



Book Time Management for Busy People

Roberta Roesch
McGraw-Hill, 1998

Recommendation

The colorful, almost cartoonish, look and feel of Roberta Roesch's book will probably put off people who prefer to have their solutions shown to them in black and white. And that's a shame because this book is an excellent time-management resource for everyone. Roesch created her book for people who "don't have time to read time books," and did a really wonderful job. By eschewing the standard book format, she may have alienated some readers who prefer their books to look serious. But it is precisely this format that encourages readers who wouldn't normally buy time management books to give this one a chance. You can read this book straight through, but its most valuable sections stand on their own. A number of questionnaires help you determine whether the material in a section covers an area that concerns you. The book is also peppered with "minutes matter," call-out boxes that offer short time-saving tips. It caters to those with short attention spans, but without being trite. It is particularly useful for those who have purchased time-management books before, but gave up on them out of boredom or frustration. *BooksInShort.com* recommends this book to anyone interested in time-management. In short, if you don't have the time for time management, this book is for you.

Take-Aways

- The best day to begin time management is today.
- Be proud of even small successes during the early stages of your transition towards time management.
- To evaluate how you spend your time, make a list of the things you have time for, don't have time for and wish you had time for.
- A list is only a plan; to put a plan into action, you need a schedule.
- Schedules let you see quickly what you have to do without wasting time worrying about how everything will get done.
- Attach a time estimate to any task on your list that you wish to accomplish.
- Compare your estimated time with your actual time to pinpoint trouble spots.
- Recognize time-crushers and learn to control their impact. Minimizing time spent on at-home chores frees up more time for what you want to accomplish.
- Once you have started time management, keep going.
- You will be able to invest the hours you've saved in the activities you value most.

Summary

Beginning Your New Routine

The best day to begin improving how you manage your time is today. Make a list of the things you do and don't have time for, and a list of things you really want time for. Use these lists to evaluate how you are spending your time.

The first day you decide to improve the way you manage time, wake up in an upbeat mood rather than a downbeat mood. It is much easier to get out of bed thinking about hot coffee and a fresh muffin for breakfast than it is to get up thinking about your crowded schedule. Arrive at work early. This will give you time before the phones start ringing to determine your top priorities for the day. You will be able to prepare for meetings, conferences, appointments and incoming or outgoing phone calls. Immediately begin working on the task you have designated as your top priority.

“Though some people balk at making lists, lists still get a number 10 rating for helping you get what you want to get done - if you keep your lists simple.”

Avoid over planning by knowing the difference between the ideal and the possible. Be realistic when you decided how many hours you will need to complete a task. Keep your task lists simple to make them effective. Divide tasks into three categories: 1) what must be done, 2) what should be done, and 3) what would be good to get done. Once you have identified these tasks and allotted a realistic amount of time to complete each one, block out time slots on your calendar or appointment book.

“While you develop your own special strengths, begin with small steps and give yourself time to upgrade your performance.”

Maintain a log all day that shows how much time you are actually spending to complete tasks. When you compare this to the time you originally projected for each task, the results will give you a better grip on reality. Plan tomorrow before you leave work. Make a list of must-do items, should-do items and would-be-good-to-do items. Create a rough draft of your timetable for tomorrow based on these lists. At the end of the day, congratulate yourself on taking the first steps toward managing your time. It takes time for a time management plan to work. Be proud of even small successes at this early stage.

Weekly Planning

Write down your goals for the week and the actions you have to complete to accomplish them. Then 'valutize' this list of tasks. Valutizing is similar to prioritizing, it involves:

- Determining the week's most important, essential tasks.
- Assessing all your listed tasks to see if they are essential.
- Eliminating all tasks that don't contribute to what you need or want to accomplish.
- Identifying the specific actions necessary to get moving on the remaining activities.

“Schedules are the engines that make master-list plans work.”

Your valutizing may change during the week depending on circumstances. As new tasks come up, assign them a value. Understand your limits, so you can be practical about what you can achieve.

Use your valutized list to create a weekly master plan. List activities by category: immediate action, projects due by the end of the week and projects to initiate. Attach a corresponding time estimate to each activity.

“There's no point saving minutes and hours, if you don't take genuine pleasure in your time...”

A list is only a plan. To put your plan into action, create a schedule that allows you to see what you have to do without wasting time worrying about how everything can get done. A weekly schedule saves the time of rewriting daily schedules.

Optimizing Your Schedule

1. Break up weekly objectives into smaller daily increments. Identify your best time of day for getting things done and plan to accomplish your most essential tasks at that time.
2. Don't over-schedule. To reduce stress, leave time for taking breaks, catching up and coping with unforeseen circumstances.
3. Review your schedule throughout the day.
4. Check off tasks and objectives as you complete them. The good feeling you experience will inspire you to continue moving forward.
5. Check tomorrow's schedule before leaving work. If necessary, adjust it to include today's still-to-do tasks.
6. Accept that you will not always be able to cross off every task by the end of the week.

"Always remember the main thing is to concentrate on the whens and hows that will move you ahead in time-saving ways and put you on the right track."

Use a single planner for your work and personal commitments. It doesn't matter if you use a simple notebook or a commercial planner. Carry it with you at all times, along with your business cards, a note pad and important addresses and phone numbers.

Keep a weekly log that includes every item on your master plan. Continue to compare your estimated time to the actual time taken to complete tasks. This allows you to pinpoint trouble spots in your day that cost you time and energy.

Using Technology to Save Time

Be aware of the technological tools you can use to gain time. One is a contact manager program, which is software with database capability. You can load your daily planner into the computer, and organize and coordinate your calendar. If you need a hard copy you just print one. A contact manager program saves time because you don't have to retrieve information from files.

"You lose time - and gain tension - when you put off making decisions for significant lengths of time."

The Internet offers several time savers. E-mail minimizes the amount of time spent corresponding by letter. On-line libraries and databases can save research time. You can use the World Wide Web many ways to serve customers efficiently. Search engines and directories save time spent searching web pages for information. The Usenet, a huge text bulletin board with thousands of newsgroups, allows you to communicate quickly with many other people on very specific subjects.

"No one can ever completely control all of the people and events that crash and crush our time."

You can also save time by using a scanner. A scanner allows you to copy text and pictures into your computer. When used with optical character recognition (OCR) software, your scanner can eliminate the time-consuming task of entering photocopies, faxes, magazine articles and other research materials into your computer. If you spend a lot of time on the phone, a headset can help you save time. It leaves your hands free for other tasks while you talk. Learning to use these new technologies may take some extra time initially, but you will save time in the long run.

Organization

Use these six steps to organize your workplace:

1. Eliminate useless space-fillers - Whether it's a five-year-old dried flower arrangement or a collage of your now-adult son's Little League victories, there is something nonessential in every office. Spend one minute picking out at least five useless items in your work place. Write them down. When you are done, be ruthless and throw them out immediately.
2. Clean off your desktop - Get rid of all the piles of paper, stationery, supplies, notes, messages and anything else that keeps you from being able to see your desk. Use labeled boxes for the items that take up space on your desktop, unless you can delegate their disposition to a staff member.
3. Maintain your clean desktop - Once you have cleaned your desktop, keep it empty except for your phone, your address file (i.e. a Rolodex), your personal planner and a container for pens and pencils. Keep the majority of your desk space available for the primary job you are handling.

4. Use your desk drawers - Clean your drawers the same, objective way your cleaned your desk. Determine which drawers should contain which items for quick access. Clean one drawer at a time. Move any items you use only periodically out of your desk. Put them somewhere else where you can find them quickly. Allow one miscellaneous drawer to hold all the things that don't seem to have a home after you move them off your desk. Once a month, empty this drawer completely, find a home for items you need and throw away the rest.
5. Locate your equipment conveniently - Put your computer, printer, telephone, answering machine, fax and any associated supplies in the same area.
6. Make your surroundings pleasant - Any items you can add to your office that help you enjoy the place you work optimizes your time and your productivity.

Time Crushers

Time crushers are people and events you can't control. They devastate your schedule. Even though you can't completely control time-crushers, you can control how they affect you, to a degree. Imagine this office time crusher: your day is perfectly laid out until the boss comes in and says he needs an analysis of the past five years sales by the end of the day. While you have little choice but to comply, you could try showing him your list of the other jobs he has assigned to you and asking him to choose which ones should be eliminated or delayed to free up time for this new task.

“Avoid the puttering, too many second cups of coffee and fifteen minutes more of reading or TV that keep you from getting to productive work promptly.”

Excessive interruption is another office time crusher. Watch out for certain "types" of co-workers: social butterflies, office politicians, advice seekers, complainers and gossips are frequent culprits. Be aware of these personalities and make sure you are not one of them. Avoid interruptions if you can because it takes four to five minutes to be able to go back to what you were doing at the same speed.

Minutes Matter

You can do a number of simple things to save valuable minutes. Individually they may not seem like much, but over the course of a day they can add up:

- Morning time savers: Set two alarms to wake you up in the morning. Place them across the room and out of reach. This will force you out of bed to turn them off. Staying awake the first time you wake up may be difficult, but it pays dividends in saved time.
- Phone time savers: Avoid long-winded answering machine messages by having your taped greeting say, "You have 90 seconds to leave your message." Don't tell someone, "I'll get back to you," if you are only delaying the "No" you should say. Remember that making a quick phone can be faster than writing a memo. If you travel, use your waiting time at the airport to return phone calls.
- Home time savers: Open your mail near a trash can. Throw out any junk mail immediately. If you are working from home, spend your time doing the work that generates the most income.
- Computer time savers: Say "no" to any technology that takes up more time than it saves. The print preview, spell check and thesaurus functions in your software can save you many wasted minutes.

About the Author

Roberta Roesch specializes in writing about personal development, psychology, behavior, human relationships and careers. She is the author of many books including *The Working Woman's Guide to Managing Time*, and *Smart Talk: The Art of Savvy Business Conversation*. She has more than 5,000 newspaper columns and features to her credit.
