especially crucial in this era of information overload. This is where the right time/activity management tools come in.

Time management tools today are innovative, clever, and even astounding. In some cases, they are also very expensive. The selection from which to choose is huge and includes both electronic devices and paper planners. So the questions are, “What kinds of tools are best for you and your lifestyle?” “Should you use a paper planner, an electronic planner, or a combination of paper and electronic devices?”

I was flying on a commuter jet one morning. Sitting across the aisle from me was an obviously effective executive. She had a palm computer in one hand and a cell phone in the other. I thought to myself: If ever there was an executive who was totally paperless, it just might be this woman.

When we leveled off at 10,000 feet, I thought, “Now I bet she’ll take out a laptop,” but not so. She took out a paper Day-Timer<sup>®</sup> Organizer. I introduced myself and asked, “How come? Why do you

use a paper planner when you are so good with electronic tools?” She said, “Well, there are many things in my business that don’t track well electronically. That’s why I augment my electronic systems with paper.”

## **Keep It Simple**

Many people operate this way. They use a combination of paper and electronic. Others operate strictly with a paper planner, and some are electronic only. The key is to keep it simple. If you combine tools, you should be sure they don’t duplicate functions. For example, don’t try to operate on two calendars.

Let’s face it: Time management tools do not manage time. People manage time. The tools are designed for one thing. They help us track the events and activities crucial to us.

Here is an easy way to think of and use time/activity management tools. Think of them as buckets. A bucket is used to collect and carry things. Paper planners, palm computers, and smartphones contain buckets in which we collect and carry data and plans for activities and events.

To ensure nothing falls through the cracks, we suggest you always carry six buckets, which are essential for effective time/activity management.

## **Bucket One—The Monthly Calendar**

Bucket one is the monthly bucket or, in other words, your monthly calendar. Monthly calendars can be paper or electronic. (See [Figure 3.1](#) for an example of a typical paper monthly calendar.) It is for collecting and carrying future events and scheduled activities. You’ve likely been using a monthly calendar this way for years.

## JUNE

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	
A.M.						
NOON						
P.M.						
EVE.					1	
A.M.						
NOON						
P.M.						
EVE.	3	4	5	6	7	8
A.M.						
NOON						
P.M.						
EVE.	10	11	12	13	14	15
A.M.						

Figure 3.1. The monthly calendar (© Day-Timer, Inc.)

If you've known an event or activity was going to occur on some future date, you simply wrote it on your calendar on that future date. Nothing hard about that!

However, many people do not use their calendar as effectively as they could. It is critical they do, though, because bucket number one, the monthly calendar, is like a master control panel. It's the one place we can go and quickly see all of our scheduled future commitments, both personal and business.

To maximize the power of bucket one, and to ensure it really is your master control panel, use the monthly calendar for **ADD**. We aren't talking about Attention Deficit Disorder here. We are talking about all

- Appointments, and all
- Dates, and all
- Deadlines

### **The Most Important Appointment**

Let's consider appointment activities for a moment. When scheduling appointments, remember the most important appointments you ever schedule on your calendar will be the appointments you schedule with yourself.

Take a look at your calendar for the past few months. Have you made any appointments with yourself and honored them the same way you treat your appointments with others? If not, you are not taking advantage of one of the most beneficial calendaring techniques.

What is the objective of self-appointments? They are for solitary focus time when you can accomplish your green activities. People who expect this kind of time to materialize without scheduling it usually come up short.

In the new time integration paradigm, we suggest that both business and personal appointments go on the same calendar. Some people attempt to use two different calendars, which increases the likelihood of losing control.

Dates and deadlines are also crucial in making your monthly calendar a master control panel. Many people fail to put deadlines on their calendar. Some people don't keep their calendars current, and they become unreliable. If you want activity management to be ridiculously easy, keep your calendar current.

Select a paper or electronic calendar that you will be willing to carry with you. Like a wristwatch, accessibility of your calendar is essential in today's mobile and virtual work environment. Take it to meetings. Have it with you when you go to confer in another person's office. Invariably, you'll be contacted all day long by others asking for some of your time. If you have bucket one accessible, you won't have to get back to people.

Please take a moment now and evaluate your effectiveness in using a monthly calendar. If you use a combination then check both paper and electronic. My monthly calendar for future events and activities that are scheduled is

\_\_\_\_\_ Paper

\_\_\_\_\_ Electronic

\_\_\_\_\_ Don't use one

My effectiveness rating is

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not Effective				Somewhat Effective				Highly Effective		

### **Bucket Two—The Catch-All Bucket**

Bucket two is the catch-all bucket. (See [Figure 3.2](#) for an example.) It is similar to the monthly calendar bucket in that it's a place to hold future events and activities. The difference is that the future events and activities in the catch-all bucket have yet to be scheduled. In other words, you know you are going to do these things in the future, but you aren't exactly sure when. Certainly you won't do them today, probably not tomorrow, and maybe not even next week. The catch-all bucket gives you a good place to track these things so they won't be forgotten. Catch-all buckets can be paper or electronic.

JUNE

## TO BE DONE IN JUNE

[illegible]



Figure 3.2. Bucket two—The catch-all bucket (© Day-Timer, Inc.)

For some paper planners, the catch-all bucket is on the back of the monthly calendars, titled “To Be Done.” You can also set up an electronic catch-all bucket, or you can designate some sort of journal for that purpose.

It’s easy to spot people who don’t have a catch-all bucket. Their pockets, handbags, and desktops are usually cluttered with little pieces of paper on which they carry vital information. They can often be seen frantically searching for that one piece of paper with the information they need at that moment.

We believe bucket number two is almost as essential as bucket number one. This bucket exists for RAM. We aren’t talking about your computer’s **RAM** here; we are talking about **R**eminders, **A**voiding FPAA, and **M**aster Task List.

- **Reminders.** People have so much to remember it is difficult to track it all in our minds. Anytime you want to remember anything, just put it in your catch-all bucket.
- **Avoiding FPAA.** That’s an acronym for Floating Paper Anxiety Attack! We think you know what we’re talking about. We get caught in a situation without something to write on, so we grab any old piece of paper to capture an important message. Then, for some reason, that paper gets lost or floats away, and up goes our anxiety because it contained very important information.

I’ve watched people make important notes on napkins, business cards, pieces of yellow legal paper, wallpaper, yellow stickies, and even the palm of their hand.

We were conducting a time management seminar in Oklahoma City one day. When we started talking about floating paper, the manager of the group stood up and said, “Hey! Do you mean like this?” and he pulled two big wads of paper out of his trouser pockets. I said, “Yes, like that! That’s a complicated way to track events and activities.”

If you want ridiculously easy time management, have one catch-all bucket where you put all the information that’s handed to you on floating pieces of paper. It takes just seconds to transcribe the information. Then, throw the little bits and pieces of paper away. Life will be amazingly simpler, and you’ll have less anxiety.

- **Master Task List.** Everybody has a list of stuff they need to remember to do each month. The catch-all bucket is a place to build a summary of such things.

For example: Before the end of the month, you want to purge your files. Put that in your catch-all bucket. You won’t forget it, and you’ll increase the likelihood it will get done.

**WARNING!** A catch-all bucket is not much help at all unless it is checked each morning as part of the planning process. It takes very little time to scan the information. Please take a moment and evaluate your effectiveness using a catch-all bucket.

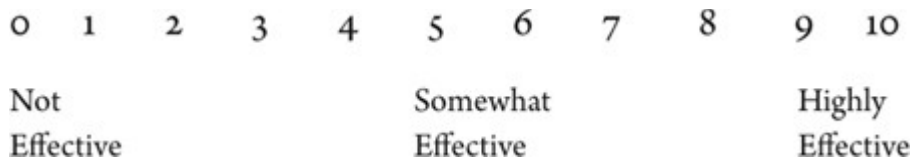
My catch-all bucket for future events and activities that are not yet scheduled is

\_\_\_\_\_ Paper

\_\_\_\_\_ Electronic

\_\_\_\_\_ Don't use one

My effectiveness rating is



### **Bucket Three—The Daily Bucket**

Bucket three is a bucket for today's activities. (See [Figure 3.3](#) for a typical example.) We call it the **AAA** bucket. And, as you may well have guessed, we aren't talking about the American Automobile Association.

26

MONDAY  
JUNE

MAY							JUNE							JULY						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6							1	2	3						
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
28	29	30	31				25	26	27	28	29	30		23/30	24/31	25	26	27	28	29

188 Days Left

## APPOINTMENTS &amp;

TO BE DONE TODAY (ACTION LIST)		HOURS	NAME
		7 0700	
		8 0800	
		9 0900	
		10 1000	
		11 1100	
		12 1200	
		1 1300	
		2 1400	
		3 1500	
		4 1600	
		5 1700	
		6 1800	
		7 1900	
		8 2000	

Figure 3.3. Bucket three—the daily bucket (© Day-Timer, Inc.)

We are talking about

- **Appointments:** today's appointments
- **Action list:** today's activity list or to-do's
- **Additions:** things that pop up during the day

What do we mean by additions? Additions are the “expected/unexpected” activities and events that pop up each day after we’ve made our plan. They are the red events in our daily traffic that require us to stop what we are doing, or what we planned to do, and go do this red event right now! We think there is worth to adding these to our original action list, and taking credit for getting those jobs done by checking them off.

Almost all paper and electronic planners have a space for today's appointments and action list. Bucket three functions like a compass. It shows us what we plan to do next. It shows us where we are headed and what we've scheduled to be doing at certain times. It also provides a place for us to note the “expected/unexpected” things that pop up during the day—the additions.

On the following page is an example of a typical Day-Timer<sup>®</sup> Organizer. The advantage of paper is that you can see both your scheduled and unscheduled activities in one view. If you prefer electronic, there's an app for that. We suggest you choose one that is simple, easy to navigate, and that you'll enjoy using daily. Consistency is key.

Most people are pretty good at having a place to track their appointments for the day. We are concerned, however, when we see people who don't take the time to make a simple action list for the day. Interestingly, some time management experts tell their clients it doesn't make sense to plan an action list at the beginning of the day because things change so fast. Their argument is that the plan might be obsolete as early as 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning, so that kind of planning is a waste of time. We disagree with that idea.

When we build a list of planned activities for the day, an action list, and we put a value on those activities, four incredible benefits accrue to the ridiculously effective activity manager.

These benefits are still there even when things change and the list becomes obsolete when interruptions occur. Here are four HUGE benefits:

1. The list becomes a tool of negotiation. It can be used as a tool of negotiation with yourself when you are tempted to be swayed by lower priorities. It can also be used as a tool of negotiation with others when they want you to subordinate your priorities to theirs.
2. It becomes a tool of navigation to help you get back on track after you've dealt with emergencies—red events you had to resolve.
3. It becomes a tool of focus because it functions like a magnifying glass to help you concentrate your physical, mental, and emotional energy on the right activities throughout the day.
4. It becomes a tool of measurement to help you evaluate your progress during the day, and shows the status of each planned activity at the end of the day.

Why would anybody want to run headlong into the whitewater of the day without an action list when it produces such benefits?

Please take a moment and evaluate your effectiveness using your daily bucket.

My daily bucket used for today's events and activities is

\_\_\_\_\_ Paper

\_\_\_\_\_ Electronic

\_\_\_\_\_ Don't use one consistently

My effectiveness rating is

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not Effective					Somewhat Effective			Highly Effective		

### **Bucket Four—The Memory Bucket**

Bucket four is the memory bucket. It's the place for **DDT**. Clearly, we are not talking about pesticides here. We are talking about

- Documenting important information
- Delegating to and receiving delegation from others
- Tracking a sequence of events and information you receive

It's where we record important information that comes to us during the day—information we think we might need at a later date. During the day, we receive information in a variety of ways. It comes to us through telephone calls, drop-in visitors, email, voicemail, text messages, meetings, and conversations with others. We certainly don't write everything down, but recording key information is crucial.

What we are talking about here is a permanent journal that is dated, sequential, and ultimately archived in such a way that you can retrieve the information, if necessary, years from the date it was recorded.

Choose the best tool that fits your style. All tools, paper or electronic, have resources that you can use as "buckets." (See [Figure 3.4](#) for an example of a dated paper memory bucket.)

DIARY AND WORK RECORD

26th Week  
177th Day

REF.	NAME OR PROJECT	DETAILS OF MEETINGS • AGREEMENTS • DE
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		
26		
27		
28		
29		

Figure 3.4. Bucket four—the memory bucket (© Day-Timer, Inc.)

If you prefer electronic, there are thousands of apps to choose from. One we like and use regularly is Evernote. Evernote makes it easy and convenient to remember things using your computer, smartphone, tablet, and the web. You can also keep a memory bucket in Outlook using the note feature. This is convenient if you use the Outlook calendar for bucket 1. Whatever tool you use, keep it simple and accessible.

People who don't use bucket four, the memory bucket, often resort to writing on legal pads, spiral notebooks, and loose pieces of paper. This can be risky. Remember this old Chinese proverb: "The palest ink is better than the best memory." However, what you write down can't be used as memory at all unless you have a good retrieval system for finding the information.

Because retrieval is so important, we recommend to all paper planner users that the memory bucket be paper, with the day's date printed on each page. Then you can file these pages sequentially. Be sure to implement a simple filing method by date, category, or project.

If you want to make it ridiculously easy, settle on a dated paper journal for your memory bucket and use it consistently. Lack of consistency with this tool will make your activity management harder, not easier.

Please take a moment and evaluate your effectiveness using a memory bucket that is sequential and dated.

My memory bucket used for recording key information is

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Electronic
- ☐ Don't use one

My effectiveness rating is

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not Effective				Somewhat Effective				Highly Effective		

### Bucket Five—The Fingertip Data Bucket

Tracking bucket five is the data bucket. This is where we carry vital information that we need at our fingertips from time to time, and might include goals, projects, documents, spreadsheets, images, your address and telephone directory, fact sheets, and so on.

The purpose of the data bucket is to centralize the information we need at our fingertips. To centralize means to get all of our key information into one source. When we do that, we promote ridiculously easy activity management.

One of the huge advantages of a PDA such as a Blackberry, iPhone, Palm, and Android™ is that you can download all of your data from your computer into a small data bucket that you carry in the palm of your hand. If you have multiple electronic devices, keep bucket five in "the cloud." Cloud

computing allows you to store vital information retrievable from any device. People are no longer tied to any specific location or one device as they roam about to get things done on laptops, tablets, or even smartphones. Sync and share notes, Word documents, presentations, spreadsheets, images, and even video with ease.

The best solution for an electronic data bucket is an online storage service like Dropbox, Google Drive, Box.com, Microsoft's Skydrive, or SugarSync.

If you do not use a PDA or smartphone, but instead use a paper planner, a tabbed index section serves as your data bucket. Another paper method would include the use of file folders. Keep them organized and accessible.

You can learn more about data bucket tools and get recommendations at our website [attackyourday.com](http://attackyourday.com).

Please evaluate your effectiveness using bucket five, the data bucket.

My data bucket used for keeping vital information at my fingertips is

\_\_\_\_\_ Paper

\_\_\_\_\_ Electronic

\_\_\_\_\_ I'm not that organized

My effectiveness rating is

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not Effective					Somewhat Effective			Highly Effective		

## **Bucket Six—The Communication Bucket**

There is one more bucket that all of us use. It's our electronic communications bucket or, in other words, our voicemail/email. Voicemail is not a major problem for most people, and most people don't abuse it.

Email, on the other hand, is a minefield of distractions, irrelevancies, and a great temptation for time-wasting. It is, however, the biggest part of our communication bucket, and an essential component of activity management.

Today, most people live in their inbox. They leave it open all day as it constantly checks for new messages. When a new message comes in, an alert pops up treating every message as a high priority demanding our attention. Not only is this distracting, it breaks our focus and productivity goes down, way down.

Take back your inbox! Treat email as another activity on your activity list and schedule it. Check your email 3–6 times daily and use a system to prioritize and process your email. We address email later in the book. In the meantime, please evaluate your effectiveness using bucket six, your communication bucket.

When evaluating my communication bucket used for oral and written communication:



\_\_\_\_\_ I control it.

\_\_\_\_\_ It controls me.

My effectiveness rating is

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Not  
Effective

Somewhat  
Effective

Highly  
Effective

Based upon your style, pick paper or electronic tools you will really use. If you are a visual person, you may be most comfortable with paper. Don't let your peers intimidate you into going with an electronic tool if you know you won't use it. Here's a clue—if you use your PDA or smartphone only as an address/phone directory, you are probably better off using paper. On the other hand, if you prefer electronic tools and all the bells and whistles they offer, they can be very useful. The key is in finding what works for you, and then making sure you always have your six-pack handy:

- Bucket One—Your Monthly Calendar
- Bucket Two—Your Catch-All Bucket
- Bucket Three—Your Daily Bucket
- Bucket Four—Your Memory Bucket
- Bucket Five—Your Fingertip Data Bucket
- Bucket Six—Your Communication Bucket

Carry your time in six buckets. Check each bucket every day so that nothing falls through the cracks. It's easy when you pick and use your buckets. Ridiculously easy!

## Take a moment to reflect

The lessons in this subject focus on structuring your time. Think about your work style and routines. Which time management tools work best for you?

# Declutter Your Workspace

## Introduction

When your workspace is cluttered, it's difficult to find what you need and easy to become distracted. Learn tips for getting—and staying—organized.

## TWENTY-ONE

## Organize Your Work Space

**One of the great** time management tools is to work from a clean desk and in an organized work space. Just as an excellent chef cleans up the kitchen before and after cooking, you should organize

your work space completely before you begin your work. One of the most successful entrepreneurs in recent history said that the key to his success was to “always work from a clean desk.”

Peter Drucker observed that effective executives always have a clean desk. Everything except the one thing that they are working on at the moment has been removed and put away, which is why they are able to focus with greater clarity and get more done, of higher quality, in a shorter period of time.

Put all of your documents away in the appropriate files, both physical and online. Deal only with your current task. Try to have only one item in front of you whenever possible.

The top professionals in every field keep a tidy and highly ordered work space at all times. Think of a carpenter, dentist, or doctor. They clean up and reorganize as they go through their day.

Get organized and stay organized. Make sure your office supplies and materials are fully stocked and available at hand. You will find that nothing is more destructive to efficiency and effectiveness than having to start a job and then stop, and then start again, for lack of proper preparation or supplies.

## **Organization Increases Productivity**

Many people believe that they work more effectively in a messy work environment with a cluttered desk. Yet every study that has been done with people shows that when they are forced to clean up their work environment so that they have only one task in front of them, their productivity doubles and triples, usually overnight.

People who work with cluttered desks are found to spend an enormous amount of each working day looking for the materials they need among the clutter around them. Psychologically, the sight of a cluttered desk or office provides subconscious feedback that reinforces your perception that you are disorganized. It leads to continuous distraction as your eyes and your attention dart from item to item, and back again.

# **Handle Email**

## **Introduction**

Keeping up with email can feel like you are frantically bailing out a leaky boat—you have to keep at it or you’ll sink. The problem is that reading and responding to emails can distract you from more important tasks. Learn how to manage your email so that it doesn’t commandeer your day.

Note that T.E.S.S.T. refers to the author's decision process:

- Take immediate action
- Empower yourself and others
- Suspend it
- Store it for future reference

- Trash or recycle it

You probably get so much email that it's difficult to keep your inbox from becoming overwhelming. The unrelenting deluge is the reason why most people have hundreds or even thousands of messages in their inboxes, including both those that are important and/or require some type of action, and those that are obviously trash—that is, unimportant. In order to deal with the ongoing avalanche, many people have decided that the only way to stay on top of it is to check it constantly. One study showed that office workers check their email up to 40 times per hour!<sup>1</sup>

Remember from Chapter 1 that research suggests that new experiences create a “dopamine squirt” that reinforces the behavior.<sup>2</sup>

It isn't just the fear of getting behind that has us frequently checking our messages. It's also lack of focus. Checking email is easy—it has to be done and it typically doesn't require a lot of brainpower. In fact, working with email could be considered busywork. There is a certain comfort in the predictability of email; checking and responding to email provides a sense of accomplishment, however brief or false. It's like having a long list that you can check something off of every few minutes—an attraction that reinforces the already present lure of the dopamine squirt.

My process for managing email begins with the Review, Process, Do strategy: You review as often as you feel is necessary, process to zero at least a couple times per week, and do what needs doing at the appropriate time. The following sections dive into each of these steps in a bit more detail.

## Review

Reviewing messages is just what it sounds like: skimming them quickly to determine those that are urgent, and therefore need a quick reply, and those that can be deleted immediately or handled completely with a quick phone call. The review process is quick and doesn't involve in-depth thought.

Unfortunately, reviewing is how some people deal with email all the time. Messages that don't fit into the categories of “truly urgent,” “quick reply,” or “immediately delete” are ignored or put off until “later.” Then those messages are quickly buried by new messages; and pretty soon they are lost in the black hole of hundreds or thousands of messages that comprise most people's email inboxes. Therefore, “later” never arrives.

To regain control over your email inbox, understand that reviewing is only the first step; you also have to process and do. To prevent yourself from letting the review step become your default method for dealing with email, I suggest that you only allow yourself to review email from your phone or other portable device. When you review email from your computer, it is very easy to be distracted by it (browsing through old messages, dragging messages to folders, clicking links, and so on) and then you don't get anything else done. On your phone or other portable device it's easier to limit yourself to skimming because the experience isn't as user-friendly—reading a small screen and typing on a tiny keyboard are not as comfortable, so you are less likely to linger. Only review messages on your portable device, don't take the time to actually process them. Follow the rule that you only check email from your computer when you really have time to process the messages.

## Process

After a few days (or a few hours, depending on your situation) of only dealing with urgent, quick-reply, or quick-delete messages, you probably have items that need more attention. Perhaps these messages didn't start out as urgent, but after time they start to make you feel a little anxious and you know you need to address them soon.

At some points in your week, you have to set aside a stretch of time to process your inbox. Merlin Mann, of 43 Folders and Inbox Zero, describes processing as “more than checking, less than responding.” David Allen, author of *Getting Things Done*, describes processing as “deciding what actions to take on stuff.” As I explained in Chapter 10, to me process means dealing with every single message to decide whether to delete it or otherwise move it out of your inbox. It's not always important to begin or complete the task that each email contains, whether that's just to provide a thoughtful response or to complete some other request. But it is important to have a firm grasp on what all the items are that require some action from you. Unknown issues buried in your email inbox or unprocessed piles of paper on your desk create stress because you'll feel like something important might be hidden there.

The goal of processing your inbox is to empty it, but you can only accomplish this if you pause the messages from downloading into your inbox. Recall from Chapter 2 that an important step in taking control over your technology is controlling when you receive new messages. If your messages download automatically with no input from you, then your technology is in control. Those constantly downloading messages are distracting, and they reinforce your temptation to interrupt yourself to check every one. Consequently, you are constantly multitasking, constantly distracted, and therefore not working at your best.

You can find specific instructions for this in Chapter 12.

Change your email client so that new messages arrive only when you press the Send/Receive button. During your processing time, press the Send/Receive button once, and then just move on down the list of messages, following the T.E.S.S.T.<sup>TM</sup> process. When you're done, your inbox will be empty; you'll know you are current on your communications (at least for the moment, because if you press that Send/Receive button, more messages will arrive), and your inbox will be at zero!

I know what you're thinking: You currently have thousands of messages in your inbox, so it will take you forever to process them all! Don't worry, I have a solution. Read the rest of this chapter for more information about processing and how to get to zero quickly so you can start fresh using the email management portion of the Empowered Productivity<sup>TM</sup> System.

Do

Remember, processing all your messages doesn't mean you've taken action on all of them. As illustrated in the T.E.S.S.T. process, some things need to be done at a later date (Suspend to Next Actions) for one of the following reasons:

- You need more information.
- You need many minutes or hours to complete the task.
- You need someone else's help.

Process the email by putting the required action on your task list so that you can do it when you have the answers, time, and resources available.

Review, Process, Do: This is the methodology I recommend for dealing with the constant barrage of email most people are subjected to on a daily basis, and it's an important piece of my Empowered Productivity System.

In the rest of the chapter, I discuss the specific times I suggest that you perform the reviewing, processing, and doing. Before I get to that, I think it's helpful to outline the most common habits I see my clients using, and some more productive behaviors with which to replace them.

### Replacing Your Old Tricks

To control communication, you need a good system, and by system I mean a real, step-by-step, I-could-explain-it-to-you-if-you-asked methodology, such as the email management methodology that is part of the Empowered Productivity System. However, most people's habits for managing email include some combination of the following:

- Skim and then skip to the next message.
- Mark emails that need action as "unread."
- "Flag" messages that need action.
- Assign categories to inbox messages.

Processing is the most important component of staying in control of your email and eliminating the stress caused by the nagging fear that you are missing something important when you don't deal effectively with your messages.

If the "skim and skip" habit sounds familiar, you need to figure out why you are skipping over messages. This tactic is fine in the review part of the "Review, Process, Do" method described earlier, but remember that reviewing is only one piece of managing your email. You need to incorporate the process and do components as well.

The most common reason for "skimming and skipping" is that you are checking your messages when you don't really have time. As a result, you skip almost everything because of one or more of the following:

- You don't know the answer.
- You don't feel like dealing with it now.
- You think it will take too long.
- You are looking for only the "important" messages.

Read on for more details about how this habit and others you might have are sabotaging your productivity.

### The Pitfalls of the Skim and Skip Habit

There are several reasons why skimming and skipping messages, and using the techniques of marking as unread, flagging, and categorizing aren't very effective, and contribute to your stress:

- You don't really know how important a message is, what is required of you, what action(s) you might need to take, or how much time it will take you. You've reviewed, but you haven't processed, so the item is still an "unknown" that nags at you and causes anxiety.

- Because the tasks waiting in the emails are still relative unknowns, it's difficult or impossible to quantify your workload, or prioritize the tasks in email within the context of the rest of your work.
- As the deluge of messages continues to flow in, those that are flagged or unread are pushed farther and farther down the list in your email inbox, increasing the chance that one or more will slip through the cracks. The fear that something might fall by the wayside also elevates stress.
- The most important reason why these techniques aren't productive is because you have more than one place to look for all the things you need to do. This is a problem not just for email, but for all your communication channels. For example, some things you know need to be done because they are clearly your responsibility. These are the items that probably make it onto your to-do list. Your email also generates tasks for you to complete, and those tend to languish in your inbox, as described. Then there are items requiring action on your part that come up in meetings, via phone calls and voicemails, in casual conversation, and other communication channels. These items may be scribbled on one or more pieces of paper, or they may just be stored in your brain. Having so many different places to look for all the tasks that need doing prevents you from being able to organize and prioritize them, and to see each item in the context of everything else you need to do.

### The Result Is Worth the Effort

There is no question that dealing with email takes time, but if email is an unavoidable part of your work or personal life, as it is for most of us, then you need to plan for the time it takes to handle it. My work has shown me that it takes, on average, about two minutes to dispatch an average email message. For example, let's say you get about 100 emails per day, every day. That's 700 messages per week, or 1,400 minutes. That's almost 24 hours—one full day—every week just to process email!

If those numbers reinforce the reason why you avoid processing your email, don't despair—the operative words are “on average.” After you become good at processing your messages, many will require less than two minutes to process. When you've mastered email processing, you might need only about three or four hours twice per week to effectively process your messages into your system. Starting to use an organized process is worth every minute you spend, in terms of both productivity and the control and peace of mind you get in return.

### Developing a Better System

This assumes you are using a client to manage your email, such as Microsoft Outlook or Apple Mail. If you are using Google or other web-based email, then simply close the email window in your browser to eliminate email as a source of distraction.

You already know that allowing your messages to download constantly interrupts you and sabotages your productivity, and that the solution is to shut off automatic downloading so that your messages arrive only when you click the Send/Receive button. However, you might still be wondering the following:

- How often you should review your messages?

- How many times should you process them?
- When is the best time to do both of these steps?

### Appropriate Timing

The answers to the first two questions depend on several things, including your calendar, or schedule, for the day, the nature of your job, and your dependence on communication with others to get your work done. Regarding how many times you should process messages, for most people the first number that comes to mind is too high. Nearly everyone overestimates how often they should at least review their messages. For many professions, I've found that reviewing messages two or three times per day is sufficient. That said, you are the only person who can determine this but make sure you factor in all the lessons from the Empowered Productivity System before you settle on a number. Also, that number can change.

When most people talk about “checking” email, they mean review in the context that we've described it here.

Another critical question about managing email pertains to when you should check it: Should you check it first thing in the morning, or should you wait until later in the day? To make this decision, consider how you want to start your day. Remember that managing email is reactive; do you want to start your day by being reactive? Recall that doing so sets you on a path to potentially be in reactive mode for the rest of the day, and it can eliminate any chance of being proactive—and therefore productive in terms of making progress toward your significant results. The real question you need to ask yourself is whether checking (reviewing) email first thing in the morning supports your own focused attention or sabotages it. The answer to this question depends on several factors:

Remember from the “Read This First” chapter that this entire book is based on the premise of productivity being defined as the ability to achieve your significant results.

- Do you have a handheld device for checking email? The conventional wisdom is that you shouldn't review or process messages first thing in the morning, but I think this advice came about before email on a handheld device was possible or prevalent. I think it's OK to review your messages (following the “Review, Process, Do” guidelines) on your handheld device first thing in the morning. Skim for those messages that directly affect your plans for the day. In general, do not review your messages first thing in the morning on your computer because it's too tempting to get lost in the messages, decreasing your opportunity to be productive and achieve your significant results for the day. However, some exceptions to this rule follow.
- Are you an independent professional (self-employed) or do you work in a large office? If you work in an office and you decide to forego email and tackle your task list immediately, you are less likely to miss something while sitting at your desk, because someone will pop in to notify you about something that's going on, you'll overhear something, or someone will call you. Conversely, if you work independently, you have to make more of an effort to stay abreast of things.
- Do you have time to be proactive, or do you have to rush off to a meeting? The whole point of not reviewing email first thing in the morning is to have some time to be proactive and

make progress on your significant results for the day. If you forego reviewing email on your computer as the first thing you do, you can spend some time being proactive, enabling you to cross items off your Next Actions list. If you need to rush off to a meeting, you would neither have time to be proactive nor be able to get bogged down by your email, so reviewing your email to confirm that the meeting hasn't been delayed or canceled is certainly prudent.

- Do you work with people in another time zone? If you work closely with people who are getting ready to leave work around the same time that you are arriving, then it makes sense to review your messages in case you need to deal with anything before the close of their business day.
- How have you “trained” the people with whom you regularly interact? In this case, “training” is not something you did intentionally; it's more about the expectations other people have based on your usual behavior. For example, real estate agents ask me, “How do I get my clients to stop calling me at 9:00 at night?” My response: “Stop answering.” People who need to communicate with you will do what works. If you have trained them that you will respond to an email immediately, then they will feel comfortable using email for emergencies. Conversely, if emailing you about something important fails to elicit a response, they will have to try reaching you some other way. Whatever is effective is the method they will use for the next urgent communication. You can't control the way other people behave, but you can create circumstances that support your own productivity, rather than sabotage it.

NOTE Regarding this issue of “training” others, it's also critical that you make a distinction about “important/urgent.” Is “urgent” to someone else also urgent to you? If not, that might affect your response time. Consider whether you might have inaccurate assumptions about the appropriate response time. I've worked with companies whose employees felt that delivering anything less than an immediate response meant that they weren't providing good customer service. However, when they actually asked their customers, they discovered that a response within one business day was considered good service (meaning that an immediate response was not necessary).

As I mentioned, if you have a handheld device, and you have the self-discipline to avoid being distracted, then reviewing your messages on your handheld device several times a day, including first thing in the morning, is certainly a valid option (I do it myself). Be careful, however, because the temptation to review messages on your phone and then rush to your computer to “just respond to this one” is strong; and it's all downhill from there!

Now that you know how to determine how often you should review, the next logical question is, “How often should you process?” This also depends on a few factors, including the following:

- The nature of your email communications—How much of your important work comes to you via email?
- The results of your reviewing—Did you find a lot that needs attention, or could most of it wait a bit?
- Your schedule for the day or week—If you are booked up one or more days, you need to plan for the fact that you likely won't have time to process email on those days and therefore need to work the time for processing into your schedule later in that week.

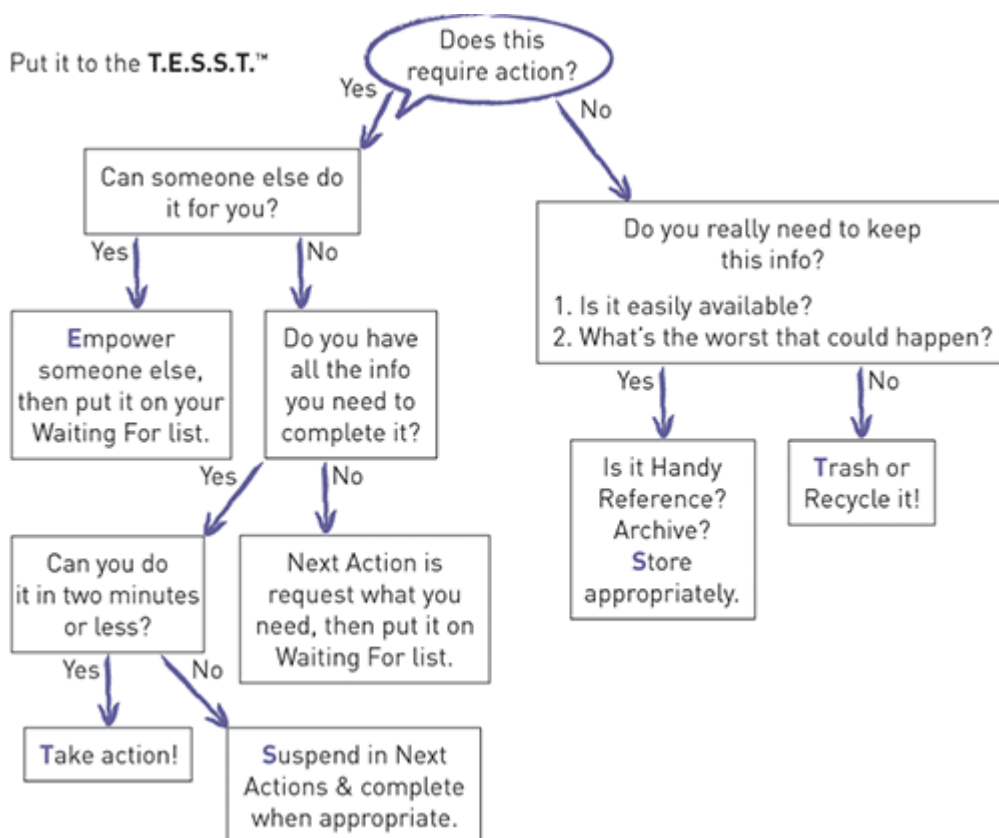


Achieving peace of mind with respect to your email is a balance only you can find. You might need to process email daily; or with effective reviewing you may only need to process it once per week; or something in between. Keep in mind that the important point here is whether you are sabotaging or supporting your productivity and attention with your email habits. Consider all the factors from this chapter carefully and frequently, knowing there isn't an exact formula that works in every situation.

### Implementing the 60-Second Rule

To process your email, use the T.E.S.S.T. Decision Chart (see [Figure 11-1](#)). You'll find that there are really only five possible combinations of actions you can take:

- Read and delete
- Read, respond, and delete
- Read and file for later reference
- Read, respond, and file
- Move the item out of your inbox and into your task list if dealing with the message will take longer than a few minutes



[Figure 11-1](#)

Incidentally, the same is true for your Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook accounts and other communication tools.

During processing, commit to spending one full minute thinking about each message, unless you can process it in less time. This will help you to break the “skim and skip” habit. If you can read a message in 10 seconds, use the extra 50 seconds (rather than skip to the next one) to apply the

T.E.S.S.T. process—figuring out what to do with the message (not leave it in your inbox!).

Allowing this time to stop to think is the biggest barrier to get over. You won't actually need an entire minute to process each of your messages, and some might require a bit more than a minute; but knowing that you have allowed yourself an entire minute for each message can help you break the habit of checking your email when you don't really have time.

**WARNING** Avoid assuming that a message's length has anything to do with the effort it will take to review or process it. For example, don't assume that because a message is long that you don't have the time to read it. If you do use the full minute you've allotted for a message, you can often gather enough information to fully process it, rather than leave it in your inbox to be dealt with later.

# Learn to Organize Anything

## Introduction

There are five basic ways to organize things. Discover these methods and when to use each one.

### Five Ways to Organize

I agree with Richard Wurman, the author of *Information Anxiety*, that there are only five ways to organize anything. The following sections describe these five ways and give you examples of the most appropriate and effective times to use each of them.

### Organizing Alphabetically

Reference information is information that does not require action in and of itself. The reason you keep reference material is because you might need it later.

One common way to organize is alphabetically. Alphabetical organization can be useful for many scenarios—for example, it is how many people organize their files. (Read Chapter 8 for more information on filing.) Alphabetical organization can also be effective when you have a static list and you need to easily find specific items on it. Typically, alphabetical organization is useful for reference information, such as your address book or an inventory list.

### Organizing by Size

Another way to organize information is on a size continuum, such as smallest to biggest. A continuum is useful for organizing physical items. For example, many people organize areas of their homes using a continuum. You may have the dishes and pots organized in your kitchen with small items in one cabinet and large items in another. Similarly, a warehouse might have large inventory stored in one area, and smaller parts in a separate section.

### Organizing by Location

The third way to organize is by location, which can be useful for both physical items and information. At home, for example, you might use different locations for summer clothes and winter clothes. Or you might store all the items you need to take with you when you leave the house—your keys, wallet, and phone—close to the door.

At work, it can also be useful to store information by location: If your company has both domestic customers and international customers, the files of the domestic customers might be located in one file cabinet or folder on your computer, while the files of the international customers are kept in a different file cabinet or folder on your computer.

Alphabetical, size-, and location-based organizing all have their place, but following are the two most critical organizing methods to regain control over a busy life: time and category.

### Organizing by Time

Organizing by time usually applies to information and commitments. Time-based organization is the method used most often by busy people, because everyone knows how to use a calendar. In fact, until we had sophisticated electronic tools to help us organize, a paper calendar was the primary tool for keeping track of a busy life. We all still have a tendency to organize by time, despite the fact that our lives today are often too complex for simple time-based organization.

Things that will happen on a certain day or at a certain time have a strong relationship to time, and time-based organization is perfect for these situations. Day-specific activities are things such as someone's birthday; the day a bill is due; or a commitment that you made, such as, "I'll call you on Tuesday." Other activities are specific to both a day and a time, such as meetings and appointments—for example, a meeting on Monday at 3:00 p.m., a doctor's appointment on Wednesday at 4:00 p.m.

Time-based events with a strong relationship to time.

Meetings and appointments only fill a portion of our time. The majority of our daily time is spent managing information, sending and receiving communications, and meeting non-time-based commitments, all of which is discretionary time. For example, if your workplace requires that you occasionally attend meetings but the rest of the time you are left alone to do your work, then you have discretionary time. The work you do during discretionary time has a weak relationship to time, so using a time-based tool to manage it (such as a calendar) means that you are working harder than is necessary. Consequently, using a calendar as the foundation of any organization system just doesn't cut it, which is why many people also keep some sort of "to-do" list.

Information has a weak relationship to time if it isn't associated with a due date, or if the due date is very far away. For example, suppose you decide to update a page on your website. It's something you'd like to do, something that you may be planning to do, but visitors to your website are unaffected by your inaction. You could pick a due date, but it would be arbitrary; and if you aren't able to update the page by the date you selected, you could still update the page later. This task has a weak relationship to time.

You may refer to your task list as your to-do list. For the purposes of this book, task list and to-do list are interchangeable.

Similarly, if you have a report due on Friday and today is Monday, it probably doesn't matter whether you complete that report on Tuesday at 11:00 a.m. or Wednesday at 2:00 p.m. or Thursday at 7:00 p.m., as long as you meet your deadline of Friday. This task also has a weak relationship to time. Items that have a weak relationship to time are usually activities one would find on a task list.

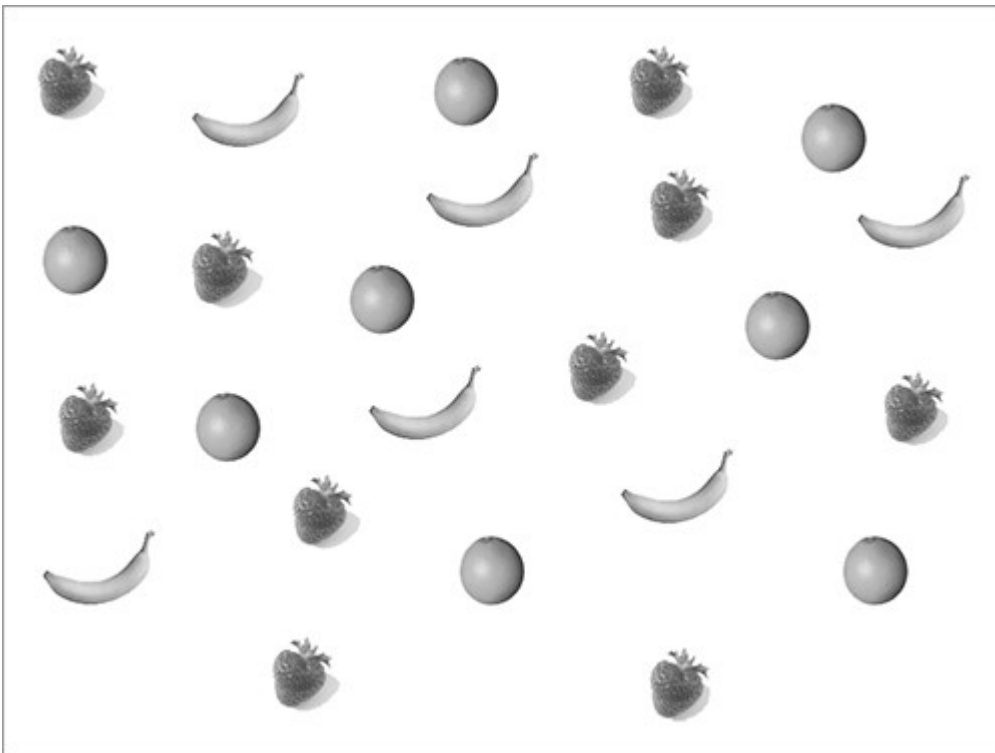
## Organizing by Category

Organizing by category is the fifth option. Categorical organization is more useful for organizing your task list than time-based organization is. Mentally processing uncategorized information takes more effort and is more time-consuming than understanding categorized information.

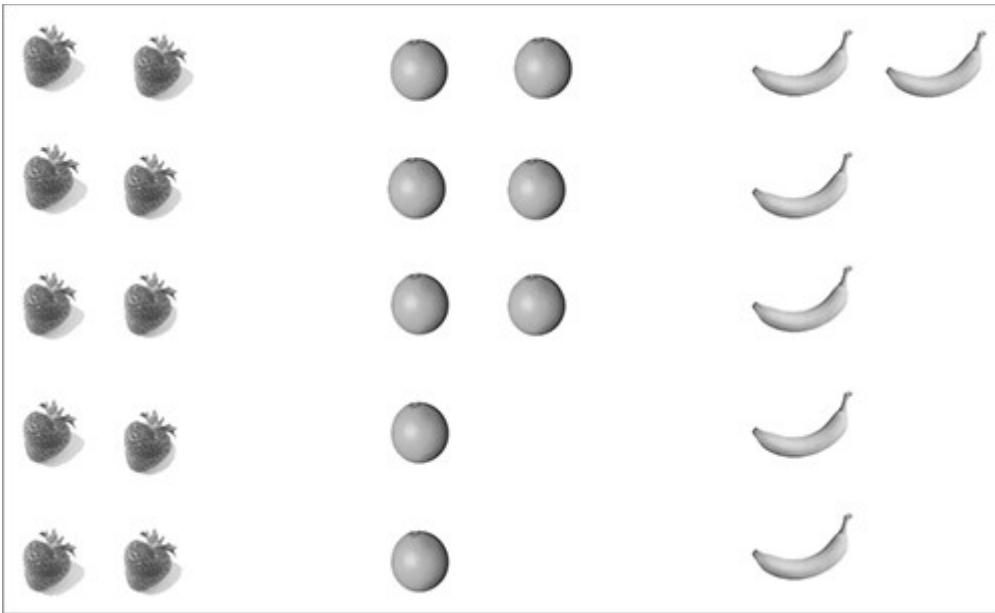
A compelling reason to use categorical organization is that your brain works categorically. A simple visual example demonstrates how information that is categorized is easier and faster to digest than uncategorized information. Figures [4-1](#) and [4-2](#) show some images of fruit. Look at each figure, one at a time, and note how long it takes you to determine two things:

- How many different types of fruit are there?
- Which fruit is there more of?

I'm willing to bet that it is easier and faster for you to answer the two questions using the second image than it is with the first. In this example, the fruit is a metaphor for the details of your life, and hopefully you can see that if you use categorical organization, those details will become much more manageable and actionable.



[Figure 4-1](#)



[Figure 4-2](#)

## Take a moment to reflect

The lessons in this subject focus on getting organized. What action step could you take to improve your skill in this area? For instance, you could ask a family member, friend, or trusted coworker for ideas on how to reorganize your workspace to be more efficient.

# Learn How to Say No

## Introduction

Deciding what you're *not* going to do is just as important as deciding what you are. Learn how to avoid getting caught up in low-value activities so you can focus on the ones that are most aligned with your goals.

The first essential skill of activity management is to be a good *chooser*. Activity management is really just *choice* management, *option* management, and *decision* management. The investment of time is always about this activity or that activity, and choosing what to do next. The best managers are really just excellent activity choosers. Those who experience the work-life quality and balance they desire are skillful activity choosers.

## Get What You Want

Get what you want out of life. You can have it or not, based on your activity choices.

A key part of choosing activities is refusing activities. Good choosers are also good refusers. They know how to say no. One of the first steps to overwhelm is the inability to say no to activities that distract from value-added activities. Put another way, overcoming overwhelm is all about saying no.

Most people think saying no involves only saying no to others. The real gist of saying no is being able to say no to yourself. There is always the temptation to say yes to activities that are fast,

activities that are fun, activities that are familiar, activities that are easy and instantly rewarding. It's so much easier to clean the kitchen sink than to balance the checkbook. We sometimes even welcome interruptions as an excuse for procrastinating on activities we really don't want to do.

When we choose instant-reward activities at the expense of value-added activities, our productivity goes down and very often some self-esteem with it. When we do this, we put ourselves into our very own choice-made activity trap. If we do this habitually, we begin to get a bigger and bigger backlog of value-added activities that need to be done, which, as you may well imagine, drives stress up—way up! That's right! Full-blown overwhelm! To avoid this, it is critical to learn when, where, and how to say no to yourself!

Making great choices, knowing what activities to choose and what to refuse, begins by taking the long view. The long view is deciding what you want to occur in the future, and then specifying the activities required to make it a reality. Your future is any time beyond today.

This means creating a crystal clear picture of the outcomes you desire to produce with the activities you plan to execute. Just doing activities without a destination in mind is like spinning your wheels on an icy road. You are burning energy but not going anywhere.

# Avoid Multitasking

## Introduction

Many people claim they are good multitaskers, but doing more than one thing at once generally lowers productivity. Learn how trying to multitask the wrong tasks can sabotage your efforts and which tasks you can combine without affecting your performance.

### The Truth about Multitasking

New communication technologies and convenient access to the Internet hold great allure. Reluctant to miss anything, many of us jump from one thought to another, from one task to another, from one device to another. The result is split attention; we're seemingly doing several things at once, almost simultaneously. This ability to "multitask" was long considered a desirable skill. However, more than a decade ago, one of the first studies of its kind showed that multitasking actually increases the time it takes to complete a task and decreases the quality of output.<sup>4</sup> It's now widely accepted among researchers and scientists that constant multitasking even makes us worse at multitasking!<sup>5</sup> In other words, the more multitasking we do, the worse we get. . . at everything.

Using a cell phone while driving, whether it's hand-held or hands-free, delays a driver's reactions as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent!<sup>6</sup>

You might be surprised to learn that there is really no such thing as mental multitasking. The human brain can only hold one conscious thought at a time. Common use of the word multitask actually has two distinct meanings. The first is physically doing two things at the same time, and it is hoped that neither task requires too much attention. For example, driving and talking on the phone simultaneously might not be a problem if the conversation is relatively light, you're on familiar roads, and the traffic isn't heavy. However, if the road conditions are difficult, such as encountering

construction or detours, or the conversation is intense, many people find themselves abandoning one task in order to focus attention on the other. (Do you ever find yourself turning down the radio—or telling your caller you have to hang up—when you're lost, or when the traffic suddenly gets heavy?)

The second, and more common, use of multitask describes the behavior of switching one's attention rapidly back and forth between tasks or ideas. The thoughts in our mind can change so fast that it seems like we're thinking about things simultaneously, but the process is actually linear, called cognitive switching.

Both types of multitasking, physical or cognitive switching, are subject to the finding that they cause an increase in time to completion and a decrease in quality of the tasks.

A study published by the American Psychological Association concluded that the ability to switch between tasks, termed mental flexibility, generally peaks in one's twenties and then decreases with age.<sup>7</sup> The extent to which mental flexibility decreases depends upon the type of tasks being performed. However, the findings of this study indicate that it decreases an average of almost 31 percent from a person in her forties to a person in her seventies.

Given all the data arguing against the effectiveness of multitasking, you might think that my advice would be to never multitask. Actually, I'm a big fan of multitasking, but the secret to successful multitasking is control. When you choose whether to multitask, instead of doing it out of habit, you're more likely to be efficient and effective. For example, I often combine tasks that don't require too much mental energy, such as catching up with a friend by phone while emptying the dishwasher or folding the laundry. Neither of these tasks requires much concentration, and the consequences of distraction are minor (for example, you might have to ask your friend to repeat something, or you might put a dish in the wrong cabinet). Conversely, if you are driving down the highway and you answer the phone out of habit simply because it rings, you have not decided to multitask. You inadvertently relinquished control over the situation.

Do you skim your email while you're on the phone simply because it's in front of you? Do you leave your email client open, with messages automatically downloading, all day, even while you're trying to do other things? How many application windows do you routinely have open on your monitor? If you're like most people, the answer might be in the double digits. These are all examples of sabotaging your own attention, rather than supporting it. You've created a situation where multitasking is virtually mandatory, rather than optional, and despite your intention to focus. Again, you are not deciding; you are relinquishing control.

You can also apply to productivity a useful lesson from martial arts that I have learned. It's called eliminating chosa—refining your movements to remove wasted effort. Efficiency is useful regardless of its application. In martial arts, conserving your energy by eliminating chosa can provide you with the extra burst you need to win a fight or escape an attacker. When you switch tasks, right in the middle, because something else grabs your attention, you greatly increase the time it takes to complete the task, and you decrease the quality of your output, just like wasted movement in martial arts. Even when the consequences aren't dire, you are still expending more effort to get less done. That's because when you are jumping from task to task, no task is getting your full attention; and it takes some percentage of brainpower to switch among them.

For example, have you ever been engrossed in a document or spreadsheet, and had a pop-up screen of a downloading email cause you to lose your train of thought or neglect to include something you intended? If studies prove that multitasking causes you to take longer and perform worse, yet you find yourself routinely multitasking, this probably means that most tasks you perform are taking you longer than necessary. More importantly, what you are putting out into the world might really be only a fraction of your true talents, skills, and abilities. It's up to you to decide if that's all right with you.

Clearly, multitasking has its time and place—the time and place you choose to engage in it. Otherwise, it is probably sabotaging your efforts.

# Overcome Procrastination

## Introduction

Does procrastination ever prevent you from accomplishing critical work or make you wonder what you did with your day? This lesson shares practical strategies for overcoming procrastination—and making the most of your work time.

## THIRTEEN

## Overcome Procrastination

**It has been said** that “procrastination is the thief of time.” A wise man in one of my seminars expanded on that by saying, “Procrastination is the thief of life.”

Your ability to overcome procrastination and to get the job done on schedule can make all the difference between success and failure in your career.

However, the fact is that everyone procrastinates. Everyone has too much to do and too little time. But if everyone procrastinates, what is the difference between the high producer and the low producer?

Simple. The *high producer* procrastinates on tasks and activities of low or no value. The *low producer* procrastinates on tasks that have considerable value to the company and to the individual's own career. For you to produce at your maximum, you must resolve to engage in “creative procrastination” from this day forward.

Consciously and deliberately decide which tasks you are going to put off. Look at your list of work for the day and choose those items that you are not going to do until you have completed other items that are vastly more important. You must work consciously and deliberately instead of procrastinating accidentally and automatically.

We always tend to procrastinate on our biggest tasks, which are usually our highest-value tasks as well. There are a series of techniques that you can use to overcome or at least manage procrastination. In fact, there are libraries full of books, one or two of them written by myself, on



the subject of overcoming procrastination. Here are some good ideas that you should start with right away.

## **Mental Programming**

“Do it now!”

These are perhaps the most powerful words you can use to increase your productivity. Whenever you find yourself procrastinating on an important task, repeat to yourself, with energy and enthusiasm, “Do it now! Do it now! Do it now!”

The amazing discovery is that after you have repeated these words ten, twenty, or even a hundred times, you will find yourself unconsciously impelled to stay on your most important task and complete that job before you do anything else.

## **Completing Larger Tasks**

Henry Ford once wrote, “Any goal can be achieved if you break it down into enough small parts.”

Any big task that you have to complete can be completed if you break it down into enough small parts. One of the best techniques of all is to divide your task into “bite-size pieces.” Take a piece of paper and write down every small part of the task that you have to do, in sequence, from the first little job to the final job that completes the task.

Then, discipline yourself to do “number one” on your list. Sometimes, the decision to take action on the first step on a large task makes it easier for you to do the next step, and the next step, and the next step as well. Sometimes just forcing yourself to start on a major task will help you to develop the momentum and energy necessary to work right through until the task is complete.

## **The Salami Slice Method**

A variation of the “bite-size pieces” technique for overcoming procrastination is called the “salami slice method.” Just as you would not try to eat a loaf of salami in one bite, you do not try to do a large task in one time period. Instead, you salami-slice the task; you reduce the size of the task by slicing off one small part at a time. You then resolve to complete that one small part before you go on to something else.

Each time you sit down with your major task, especially if you are overwhelmed with other pressing responsibilities, resolve to complete one part of the task at a time. Often this strategy will get you started on the project and make it easier to complete parts two, three, four, and so on.

## **Develop a Sense of Urgency**

One of the rarest and most valuable human qualities in the world of work is a sense of urgency. It is estimated that only about 2 percent of people move quickly to get the job done. When you develop a reputation for having an “action orientation” and for getting the job done quickly, you’ll move onto the fast track in your career.

When 300 chief executive officers were asked what employees could do to put themselves on the fast track in their corporations, 85 percent of the top executives had the same reply. The most

important qualities that they looked for were 1) the ability to set priorities and 2) the ability to start on the most important job and get it done quickly and well.

When you develop a reputation for starting on your most important tasks and completing them quickly and well, you will be happily surprised at all the wonderful opportunities that will open up for you.

# **Control Interruptions**

## **Introduction**

When you are working on tasks that require intense concentration, an interruption can set you back. Get tips on how to minimize interruptions so that you can remain focused on your work.

## **FIFTEEN**

## **Control Interruptions**

**Unexpected and** unscheduled interruptions are among the biggest time wasters in business and industry. These interruptions can be in the form of a bell going off on your computer, a telephone ringing, an SMS message coming in on your smartphone, or people just walking into your office because they need to talk.

It turns out that people are the greatest time wasters in the world of work. As much as 50 percent of time at work is spent in idle chitchat with coworkers. Many people come into work in the morning and begin chitchatting with their coworkers, and then continue for the next two or three hours. In many environments, people don't really start serious work until about 11:00 a.m., and then soon it is time to break for lunch. After lunch, they come back and chitchat with their coworkers some more, not getting back into the job until 1:30 or 2:00 p.m.

## **Work All the Time You Work**

The rule for you is to "work all the time you work." When you go into your workplace, begin work immediately. Do not chat with others, read the newspaper, or surf the Internet. Since you planned out your day the evening before, you begin immediately on your most important task, and keep working, task by task, until you get your most important jobs done.

## **Minimize Interruptions**

When someone phones you, cut to the chase immediately. Say something like, "Hello, Bill. It's nice to hear your voice. What can I do for you?"

Get right to the point. Don't waste time. Before you call Bill, quickly write out an agenda of the points you want to cover in your phone call. When you get Bill on the line, you say, "I know how busy you are. I have three points that I need to go over with you and then I will let you get back to work."

This approach is both polite and professional. Most busy businesspeople are going to appreciate your getting to the point quickly and then getting off the phone.

When someone comes into your office to chat, you can say, “I would love to talk with you right now, but I really have to get back to work. I have to complete this task by this afternoon.”

Whenever you say those magic words, “I have to get back to work,” the other person will pack up and leave.

## **Stand Up Immediately**

To minimize the time cost of unexpected interruptions, when someone comes into your office, stand up and approach the other person saying something like, “I was just on my way out. What can I do for you?”

Then, you walk with the person out of your office and back into the hallway, talking and listening. When the person has finished talking, you then let him go back to his work, and you return to your office and your work.

Another technique is to take outside visitors to a separate meeting room rather than bringing them into your office. Then, you politely set a time limit at the beginning of the discussion by saying something such as, “I have an important call coming in from our agent in London at exactly 3:15. I can’t get out of that appointment. I’m sure we can cover everything we need to cover by that time.”

In his book *The Effective Executive*, Peter Drucker makes the point that not only do people waste your time, but you waste the time of other people. He suggests that you have the courage to go and ask other people, “What do I do that wastes your time?” When you invite people to be perfectly honest with you in answering this question, you will be quite amazed at the ideas you’ll hear to help increase their efficiency and effectiveness, and your own as well.

# **Delegate**

## **Introduction**

If you are someone who prefers to do everything yourself, you may be interfering with your ability to accomplish your goals. Learn which tasks are suited for delegation, to whom you should delegate them, and how to communicate what needs to be done.

If a task simply has to be done, but you cannot get to it, then the best way to give yourself more time is to delegate it to someone else. This is eminently desirable and yet, for some, curiously difficult. What are the pros and cons?

First, the advantages. Consider these by asking yourself what sort of manager you want to work for yourself. You could probably list a great many qualities: someone who is fair, who listens, who is decisive, good at their job and so on – but I bet you would put someone who delegates high on the list. The opposite is a boss who hangs on to everything, does not involve you, is probably secretive and generally not the sort of person you would want to work for at all. So, if you delegate

effectively, there are major advantages in other ways: motivation and the chance to tackle new things for one, as well as the time you will save.

Second, the difficulties. Delegating is a risk. Something may go wrong and what is more, as the manager, you may be blamed. So, despite the fact that going about it the right way will minimize the risk, there is temptation to hang on to things. This makes for problems in two ways. You have too much to do, and particularly too much at the more routine end, keeping you from giving things that are clear priorities the attention you know they deserve. And staff do not like it, so motivation – and productivity on the things they are doing – will also be adversely affected.

But there is another important and significant reason why delegation sometimes does not happen. This is fear – not that the other person will not be able to cope, but that they will cope too well, that they will improve the method, that they will do things more quickly, more thoroughly and better in some way than you. If you are honest, you may admit this is a real fear too. Certainly, it is a common one. Though it is precisely how innovation can occur. It is not a reason that should put you off delegating – the potential rewards are too great. The amount you can do if you delegate successfully is way beyond the improvement in productivity you can hope to achieve in any other way. So, it is a vital area. But what about something delegated that does go better? So much to the good, this is one of the key ways that progress is made in organizations as new people, new ways and new thinking are brought to bear on tasks. Without it, organizations would become stultified and unable to cope with change. And besides, as a manager you should be the reason they are able to make this happen. It is your selection, development, counselling and management that create and maintain a strong and effective team; and this is something for which you deserve credit.

Making delegation successful needs a considered and systematic approach to the process. What does successful delegation achieve? There are several key results. Delegation:

- creates, for those to whom matters are delegated, opportunity for development and accelerated experience;
- builds morale (precisely because of the opportunity above) through the motivational effect of greater job satisfaction, and achievement long and short term in the job (and ultimately beyond it);
- has broader motivational effects around a team, as well as on the individual;
- for the delegator, concentrates time and effort on those aspects of their job that are key to the achievement of objectives;
- brings a more considered, or creative, approach to bear, uncluttered by matters that may distract or prevent a broad-brush or longer-term perspective.

You can probably think of specific advantages springing from these kinds of general effects in your own job. Yet, it can be curiously difficult to delegate, and some managers find it impossible. Just as you want to report to someone who delegates, so too will those who work for you. If the time gains to be made from delegation seem inadequate to make you do it, or do it as much as you should, maybe this will produce additional pause for thought. Despite the several and considerable advantages delegation can bring, it is not without its risks. This element of risk makes it difficult to accomplish, but several factors can help:

1 Minimizing the risks. There is always the possibility that delegation will not work. After all, it passes on 'the right to be wrong' as it were, by putting someone else in the driving seat. So, if a misjudgement is made about the choice of what is to be delegated, to whom it is to be delegated or how the process will be carried out, things may end up with mistakes being made, and time being wasted as a result. The net intention from all this must be to minimize the inherent risks, first by selecting tasks that are suitable for delegation. In most jobs there will be certain things that should sensibly be omitted. These include:

- matters key to overall results generation or control;
- staff discipline matters;
- certain contentious issues (eg staff grievances);
- confidential matters (though be sure they need to be confidential; protecting unnecessary secrets can be very time-wasting and often fruitless).

Then, in picking the best person to whom to delegate, you should ask questions such as:

- Have they undertaken similar tasks in the past?
- Do they have the necessary knowledge, experience and capability?
- Is it too much to cope with at once?
- Is prior training (however informal) necessary?
- Do they want to do more? (Or should they?)
- Will they be acceptable to others involved and will it be accepted also as a fair opportunity amongst peers?

Thereafter, perhaps the greatest guarantee of success is clear communication, and that means more widely than just with the person involved. Others may have to know what is going on and have to trust in the person's ability to do something. Messages may need to be passed up and down and across the line to ensure total clarity. Make sure there is nothing left out regarding authority and responsibility and that, above all, the individual concerned knows why the job is necessary and why they are doing it. And, as the result of any briefing, be confident that they are able to do it satisfactorily.

Any explanation needs to make clear whether what is being done is a one-off exercise, perhaps in an emergency, or ultimately a permanent addition to the existing set of responsibilities. Remember, delegation is more than simple work allocation and, as such, can have implications for such matters as job descriptions, salary and employment conditions. Assuming that delegation is well chosen and communicated, the next step is to keep in touch, at least initially, with how things are going.

2 Monitoring progress. Once something has been passed over, keeping in touch can easily be forgotten, and when done it can present certain problems. It must be done, in a word, carefully. If it is not, then it will smack of interference and may doom the whole process. The simplest way to monitor in an acceptable way is to build in any necessary checks at the time of the original briefing and handover. From the beginning, ask for interim reports at logical points. Do not simply arrive unannounced at someone's desk and ask to see the file (they may be at an awkward stage). Let them

bring things to you, at prearranged moments. If they have been well briefed, know what is expected and to what standards, then they can deliver in a way that either duplicates past practice, or brings something new to the activity. Either may be appropriate in the short term, though, as nothing lasts for ever, new thinking is usually to be encouraged once the person has a real handle on the basics.

It may be necessary to let things proceed, to bite your tongue and resist taking the whole matter back during this stage as you see things proceeding in a way that may well differ, if only a little, from the way in which you would have done the job. The ultimate results make all this worthwhile, and not just in time terms but in terms of growth and development within the workplace. So far so good. If all goes well surely there is nothing more to be done? Wrong. The process must be evaluated.

3 Evaluating how delegation has worked. Once sufficient time has gone by and you can assess how things have gone, a number of questions should be asked. These can usefully include:

- Has the task been completed satisfactorily?
- Did it take an acceptable amount of time?
- Does it indicate the person concerned could do more?
- Are there other tasks that could be delegated along the same route?
- What has been the effect on others (eg are others wanting more responsibility)?
- Is there any documentation change necessary as a result?
- Has any new or revised methodology been created and are there implications arising from this (eg a change to standing instructions)?
- Overall, what has the effect been on productivity?

This last brings us to a key aspect of evaluation: what has the effect been on you? In other words: what have you done with the time saved? (This might make new work possible, or facilitate a greater focus on key or long-term issues.) There is little to be gained by delegating if you only end up submerged in more detail and having little or nothing of real substance to show for the change.

Similarly, should the process not be a success, questions should be asked about what went wrong and they too need to address both sides, asking not just what did someone do wrong or misunderstand, but also raising such questions as how thoroughly you in fact briefed that person. It is important to learn from the experience; testing what you delegate, to whom and seeking the best way of handling the process is well worthwhile. If you develop good habits in this area, it can pay dividends over time.

At the end of the day, the effect on others is as important as the effect on you. People carry out with the greatest enthusiasm and care those things for which they have responsibility. In delegating you pass on the opportunity for additional responsibility (strictly speaking, responsibility can only be taken, you cannot force it on people) and you must also pass on with it the authority to act. As has been said, delegation fosters a good working relationship around a team of people. Not least, it produces challenge and, although there are risks, people will normally strive hard to make it work and the failure rate will thus be low. Certainly, the effect on productivity can be marked. But – there

is always a but with anything of this sort – it is a process that needs care, determination and perhaps even sacrifice. Delegation is not just a way of getting rid of the things you regard as chores; among the matters most likely to benefit from delegation are almost certainly things you enjoy doing.

The potential rewards cannot be overrated, and the need to make delegation work is therefore strong. Theodore Roosevelt once said: ‘The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and the self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.’ Sound advice, and for the manager wanting to be a good time manager it is crucial. The two things go together. You cannot be as good at time management if you are a poor delegator. Get both right and you have a major part of the overall management process working for you. This is an area to think on:

- Do you delegate?
- Do you delegate the right things and do it sufficiently often?
- How well does it work?

While the principles reviewed here are important and it is something to be tackled on the right basis, an intention and commitment to making it work are perhaps most important. It may be worth more time to check it out. If you think there is more that you could delegate, review just what and just how you can action the process to get the very most from it in terms of your time and all the other advantages that can flow from it. Perhaps you should consider attending a course on delegating (or better still, send your assistant!).

## **Take a moment to reflect**

To improve your skills in focusing your attention, identify your three biggest time wasters. What can you do differently to minimize or eliminate them?

# **Congratulations, You've Completed Time Management**