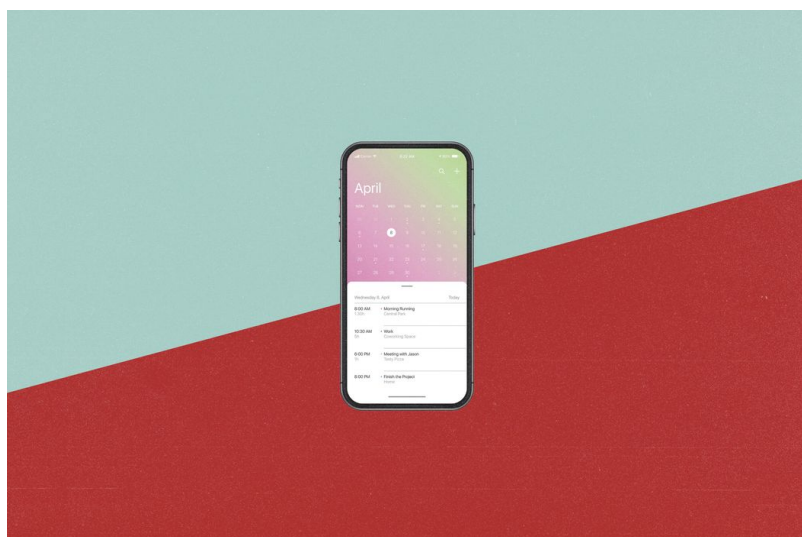


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How to Improve Your Time Management Skills and Succeed in the Workplace



These time management tips can help you increase productivity and give you tools to deal with stress in the workplace.

PHOTO: TAMMY LIAN AND JAKE ZUKE

By [Allison Pohle](#)

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In brief

- Find a time management strategy that works for you, like planning out each day ahead of time and organizing your schedule around when you work best.
- Use to-do lists and distraction lists to organize what you need to get done and what might throw you off track.
- Improve your time management skills by working in sprints to make the most of your productive hours.

Organizing your days may seem like a daunting task, particularly in an age when there are more distractions than ever. In 2019, RescueTime, a time management software program, analyzed 185 million working hours of

anonymized and aggregated data from its users. It found that workers averaged just two hours and 48 minutes of productive device time a day. Productivity and burnout management advisers say you can make the most of your productive hours by planning your workday in advance.

Sometimes that can start with a small step. “If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed,” retired U.S. Navy Admiral William McRaven said in a commencement speech at the University of Texas, Austin. When Adm. McRaven was in Navy SEAL training, his instructors would inspect his bed to make sure it was perfectly made. In the speech, Adm. McRaven says it seemed ridiculous to him initially, but he eventually learned that accomplishing this first task of the day gave him a “small sense of pride” and encouraged him to go on and complete other tasks.

Have a weekly review to determine how to manage your time.

Stave off the “Sunday scaries” by planning out your week. Marie Poulin, a workflow consultant, spends some time on Sunday evenings plotting out how she will spend her workweek. She uses time blocks in Google Calendar to first map out what she calls “mind, body spirit” time for self-care. Then she makes time for meetings and other obligations. She also uses a time-management strategy called the Pomodoro Technique, which involves breaking down projects into tasks and focusing on them in 25-minute intervals. “I think a productive day always starts with a productive week,” Ms. Poulin says.

The planning session doesn’t have to take long, says Khe Hy, founder of RadReads, a newsletter and website that explores productivity, money and ambition. Ten minutes on a Sunday night could save you hours during the workweek.

Try setting an hour by hour plan.

You might feel as though you are doing a lot through the day without accomplishing what you needed to. To combat this, Laura Mae Martin, executive productivity adviser at Google, writes an hour-by-hour list of how she plans to spend the next day.

She thinks of this approach as similar to setting an agenda for a meeting: “If you

set an agenda for a meeting, everybody is in the right place mentally, they know exactly what you're going to talk about, and the meeting starts right away and you're on topic."

To manage your time better, organize your day based on when you work best.

If you are working from home, you might have more flexibility in your work hours. You may be able to begin your day earlier, but break for a midmorning walk—or start later and fire off emails when you are most alert in the afternoon. Understanding how your energy ebbs and flows can help you schedule your day around when you work best, says Ms. Martin.

Start each day with a win.

Like Adm. McRaven, Mr. Hy suggests starting your day off with an easy win, such as making your bed. "By making your bed, you've secured a repeatable win before the rest of the world has even opened their laptops," says Mr. Hy.

If you are a morning person, you can also complete a task related to your long-term goals. "Think about if you just worked on the highest-leverage, highest-skill thing you could do at that point in your life for 25 minutes every morning for your entire career. Anything you ever wanted out of work, you would have in your life," says Mr. Hy.

Start your day off right to get rid of stress.

Before you start responding to emails, try having a brief check-in with yourself, says Emily Ballesteros, a burnout management coach. She puts headphones on and listens to an upbeat song before starting work for the day to get herself into the right mood.

Increase your productivity by working on the highest priority tasks when you have the energy.

Even though the typical workday lasts eight hours, most people are productive for a fraction of those hours, says Mr. Hy. Because he has the most energy in the

morning, Mr. Hy says he knows he needs to complete his strategic and creative work before noon. Once you decide what your priorities are for the day, you should map the highest priorities to when you have the most energy, he says.

Work in sprints.

Find a length of time that you can work uninterrupted and stick to it. Ms. Ballesteros works in 50-minute increments, and ends with five-minute “energy blocks.” During these short breaks, she recommends having a list of what you want to do so you don’t get sucked into your phone. This might include getting a snack, going for a short walk or doing a small household chore. “Deadlines create urgency, which creates focus,” she says.

Use checklists to better manage your time.

Ms. Ballesteros recommends keeping two lists handy: A to-do list and a distraction list. The to-do list, she says, is there to remind you of your priorities during your work sprints. The distraction list is everything that can derail you, such as remembering that you need to text your mom back or need to pick up something at the grocery store. Ms. Ballesteros suggests making time at the end of the day to get the essentials on your distraction list completed.

Avoid burnout by remembering to stop working.

Without commutes, many Americans are working longer hours. You will be more productive and less likely to burn out if you set boundaries for yourself. At the end of each day, a calendar reminder that says, “Shut it down, Marie,” pops up on Ms. Poulin’s screen. “It actually says that to me to remind me to step away from the computer,” she says.

Resources

Software including [Pomodoro](#), [Google Calendar](#) and [Calendly](#) can be used to schedule your time.

[RescueTime](#) can help you track your workload.

[Trello](#) is a collaborative digital whiteboard that lets far-flung colleagues organize projects, create to-do lists and assign tasks.

What to read next

- [What Does It Mean to Manage Up?](#)
- [How to Improve Your Work-Life Balance](#)
- [The Best Career Skills to Have for Any Job](#)
- [How to Build Your Professional Skills](#)
- [How to Set Career Goals and Plan Out Your Professional Future](#)
- [How to Build a Career Path in 3 Steps](#)
- [How to Build Meaningful Workplace Relationships](#)
- [How to Network and Meet the Right People](#)
- [How to Prevent and Recover From Job Burnout](#)

Further reading

- [What People Really Love \(and Hate\) About Remote Work](#)
- [Remote Work Is Here to Stay. Bosses Better Adjust.](#)
- [Work-Life Balance Is Changing. These Apps Can Help.](#)
- [Five Ways to Work Better From Home](#)
- [Shorter Hours Make Stronger Businesses](#)
- [The 5-Hour Workday Gets Put to the Test](#)
- [How Productivity Apps Can Make Us Less Productive \(And Less Happy\)](#)
- [Feeling Burned Out at Work? Join the Club](#)
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