

Time Management Tips for Business Owners

1 Set clear, achievable goals on a yearly, monthly, and daily basis. Write or type your goals someplace where you will see them daily. Break down larger, complex goals into individual steps that can ultimately work their way onto a daily to-do list.

2 Create your to-do list first thing every day (or before bed the night before). Prioritize the items listed based on importance, with “importance” defined as what will make the biggest positive influence on your productivity.

3 Use “time boxing” to allocate a fixed time period (a start and end time) for each item on your task list. This will ensure that you don’t lose track of time, you’re able to complete each task, and you’ll meet your deadlines.

Examples: “8:00am-9:00am: Read bookmarked articles. 9:15-10am: Write blog post.” Give yourself a little buffer between each task and use a timer to keep on schedule.

4 Block out “heads down” time by removing distractions. Log out of social applications like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Shut your email, instant messaging, and chat applications down temporarily. Turn off your phones and let messages go to voicemail. (Most cell phones have a “Do Not Disturb” mode, and many of them allow you to add exception phone numbers to it, such as your child’s school or an important client.)

5 Use customer contact and calendar software (such as Act!) to manage your daily tasks and activities. Choose a tool that enables you to sync your activities and calendar on your computer to the one on your smart phone. Make sure to use your calendar’s built-in reminder feature to alert you 15 minutes or more before any important meeting or activity starts (or longer if you need time to prepare or travel).

6 Take a few minutes after each call or meeting to jot down a summary of key points and action items. Be sure to date it and highlight any action items that you need to add to your to-do list.

7 Organize your workspace, whether it’s your desk, files on your computer, or your email inbox.

- Magazine organizers are a great, low-cost way to store documents, reports, and other paper-based files.
- Create sub-folders on your computer. Tip: Use an “@” sign in front of your most commonly used folders to force them to the top of alphabetical listings so it’s quick and easy to find the files you use most often.
- Set up filters in your email software to automatically move emails from specific people or about specific topics into predefined folders.

8 Don’t strive for perfection. Make sure that you’re investing the appropriate amount of time into a single task, project, or deliverable. The 80/20 rule applies here. If you spend 40 hours on project that yields high quality results, is spending another five hours to “make it perfect” a good use of your time? That extra five hours can usually be used more effectively, such as to tackle other items on your list.

9 Learn to say “no.” Many of us resist saying “no” to avoid appearing less competent, less devoted, or less of a team player. But when requests from others are of truly lower priority, they can drain your productivity. In such situations, especially those in which you’d like to help just to be helpful, try saying, “I’d love to help, but I’m swamped. Can I get it to you sometime next week?” You may find that the individual is pleased by your attempt but manages to find an alternative that lets you off the hook.

10 Delegate! Delegating can be especially hard for business owners who tend to be do-it-yourselfers, but you can’t focus on important tasks if you’re trying to “do it all.” Start by delegating tasks that are less important and have less risk associated with them, and gradually ramp up responsibilities as individuals prove capable. This has the added benefit of developing your employees professionally.