

Time Management Tips

Time is what we want most, but what we use worst.

—William Penn

In addition to the tools already discussed, here are some additional tips or suggestions to help you and your group or team be productive through adjustments to the use of time.

Kaizen

Kaizen is a Sino-Japanese word indicating “improvement,” particularly, incremental improvement. While you should not expect tremendous impacts from your changes overnight, continuous small changes should give results rather quickly. It will take time to achieve *quality time* and some of your people will develop more slowly than others. Consider applying the 5 pillars or 5S associated with Kaizen (Gapp, Fisher, & Kobayashi, 2008; Hirano, 1995):

Quality Time, pages 51–55

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1. *Seiri*—prioritize
2. *Seition*—organize so things can be found quickly
3. *Seiso*—keep the work area clean and uncluttered
4. *Seiketsu-Seiketsu*—have standard procedures to simplify the work
5. *Shitsuke*—self-discipline to show respect for others in your group or team

Philosophy

It is time quality, not time quantity, that counts. It is how you spend your time, not how much time you spend, that is truly important. Spending a lot of time on a project is not what matters; it is how you spend the time that is important. It is important that you take time to relax and do non-job activities, especially at night and on weekends. And remember the importance of interpersonal networks—don't cut off your friends.

Plan Goals

Keep your long-term goals in mind even when you are doing small tasks and unpleasant activities. Periodically review and revise your long-term goals and don't be surprised if they change. That is to be expected. You should also frequently review your short-term goals and be sure to identify daily activities that are necessary to accomplish them. Remember that effective planning saves future time and achieves better results even though it takes time to do it properly. Spending time now to save time in the future may well be worthwhile. Finally, concentrate on your objectives, not just staying busy. Don't confuse activity with results. Staying busy just to be busy is a sign of "workaholism" and prevents the achievement of quality time.

Prioritize

Prioritizing refers to recognizing an activity's importance in accomplishing longer-term goals. Remember that just because something is due "tomorrow" does not mean that it is a priority item. You need to avoid responding to urgent items if they are not priority ones. One way to make sure that you are properly focused is to use a daily "to-do" list—a list of specific items to be done each day.

I tried to keep a list of things I should do each day but when I wrote them all down, I couldn't see how it would be possible to do them all. I was so de-

moralized that I just gave up trying to make a list. So, I just try to do whatever seems to be needed to be done at the time.

You need more than just a list. Be sure to arrange your “to do” items in priority order [A = highest priority = most likely to move you toward achieving your goals; B = intermediate priority; C = lowest priority]. Focus on accomplishing your “A’s,” not “B’s” and certainly not “C’s.” Use a “C drawer” for storage of those items which you do not immediately throw away. Circumstances may change and an item in your “C drawer” may suddenly become a “B” or even an “A.” Don’t skip items on your “to-do” list just because they are difficult or unpleasant, especially “A” items.

The *Pareto* principle, which is commonly referred to as the 80/20 rule, suggests that approximately 80% of effects come from 20% of causes. In terms of time management, you should use it to remind you to keep focused on those things which are the highest priority [80% of your goal achievement will come from 20% of your activities—doing the “A” items]. Sometimes “A” items seem overwhelming. If so, try breaking them into a series of smaller items that can be more easily accomplished. This is known as the Swiss Cheese approach—poke enough holes and soon it is all gone. Do enough small parts to an overwhelming “A” and it, too, will soon be done.

Interruptions

When you are interrupted, consider the nature of the interruption and who is behind the interruption. An email marked as urgent may or may not really be urgent or important. A quick look is all that’s necessary to decide whether to deal with it or save it for later. Whatever you do though, keep the interruption short. Don’t allow it to sidetrack you from your activity.

Analyze

As you consider your goals and develop priorities, you should examine old habits for possible elimination or streamlining to reduce the time spent on them. As suggested earlier, keep a diary or time log to help you identify your major problems and opportunities. Look for times when you are most creative or productive and then try to schedule routine meetings and administrative duties at other times. Continually ask yourself, “What is the best use of my time right now?”

Employ Techniques

In addition to the use of “to do” lists, there are numerous other time management techniques that you should consider using. When you have to wait, consider that waiting time as a gift to relax, plan, or do something that you would otherwise not have done. Carry blank 3 × 5 cards or a small notebook to jot down ideas and notes while you wait. Use waiting time as a break. Even without waiting time, be sure to take breaks every now and then to rest; you will maintain your efficiency and productivity longer that way. And be sure to get a good night’s sleep every day.

Take a break! Get serious. I can’t take a break. I’ve got way too much to do. Besides, if you take a break around here, people will think you’re slacking, and your boss may find something else to assign to you. The only break I get is when I use the restroom but even then I feel the need to get back to work right away.

Maybe if you take an occasional break, you would find that you are more productive when you return to the task at hand.

With regard to “paper,” generate as little paperwork as possible and throw away everything possible. Write replies directly on originals (keep a copy for yourself or keep the original and return the copy). Most importantly, do something with each piece of paper you handle—route to someone else, request other information before completion, and so on (this is sometimes referred to as “handling each piece of paper only once”). Concentrate on only one thing at a time. This also applies to electronic communication. Just because you got an email doesn’t mean you have to respond and certainly doesn’t mean you must respond immediately. Sometimes ignoring emails is the best strategy.

Dealing with others is especially challenging in terms of time management. Other people can help or hinder so there are some tips for dealing with them. Be considerate of others’ time as you want them to be considerate of yours. This helps you establish a positive culture of worth. If your workplace permits, have visitors, mail, and phone calls screened (an answering machine can be used for phones). Have an “open door” policy that means that with Caller-ID you are accessible but not that you physically keep your door open. Start meetings on time (plus a minute or two) even if everyone is not present. Set deadlines for yourself and others. Delegate where feasible and practicable given time demands on others, and when you do delegate, be considerate of others’ time.

Cell Phones

Cell phones, tablets, and laptop computers have become ubiquitous in today's workplaces and can be great time savers, but they can also be time wasters. You need to consider how you are using them, especially around others. When using your cell phone or voice recognition software speak softly to avoid disrupting others. Watch your language, especially when others can overhear you. Be courteous to those you are with; turn off your device if it will be interrupting a conversation or activity. If it must be on and it could bother others, use the "silent" mode and move away to talk. Pay attention during meetings; don't text.

Paradox

But as you consider how to employ these tips, you should also be aware of the paradox of time "No one has enough time, but everyone has all there is." (see the Appendices for more "paradoxes")

While using the "tools" and these tips should enable good progress for the team in its use of time to contribute to the organization's value, there will still be tension or stress in the day-to-day functioning of the team. So, consider how to handle that stress.

Time Management Tips Questions

1. Which tip or tips did you find most useful?
2. Do you use a "to do" list?
3. How much of a time interruption is your cell phone? The cell phones of others?
4. Do any of these tips help you to reduce eroding factors and/or increase enabling ones?

Time Management Tips Actions

Go over these tips with subordinates or team members and discuss openly any areas where potential conflict may occur; for example, where your "A" goal involves them, but they see their role as only a "B" or worse a "C." Focus on the V-REEL® framework and how it may help to identify "A" goals as you move toward quality time.

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