

1 Introduction

Understanding Time Management

"We all have time to either spend or waste and it is our decision what to do with it. But once passed, it is gone forever."

- Bruce Lee ("Zen in the Martial Arts" by Joe Hyams)

Every individual on earth has the same amount of time - 60 seconds in a minute; 60 minutes in an hour; 1,440 minutes in a day; and 525,600 minutes in a year. While a vast majority of people confesses faltering to come to grips with it, extremely few can claim to have made the most of it. How is it that they have got it all done? It's because they have managed a way to figure out how to manage their time effectively.

Time Management is more than just managing time. It is about controlling the use of the most valuable - and undervalued - resource. It is managing oneself in relation to time. It is setting priorities and taking charge of the situation and time utilization. It means changing those habits or activities that cause waste of time. It is being willing to adopt habits and methods to make maximum use of time.

With good time management skills one is in control of one's time, stress and energy levels. One can maintain balance between one's work and personal life. One finds enough flexibility to respond to surprises or new opportunities. It is not how much time one has, but rather the way one uses it. The bottom line is how well one manages time.

Internationally known authority on time management Dr. Alec Mackenzie in his book *The Time Trap* argues that the very idea of time management is a misnomer because one really cannot manage time in the way other resources can be managed: financial capital, physical capital, human capital, information and time. While each of the first four can be augmented, reduced, transferred or otherwise controlled, Time cannot be manipulated. Dr. Mackenzie contends that when it comes to time, one can only *manage oneself* in relation to it. One cannot control time as one can control other resources – one can only control how one *uses* it. In the world in which we live, time cannot be replaced or re-created. It is therefore not for us to choose whether we spend or save time but to choose only *how* we spend it.

2 Misconceptions about Time

There are several misconceptions which we all have about time. They affect everyone including those persons who may be considered quite successful and effective. Here are some of the misconceptions identified by Dr. Mackenzie:

- **Time management is simple - all it requires is common sense.** While it is true that the concept is simple, the self-discipline required to practice effective time management is not easy.
- **Work is best performed under pressure.** Psychological studies show this to be no more than an excuse for procrastination. One does not work well under pressure - only does the best one can under the circumstances. Pressure and challenge must not be confused. Lara's performance when the West Indies Team is in trouble has more to do with application and determination rather than pressure.
- **I use a diary, a to-do list and have a secretary to keep me organized.** One has to keep oneself organized - no one can do it for others. The trouble with the disorganized person is that he hardly has time to listen to his secretary or look at his diary.
- **I do not have the time.** The effective worker or manager often gets more work done in the earlier hours of the morning than most laggards get done in the whole day. He then no longer has to work against tight deadlines and under stress which contributes to heart problems and not unusually the ultimate reduction of time on this earth.
- **Time management might be good for some kinds of work but my job is creative.** Time management is not about routine: it is about self-discipline. Lack of discipline prevents one from being great instead of simply good.
- **Time management takes away the fun and freedom of spontaneity.** Is working under stress, forgetting appointments, making constant excuses and apologies to be fun? Would it not be much more fun if by better organization one had one or two more hours every day to spend with the family, to play games, read a good book, plan for tomorrow and the day and week after or just relax?

3 Symptoms of Poor Time Management

Poor time management shows up by way of one or a combination of typical perceptible symptoms. Managers would do well to look for and reflect on whether they are subject to any of those symptoms with a view to take necessary corrective actions.

The following are some of the indicators of poor time management:

- **Constant rushing** (e.g. between meetings or tasks)
- **Frequent delays** (e.g. in attending meetings, meeting deadlines)
- **Low productivity, energy and motivation** (e.g. 'I can't seem to get worked up about anything')
- **Frustration** (e.g. 'Oh, things just don't move ahead')
- **Impatience** (e.g. 'where the hell is that information I've asked him for?')
- **Chronic vacillation between alternatives** (e.g. 'whichever option I choose it is going to put me at a big disadvantage. I don't know which way to jump')
- **Difficulty setting and achieving goals** (e.g. 'I'm not sure what is expected of me')

Why do/will I have so little time ?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management by crisis • Lack of Planning • Incomplete information • Personal disorganization • Attempting too much • Inability to Say No • Responsibility unclear • Ineffective delegation • Inadequate staff & resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paperwork • Poor communication • Poorly organized meetings • Leaving tasks unfinished • Inadequate controls • Lack of self-discipline • Socializing • Drop-in visitors • Telephone interruptions |
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4 The Eleven Time Thieves

Dr. Donald E. Wetmore ("Time Thieves: The 11 Biggest Time-wasters Revealed") lists out the eleven 'inconsiderate troupe' of eleven thieves that gang up to steal some of the precious time away from productive use of managers.

1. Poor Planning: Failure to see the value of planning and getting impatient to get something done are the causes of poor planning. Absence of a plan of action is likely to trigger off a false start, resulting in unproductive time utilization on the critical path of the task being undertaken. Consequently, the managers might not find enough time for completing the task.

2. Crisis Management: Most often, crisis management is an offspring of lack of prioritization of tasks. As a result of the inability to distinguish between the urgent, the important and the unnecessary tasks, unimportant tasks are likely to get done first at the cost of important tasks. Consequently, the managers are not likely to find enough time to get around to the important things.

3. Procrastination: It is easy to put off tasks if they are not due right away. The trouble is, tasks pile up and can force managers to run into a time crunch later. Procrastination is generally triggered off by the fear of failure / success, perfectionism, wanting to do it all or incorrect priorities. It is a virtue to want to do a good job. But some people become so anxious about getting a job done perfectly that they never complete it. Managers should examine whether their efforts to get the job done perfectly are really improving things or preventing them from getting the job done.

4. Interruptions: Interruptions and distractions arise due to lack of planning, poor concentration and lack of control over environment. They are unnecessary thieves of a manager's time and come in many forms – drop-in visitors, telephones, e-mails unscheduled meetings, poor communications and confused chain of authority etc. Managers should be less willing to automatically give away their time just because they demand it. They should learn to avoid distractions if they are to get work done. They should work in areas where they are less likely to be disturbed and tell people when they are busy and cannot be disturbed.

5. Not Delegating: Wanting-to-do-all by oneself is yet another thief that could let the managers lose control. They feel that employees can never do anything as well as they can. They fear that something will go wrong if someone else takes over a job. They lack time for long-range planning because they are bogged down in day-to-day operations.

6. Unnecessary Meetings: If a meeting is held without a specific agenda and nothing productive comes out of it, clearly that meeting was unnecessary. Obviously, such meetings are thieves as the time is wasted and things just do not get started.

7. The “shuffling blues”: Managers often waste much time because of disorganization. Keeping things that they need in a specific place, eliminating clutter, making sure that they have all the materials or information that they need before starting on the task and following a day-planner or schedule will help keep the ‘shuffling blues’ away at the work place.

8. Poor Physical Setup: Not having the things that the managers need frequently within easy reach and having a lot of the things that they seldom require close-by results in wastage of a lot of time, wearing out the carpet, retrieving what they frequently need. And of course, as they pass others they will often pull them aside to steal some of their time.

9. Poor Networking: Quality relationships with employees and others can be a substantial time-saver as they open doors for the managers with all kinds of opportunities. Failing to develop a good network base will cause them to waste time creating what they might have had through their network.

10. Bad Attitude: Nothing sinks a day more effectively than having a poor attitude. It causes the managers to dwell on the problems and not the solutions and makes it possible to throw the day away. When they are burdening others with their problems and complaints they are forfeiting their valuable time.

11. Negative People: Being surrounded by negative people could mean the managers are spending a lot of their time listening to them but getting nothing much or purposeful from them. Obviously, avoiding such people will help the managers to minimize wasted hours and get some of their productive time back.

How much time do you spend each day on the following time stealers?

- Watching TV
- Reading Newspapers / Magazines excessively
- Idle chat, gossip and telephonic talk
- Opening and sorting mail
- Returning telephone calls
- Meetings
- Paying bills
- Day-dreaming
- Fretting over personal problems
- Caught in traffic snarls
- Planning how to change things
- Waiting for things to happen
- Taking naps
- Eating snacks between meals
- Drinking
- Smoking
- Shopping
- Wagering money

5 Saboteur Time Styles

The other aspect is self-inflicted thieves – ‘saboteur time styles’ that steal time. Based on the typical patterns of behaviour that tend to sabotage people’s attempts at effective time management, Susan Ward (“Are You Sabotaging Your Time Management Efforts”) classifies managers into different personality types and prescribes the following simple exercise, intended to help managers discover their standard behavioural responses to events and provide them with some clues for effective time management.

The Firemen - For them, every event is a crisis. They are always seen busy dousing the fires. They find scarcely any time for anything else and do not spare a thought on time-management. Tasks keep piling up around them, while they are seen rushing from fire to fire all day.

The Over-Committers – They just cannot say ‘No’ to anybody. They oblige and try to please everybody. All that anyone has to do is just ask, and they will chair another committee, take on another project, or organize yet another community event. Consequently, none of the tasks receives complete attention and remains half-done.

The Aquarians - There is such a thing as being too “laid-back” - especially when it starts interfering with their ability to finish tasks or bother to return phone calls. Getting to things that is when they get to them is not time management; it is simple task avoidance.

The Chatty Kathys - Born to socialize, they have astounding oral communication skills and cannot resist exercising them at every opportunity. Every interaction becomes a long drawn out conversation - especially if there is an unpleasant task dawning that they would like to put off.

The Perfectionists – Exactitude is their watchword, and they feel that no rushed job can be a good job. Finishing tasks to satisfaction is such a problem; they need more time zones, not just more time.

Price of Time Inefficiency

What is the price of inefficient time management for an organization? That is a crucial question managers should ask and promptly address. Statistics show that a person - on the average - loses at least one hour of productivity each day due to disorganization and inefficiency. Accordingly calculated, the aggregate monetary value of loss caused by inefficient time management by all the employees in an organization amounts to:

- **1 hour X one person's hourly salary = Rs. _____**
- **6 days a week X _____ Rs. lost today = Rs. lost this week.**
- **48 weeks X Rs lost this week + _____ Rs. lost this year.**
- **Number of persons X _____ Rs. lost this year = Rs (total) _____**

The Six D's

“When’s the last day you didn’t have a high-priority phone call, an urgent email or a stressed-out colleague begging for attention?” asks Tom Gegax, founder of Gegax Management Systems and author of the best –seller “**By the Seat of Your Pants: The No-Nonsense Business Management Guide.**”

He says: “Getting pulled off-course is in every leader’s job description. That’s why enlightened managers must have a strategy for dealing with daily interruptions.” Gegax bases his time-management principles on the “Six D’s” - **don’t do it, delay it, deflect it, delegate it, do it imperfectly and do it.**

“When something pops up, rather than robotically just doing it, I start with the first option,” Gegax says. “If that doesn’t apply, I move on to the second. I keep cruising down the list until I reach the appropriate action.”

For instance, many seemingly urgent tasks disappear if you don’t do them or delay them, he says, leaving you more time and energy to focus on the tasks that matter.

And while some contingencies need immediate attention, your involvement isn’t always required. Carefully consider whether to deflect the situation to another department or delegate it to a subordinate, Gegax advises.

If you do opt to tackle the problem yourself, Gegax cautions against automatically shifting into “perfectionist mode.”

“A large number of my projects could hardly be described as perfect, yet were successful nevertheless,” he says.

Of course, reserve the final “D” — do it — for the tasks you’ve determined will keep you moving toward your goals.

(Matt Krumrie - Time Management for Managers)

An easy way to find out how effectively or ineffectively managers spend their time is to use the **Time Inventory Chart**. At the end of each day they should write down the time spent on each of their activities. The total amount of time for all activities should equal the total number of hours they were awake.

TIME INVENTORY CHART

Activity	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
Sleep								
Hours Awake								
Work: Office & Home								
Commuting & Travel								
Eating								
Dressing & Personal Hygiene								
Family & Personal Work								
Education & Self-Improvement								
Community & Professional Activities								
Leisure								

Hours unaccounted for = _____