Time Management

The term “time management” is misleading because no one can manage “time” because there are 24 hours in everyone’s day. The key to productivity is, instead, “self-management” and you need ways in which to manage yourself, your behavior, your expectations, decisions and the execution of the plans you’ve made.

What follows are tips for effective self-management so that you can get more things done and reach more goals than you thought possible.

1. Be realistic. This basic concept is also one of the most important. It is vital that you be realistic with yourself about how much you can realistically accomplish in a given amount of time. Don’t set yourself up for failure. Don’t attempt to fill one hour of time with tasks that will actually require three hours of effort. Doing so will result in frustration for you, tasks still not being completed and an increased level of stress. Be realistic as to how much time a given task will likely take and then allot yourself that much time (or even a little extra time) to complete the task. This strategy will result in more things getting completed, more tasks scratched off your “To Do” list and a greater sense of productivity and accomplishment for you.
2. Be assertive and say, “No,” sometimes. Something that gets a lot of people blocked from being more productive is that they do not say, “No,” to requests for activities or additional responsibilities that will infringe on the amount of time they have to complete their tasks. Even if you’re realistic in accurately estimating the amount of time necessary to complete a task and you give yourself the proper amount of time to complete it, you will sabotage your efforts if you don’t turn down requests for things that will use up your available time, energy and focus.
3. Prioritize. Because not every task is equally important, prioritize your tasks, putting the ones that are most important or urgent on the top of your “To Do” list. Use this prioritizing strategy to put into order your tasks on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.
4. Know yourself. We all have personal biological cycles, at various times of the day or night, in which we are not at our best for energy, focus and motivation. Plan your work activities accordingly. If your energy and focus are highest in the morning, plan the activities that demand the most energy and focus for the morning. You’ll frustrate yourself greatly by trying to accomplish high energy and demanding tasks when you’re at a low-energy period in your personal cycle.
5. Know the difference between “perfect” and “sufficient.” With many tasks or goals it is not always necessary for the final product to be “perfect,” although many people believe that perfection is a requirement. Usually, completing a project that is “sufficiently good” is enough to satisfy requirements. This is not to suggest that you are slacking if you don’t strive for perfection, but it does suggest that you will get more projects finished with this strategy. We sometimes burn up and waste vast amounts of time being absolutely meticulous over aspects of projects that are important to us but that may not be important to others.
6. Learn to delegate. Some people waste time and energy trying to do every task in a project themselves. Learn to delegate, when appropriate, some tasks and responsibilities to others so that some of your time and energy are freed up. As long as others complete the delegated tasks to your specifications and expectations, you’ll get more done in the same amount of time.
7. Task chunks. Breaking down large or difficult tasks into smaller, more manageable ones is a good way to decrease feelings of stress and feeling overwhelmed. Breaking down large or difficult tasks and then completing those “task chunks” is helpful in making you feel productive and keeping you on task.
8. Time chunks. Another way to decrease stress associated with large or difficult tasks is to work on tasks in 20-minute chunks or blocks of time. It can feel incredibly daunting to know that you have to work on a project for six hours, but it feels less stressful and intimidating and more manageable to work on that project for just 20 minutes at a time.
9. Timing is important. It’s important that you be selective when you start to work on a project. Pick a time when you’re not too tired, hungry, overly distracted or prone to have interruptions. Any of these factors can easily derail your efforts to get tasks completed.
10. Set goals and rewards. Set some attainable goals for yourself, even small goals, and then reward yourself for accomplishing them. Keep the rewards in proportion to the goals: big rewards for big goals accomplished and smaller rewards for smaller goals achieved.