

CHAPTER 2

Plan Every Day In Advance

*"Planning is bringing the future into the present
so you can do something about it now."*

Alan Lakein

You have heard the old question, "How do you eat an elephant?
Answer: One bite at a time!"

How do you eat your biggest, ugliest frog? The same way; you break it down into specific step-by-step activities and then you start on the first one.

Your mind, your ability to think, plan and decide, is your most powerful tool for overcoming procrastination and increasing your productivity. Your ability to set your goals, make plans and take action on them determines the course of your life. The very act of thinking and planning unlocks your mental powers, triggers your creativity and increases your mental and physical energies.

Conversely, as Alex Mackenzie wrote, *"Action without planning is the cause of every failure."*

Your ability to make good plans, before you begin, is a measure of your overall competence. The better the plan you have, the easier it is for you to overcome procrastination, to get started, to eat your frog and then to keep going.

Increase Your Return on Energy

One of your top goals at work should be for you to get the highest possible return on your investment of mental, emotional and physical energy. The good news is that every minute spent in planning saves as many as ten minutes in execution. It only takes about ten to twelve minutes for you to plan out your day, but this small investment of time will save you at least two hours (100-120 minutes) in wasted time and diffused effort throughout the day.

You may have heard of the Six "P" Formula. It says, "Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance."

When you consider how helpful planning can be in increasing your productivity and performance, it is amazing how few people practice it every single day. And planning is really quite simple to do. All you need is a piece of paper and a pen. The most sophisticated Palm Pilot, computer program or time planner is based on the same principle. It is based on your sitting down and making a list of everything you have to do before you begin.

Two Extra Hours Per Day

Always work from a list. When something new comes up, add it to the list before you do it. You can increase your productivity and output by 25% or more, by about two hours, from the first day that you begin working consistently from a list.

Make out your list the night before, at the end of the workday. Move everything that you have not yet accomplished onto your list for the coming day and then add everything that you have to do the next day. When you make out your list the evening or the night before, your subconscious mind works on your list all night long while you sleep. Often you will wake up with great ideas and insights that you can use to get your job done faster and better than you had initially thought.

The more time you take to make written lists of everything you have to do, in advance, the more effective and efficient you will be.

Different Lists for Different Purposes

There are different lists that you need for different purposes. First, you should create a **master list** on which you write down everything you can think of that you want to do some time in the future. This is the place where you capture every idea that comes to or every new task or responsibility that comes up. You can then sort out the items later.

Second, you should have a **monthly list** that you make up at the end of the month for the month ahead. This may contain items transferred from your master list.

Third, you should have a **weekly list** where you plan your entire week in advance. This is a list that is under construction as you go through the current week.

This discipline of systematic time planning can be very helpful to you. Many people have told me that the habit of taking a couple of hours at the end of each week to plan the coming week has increased their productivity dramatically and changed their lives completely. This technique will work for you as well.

Finally, you transfer items from your monthly and weekly lists onto your **daily list**. These are the specific activities that you are going to accomplish that day.

As you work through the day, tick off the items on your list as you complete them. This activity gives you a visual picture of accomplishment. It generates a feeling of success and forward motion. Seeing yourself working progressively through your list motivates and energizes you. It raises your self-esteem and self-respect. Steady, visible progress propels you forward and helps you to overcome procrastination.

Planning a Project

When you have a project of any kind, begin by making a list of every step that you will have to complete to finish the project from beginning to end. Organize the project by priority and sequence. Lay out the project in front of you on paper, or on a computer so that you can see every step and task. Then go to work on one task at a time. You will be amazed at how much you get done in this way.

As you work through your lists, you will feel more and more effective and powerful. You will feel more in control of your life. You will be naturally motivated to do even more. You will think better and more creatively and you will get more and better insights that enable you to do your work even faster.

As you work steadily through your lists, you will develop a sense of positive forward momentum that enables you to overcome procrastination. This feeling of progress gives you more energy and keeps you going throughout the day.

One of the most important rules of personal effectiveness is the **10/90 Rule**. This rule says that the first 10% of time that you spend planning and organizing your work, before you begin, will save you as much as 90% of the time in getting the job done once you get started. You only have to try this rule once to prove it to yourself.

When you plan each day in advance, you find it much easier to get going and to keep going. The work goes faster and smoother than ever before. You feel more powerful and competent. You get more done faster than you thought possible. Eventually, you become *unstoppable*.

Eat That Frog!

1. Begin today to plan every day, week and month in advance. Take a notepad or sheet of paper, or use your PDA or Blackberry, and make a list of everything you have to do in the next 24 hours. Add to it as new items come up. Make a list of all your projects, the big multi-task jobs that are important to your future.

2. Lay out each of your major goals, projects or tasks by **priority**, what is most important, and by **sequence**, what has to be done first, what comes second and so forth. Start with the end in mind and work backward.

Think on paper! Always work from a list. You'll be amazed at how much more productive you become, and how much easier it is to eat your frog.