

Improve your Time Management Skills

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Next to life itself, time is without doubt the most valuable commodity. For each one of us, time is limited. The way we spend our time impacts on a whole lot of areas: our relationships, our earning capacity, our enjoyment, our health and even our destiny. And yet many of us are poor time managers.



To see where you can improve your time management skills, answer the following five questions:

- Do you regularly take work home?
- Do you struggle to meet deadlines?
- Does the amount of detail you have to deal with seem to bury you?
- Are you frequently tired?
- Do you often return phone calls more than a day later?

Characteristics of good time management

Sustainability

Good time management helps to ensure that things do not get out of control. The person who constantly operates in crisis mode invariably has poor time management skills. By not completing the tasks at the time they are required, he puts unnecessary stress on himself. This further diminishes his performance and tends to induce a vicious spiral. A successful manager of his time knows how much time each activity takes. He completes each task well and is not continuously “rushed off his feet”.

He derives satisfaction from the knowledge of tasks completed in such a way that they do not have to be re-visited. He has a calmness about him that can handle the normal daily unexpected setbacks.

Knowing the limits

A good manager of his time knows what he is capable of, and he knows his limits. He realises that he cannot resolve every problem, that there are often other people who are better qualified to do a certain function. He does not try to do everything himself.

He passes on jobs to others that are not strictly part of his domain. In other words, he is a good delegator. He also knows that if he continually takes work home, his output will ultimately suffer.

His family will develop a negative view of his work, which increases his own stress levels. His problems are passed on to members of his family, which tend to ricochet.

The right thing at the right time

The person who effectively manages his time normally enjoys life. He is not driven by a fear of what the boss thinks if he relaxes. He gets those important jobs done on time, and in a way he can be proud of. He also deals with those time-consuming details that everyone of us has to cope with, without

upsetting his composure. His schedule allows him to have a sense of humour and his eyes are open to other things besides work. In fact, work itself becomes fulfilling – a way of expressing himself.

Obstacles to good time management

Some of the things that keep us from using our time effectively are:

- We tackle too much. Most of us tend to overestimate our capacity. We find it difficult to decline when someone placed higher in the organization asks us to deal with an issue, even when we know it is not really our concern.
- Procrastination. We often deal with the pressing details of the moment (the one that scream the loudest), and shelve those issues that are really important.
- We confuse being busy with being productive. The fact that we are doing something does not guarantee that we are doing what we should be doing.
- Fear of what others think. We often have feelings of guilt when there is nothing specific to do. We create activities which give the appearance that we are occupied. Very few of us can use periods of inactivity beneficially to generate new ideas, other opportunities or better ways of doing our routine tasks.



How can I become a better time manager?

- ❖ Focus on your priorities. Make sure you understand what is really important to you and your progress. Use your time to achieve these. Learn to delegate tasks to others who are being paid to do them.
- ❖ For each day have a clear idea of what must be done to-day. Arrange your time so that you have maximum energy and alertness for when you do that task that must be done to-day. Do the other menial tasks at a time when it is not so important that you are creative. Important tasks require special effort and application.
- ❖ Use a board in your office on which you write down those long-term projects. A big project is only completed by being worked, a bit at a time, on many occasions. Break the project down into sub-projects. Progress is slow, but as you record the progress on your board you will motivate yourself, and eventually you will see the light at the end of the tunnel.
- ❖ Your planning must always include deadlines. Every important task must be accompanied by a specific time by when it needs to be completed. Do not set your deadlines too tight. In other words, allow yourself a little lee-way in case the task requires more work than you had originally anticipated.
- ❖ Use the NOW principle. Many smaller tasks are best done now. Those irksome interruptions are handled most effectively immediately. Then they are out of your mind and you can concentrate on the important things.
- ❖ Do not take on more than you can handle. Remember, that life is more than work. If you take on too much, the chances are that some things you will do second-best, or you will have to do them in your legitimate leisure time. That leaves a feeling of dissatisfaction and generally diminishes your output.

Is it worth spending effort to improve your time management skills? You bet it is!