



Robert W. Bly

Book Make Every Second Count

Time Management Tips and Techniques for More Success with Less Stress

Robert W. Bly

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Recommendation

Dilbert, Scott Adams' sad sack cartoon antihero, is the modern-day Everyman. Micromanaged and overworked, Dilbert seldom gets what he needs – especially time. A recent commercial includes this voice mail for Dilbert: “You have 947 messages...all urgent.” And he is not alone. *Men's Health* magazine recently reported that the average *Fortune* 1000 worker deals with 178 messages daily – more than 22 messages every hour. Today, few people have the time to manage their multiple responsibilities and tasks. People need to learn how to use their time more efficiently. Business author Robert W. Bly teaches you how. *BooksInShort* recommends his guide for its abundant useful tips and techniques for optimizing your productivity, enhancing your performance and becoming more efficient.

Take-Aways

- Time is your “most precious commodity.”
- To find more time, stretch the hours you have.
- Stay organized by listing your daily tasks, ongoing projects and long-term tasks.
- Accomplish more by setting firmly defined goals.
- Schedule your day and prioritize your tasks.
- Set aside intervals of time when no one can interfere with your work.
- Bad habits, such as too much TV, waste time. Limit or eliminate these habits.
- Information overload can bury you. Control it.
- Optimize your time to be more productive by changing your pivotal activities.
- Become more energetic by eating right, drinking lot of fluids, exercising and getting enough sleep.

Summary

It's (Past) Time to Save Time

Everything today moves at lightning speed. Time is your “most precious commodity.” To protect your time, learn to work more efficiently and to complete your planned tasks each day. After all, as professional organizer Sandee Corshen says, “You can't deal with today if yesterday is staring you in the face.”

“Time is a nonrenewable resource that's consumed at a constant and relentless rate. Once an hour is gone, it's gone forever; you can never get it back.”

Start by scheduling your activities. Break your day into segments of an hour, 30 minutes or 15 minutes, and schedule yourself by segments. Refer to your schedule

during the day to remain on track. Use three checklists to manage your responsibilities:

1. A “daily to-do list” of activities you must complete today.
2. A “project to-do list” of ongoing projects and deadlines.
3. A “long-term to-do list” of important tasks you can do over time.

“You may delay but time will not.” (Benjamin Franklin)

Prioritize

- Work on your most important tasks first.
- Do not procrastinate.
- Take breaks as necessary.

Studies show that people can work well for 90 to 120 minutes, and then they need short breaks to recharge. If you can, focus on only one task during this work period. Tackle your hardest jobs when you have the most energy. Switch from one chore to another to avoid boredom and stress. Establish firm daily goals like author Stephen King, who “writes 1,500 words every day except on his birthday, Christmas and the Fourth of July.”

“More information has been produced in the last 30 years than in the previous 5,000.” (author Richard Saul Wurman)

To make work go faster, look for joy and satisfaction in the task. The less worry the better, particularly since “only 8% of worries are about real problems.” Eliminate habits that waste time. List them and drop them. TV is an enormous time waster. Turn it off.

Goal Setting

To accomplish a lot, set ambitious goals. Use the SMART system. Make your goals “specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-framed.” Post your tasks on a four-cell “Priority Grid” that sorts them by urgency and importance:

1. **Upper left: “Highly urgent but not important”** – Completing these tasks doesn’t support your goals, but you must do them quickly. Can you delegate them?
2. **Upper right: “Highly urgent and highly important”** – Focus on your priorities.
3. **Bottom left: “Not urgent and not important”** – Ironically, many people spend most of their time on these chores.
4. **Bottom right: “Not urgent but highly important”** – People seldom focus on the tasks that support their long-range goals.

“Managing information overload is critical to time management.”

The more organized you are, the more efficient you become. Adopt these habits:

- Carry “a pocket to-do list and a pen, or a personal digital assistant (PDA).” Write reminders and new ideas as they occur. Without notes, you will lose new ideas.
- File everything, including warranties, bills and receipts.
- Maintain a clutter-free desk. Clutter impairs efficiency. The typical executive wastes six weeks each year searching for missing information.
- Maintain a calendar of events, appointments and deadlines. Post your calendar prominently. Visual organizers can help you stay on top of things.
- Use a bulletin board to keep your most important paper items on display at all times.

What Is Your Time Worth?

Work hard on a daily basis, but don’t burn yourself out. Don’t let co-workers interfere with your schedule. Take breaks, but avoid sloth and wasted time, which slow productivity. Assign a dollar value to your time to understand how much money you lose to waste. As entrepreneur Victor Kiam cautions, “Procrastination is opportunity’s assassin.” Big time wasters include cutting the grass when a high school kid could do it, shopping in person instead of online, doing errands that a freelance assistant could do and taking on community activities, except those that nourish you most. Have an accountant prepare your taxes.

“Irrelevant information is a great time-waster, but relevant information that is not organized properly can steal away precious hours of work time from a very busy schedule.”

Moving more quickly is only helpful if you’re also effective. *Miami Herald* columnist Leonard Pitts once concluded, “We move faster than ever, but never quite fast enough.” Use this nine-step process to think faster and do better work:

1. **“Identify the problem”** – You can’t solve a problem if you don’t know what it is.
2. **“Assemble all pertinent facts”** – Organize all your research materials. Condense and type up the pertinent notes to gain familiarity. This helps develop new perspectives.
3. **“Gather general knowledge”** – The more you know, the better. But avoid “information overload.” Be selective about sources of information. Use your high-energy periods to review demanding data.
4. **“Look for combinations”** – That is, seek “new relationships between old ideas.”
5. **“Sleep on it”** – Rest after you’ve worked hard to help your brain absorb data and develop solutions. Don’t waste precious sleep time stewing over today’s work or tomorrow’s.
6. **“Use checklists”** – They save a lot of time and help you focus.
7. **“Get feedback”** – That’s why Sherlock Holmes kept Dr. Watson around.
8. **“Team up with others”** – An ideal team has two members who listen to one another.

9. **“Give new ideas a chance”** – “Cars, airplanes, light bulbs [and] electricity” were once new, untried ideas.

Information Overload

Drowning in data causes stress and illness. Filter information selectively. Subscribe only to the publications you need. Instead of reading, scan printed material. Don’t read news stories that have no relevance to your day-to-day work. Reading the newspaper every day or watching the evening news can be unproductive. If it is, break the habit. To manage information overload:

- **“Subscribe to a customized news/data service”** – Receive only the news you need.
- **“Get your voice mail under control”** – To reduce telephone tag, insist that callers leave detailed messages.
- **“Reduce your email correspondence”** – Keep your emails short and sweet.
- **“Protect yourself”** – Don’t communicate with people who waste your time.
- **“Specify your desired content level”** – You don’t always need all the details. Often, a snapshot is better.
- **“Cleanse and purge frequently”** – Get rid of unneeded books and magazines.
- **“Know when you have enough information”** – Stop researching when you have the basic information you require.

“Practice good filing ‘hygiene’...don’t let papers pile up. File what you need and toss the rest. If information is available elsewhere, don’t add it to your files.” (Jeff Davidson)

Most people do not work at maximum efficiency. To increase your productivity by 10% to 25%, apply your focus as follows: Set aside certain times for your hardest assignments. Let others know not to disturb you at those times. Never schedule appointments during these periods. Do easy jobs at other times of the day. Eliminate unnecessary tasks.

Personal Habits

Energetic people accomplish more. Increase your energy by drinking a lot of “cold water, juice or other fluids.” Use multivitamins. Eat well, with “protein, fats and carbohydrates at each meal.” Cut back on “caffeine and sugar.” To re-energize, periodically wash your face and hands. Get more sleep. Don’t think and fret at night. Before going to bed, write down the things on your mind and place the list next to your bed to free yourself from worry. Eat breakfast (even a small one). Avoid large meals at midday and alcohol during the day.

“The ‘lunch hour’ is fast disappearing from the American business world as workers more frequently eat lunch at their desks.”

A quick catnap (15-20 minutes) early in the day can restore your energy. Do not nap late in the day because that causes difficulty falling asleep at night. Exercise at least 30 minutes three times weekly. Go to bed and awake on a schedule. Get up on time. Never go back to sleep after waking naturally (with no alarm clock). Supercharge your productivity by getting up and beginning your work “an hour earlier every day.” Relax by using yoga, Transcendental Meditation and other techniques.

“Many people boast of going years without a vacation. This is a sign of trouble – not commitment.”

Most people spend one-third of their time at work, one-third sleeping and one-third at home engaged in activity. To save time with your home chores, list them “on a daily basis over a week’s time.” Review your list to see what tasks you can consolidate or delegate.

Online Resources

Consolidate your tasks. Combine your errands with taking your children to ball practice. Use your computer to organize your affairs. You may want to create a subfolder set titled “Home Office.” Inside this folder, you can create subcategories, such as Financial, Marketing, Clients, and so on. Do not clutter up your computer desktop with saved files. Keep them in their appropriate folders.

“I am always quarrelling with time! It is so short to do something and so long to do nothing.” (Queen Charlotte)

Some worthwhile scheduling programs and online resources include The Calendar Planner (thecalendarplanner.com), Salon Calendar (freedownloadscenter.com), and Microsoft Outlook and MS Project (Microsoft.com). Additional websites that can help you manage your time and organize yourself include: openbench; backpackit for project management; bigcontacts for customer relationship management; timetimer.com/applications/business.php to time “meetings, phone calls or other time-managed events”; earlytorise for great self-improvement programs; franklincovey for numerous planning and organizing programs; and workingmomsonly for valuable information for mothers who work.

“Yet you can solve most of your time-related problems – not enough time, too much to do, deadlines too short...simply by increasing the productivity of the one source you can control: you.”

Create a Google email account so you can use the site’s planning calendar, Google Calendar, which is very simple to master. Take advantage of “access to Google documents and a host of free tools to use for your online office needs.”

Social Media

With the Internet, you can network easily with your contacts. Social media websites include: Facebook, which has an “‘invitation’ feature” that you can use to invite your friends to “sign up for teleseminars” you create; Twitter, where you can join your customers’ conversations and LinkedIn, which lets you network through special LinkedIn groups in your area of expertise.

“List what you do on a daily basis over a week’s time...then you can find ways to consolidate events or pass tasks on to others.”

For help with social networking, try Ping.fm, which enables mobile phone users to send emails, images and text messages; FriendFeed, which provides a common interface for “Web page, photo, video and music updates” from your online contacts; and Scoutle, which lets you connect with bloggers who create content on subjects that matter to you.

Are You Mobile?

Advances in mobile technology increase productivity. Thanks to the BlackBerry and the iPhone, people can operate efficiently while on the road. Sophisticated 3G networks are commonplace, and a 4G network is now in operation. Cellphones are ubiquitous. Smartphones are incredibly sophisticated technology with such popular features as email, Internet access, document management, online gaming and more. Some mobile devices have moved beyond telephone communications. For example, Apple introduced the iPad, which it “hopes will be the coolest device on the planet.”

Get Someone Else to Do It

If you work around the clock, but still don’t have enough time to accomplish all you want to do, free yourself by delegating and outsourcing work as appropriate. To begin to delegate, give your staff members more responsibility. Demonstrate trust in them. Don’t monitor everything they do. As far as outsourcing goes, be expansive.

“You can’t jam 25 hours into a 24-hour day.”

To save time, many businesspeople and professionals routinely outsource research, bookkeeping, database management and word processing. After all, “everywhere within a one-hour drive are co-workers, colleagues, suppliers, vendors, retailers, service firms and other resources that are ready and willing to do the work you avoid.”

About the Author

Robert W. Bly is the author of 75 books. More than 65,000 subscribers receive his online newsletter, “The Direct Response Letter.”
