

Managing your Time Effectively Checklist 016



Introduction

Effective time management is simply, making the best use of limited time. This involves using our time towards achieving the best desirable goals. Effective time management can help you to gain more control over your activities, increase your efficiency, improve your work-life balance and become proactive rather than reactive in preventing or dealing with problems. Getting to grips with time management should help to reduce work pressures so that you will feel more relaxed, and others will be more likely to perceive you as calm and well-organised.

Definition

Time management is the conscious control of the amount of time spent on work activities in order to maximise personal efficiency. Time management involves analysing how time is spent, and then prioritising different work tasks. Activities can be reorganised to concentrate on those that are most important, and various techniques can be of help in carrying out tasks more quickly and efficiently. These include information handling skills; verbal and written communication skills; delegation; and daily time planning.

Action checklist

1. Establish how your time is spent

Look back through your diary or logsheet to work out how you spend your time. If you have not done so, log your activities for a period of two weeks to see where your time is going.

Ask yourself:

- how much of your activity was a result of planning and how much was unplanned?
- how accurate your planning was - did you complete tasks in the time allowed?
- how much time you spent on routine activities which could be delegated
- how often interruptions diverted you from your tasks
- during which period of the day you tend to accomplish the most.

Use this grid to establish which tasks or activities are urgent/important/non-urgent/not important.

Group A Urgent and Important tasks	Group B Urgent and Not Important tasks
Group C Not Urgent and Important tasks	Group D Not Urgent and Not Important tasks

2. Determine your problem areas

What is making you use time inefficiently? Split problems into the 'Enemy Without' and the 'Enemy Within'. The Enemy Without includes external factors beyond your immediate control, such as the mistakes or inefficiencies of other departments, unexpected extra tasks, and complaints. The Enemy Within is personal inefficiency, and includes poor planning, lack of assertiveness in turning away unwanted callers, and putting off problems and unenjoyable activities.

3. Be clear on your objectives and priorities

Before you can successfully manage your time, you must make sure that you are familiar with your job description and with what you should and should not be doing as part of your job. Agree your precise role, objectives and targets with both your superiors and subordinates so that everyone knows what is expected of you, and get this put into writing.

4. Tackle the Enemy Without

If you find that problem relationships, complaints, and reaction to situations beyond your control take up too much of your time, try to minimise this by:

- setting service level agreements which detail what each department expects from others, and improving interdepartmental communication
- reviewing complaints procedures and setting up a more efficient system
- examining personnel policies which might be giving rise to interpersonal tension or inefficient work practices
- asking colleagues to be concise when giving written or oral reports.

5. Tackle the Enemy Within

Make more constructive use of your time by:

Planning

- Map out your activities a week in advance
- Spend five minutes each morning reviewing your time, and re-adjust your plan as circumstances change
- Build slack time into your schedule so that you do not constantly overrun
- Have a back-up plan for contingency situations - decide which tasks can be dropped, who can be called on to help out, and who will need to be notified if you are consequently delayed with other activities
- Plan time for relaxation and recreation as well as work.

Prioritising

- Rank tasks in order of importance - try to be objective and avoid ranking highly those tasks that you enjoy the most but that are not vital
- Be firm but polite in refusing to do tasks which are not your responsibility
- Maintain clear objectives on what you are trying to achieve and allocate your time accordingly.

Delegating

- Assess which tasks can be delegated to someone else
- Choose carefully who you delegate to - is the person knowledgeable and competent and do they have the time and willingness to do the task? Will you be offending anyone else?
- Make sure you give clear instructions so that delegated tasks are done well
- Involve others in projects and share the workload
- Train your employees to manage their time effectively too.

Reviewing how you work

- Plan to do important activities at the time of day when you function best
- Break down complex tasks into manageable chunks
- Avert unwanted interruptions - if necessary, ask your secretary to ward off unwanted callers, work somewhere other than your office, or simply put a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the door (and make sure that people know it means what it says)
- Work at home for a day occasionally, if this is allowed and if home is a quiet environment
- Talk to people instead of writing - this can result in a quicker response and quicker decision making
- Avoid task hopping - concentrate on one thing at a time
- Batch similar tasks together
- have breaks or switch tasks when you feel tired or have a mental block
- Keep accurate records and an organised filing system to save time locating information or having to compile documents again
- Make use of new technology - but only if it really will save time
- Minimise paperwork and avoid unnecessary duplication
- Make sure the meetings you attend are really necessary and, if running one yourself, make sure it is well-organised
- Look at your travel arrangements for commuting or work trips - can you eliminate unnecessary journeys or shorten them?

6. Make time to play

Overwork is counter-productive. It can cause stress and decrease the time efficiency which you worked so hard to achieve. However well-organised you are, there are still only 24 hours in a day and you need to devote an adequate proportion of them to yourself. Don't be afraid to take ten minutes for a tea break or a walk around the park, or an hour to go to the gym. Try to maintain a healthy work / home-life balance.

7. Make time to think

The need for quality thinking time (e.g. when writing important plans or policies), free from interruption is important as this allows time for reflection. In open plan offices a mechanism that could be used is to have a flag on your desk which shows whether you are interrupt-able or not.

Managers should avoid

- wasting time on less important tasks when really important ones need doing
- procrastinating on dealing with problems that may worsen if they are not dealt with
- forgetting to take time for personal development
- neglecting your family, your social life or your relaxation activities.

National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership

This checklist has relevance for the following standards:

A: Managing self and personal skills, unit 1

Additional resources

Books

The time advantage, John W Hall
Cambridge: Enstrata, 2010

100 great time management ideas from successful executives and managers around the world,
Patrick Forsyth
London: Marshall Cavendish Business, 2009

Time management instant manager, Polly Bird
London: Hodder Education, 2008

The hamster revolution: how to manage your email before it manages you, Mike Song, Vicki
Halsey and Tim Burress
San Francisco Calif.: Berrett Koehler, 2007

Time management: increase your personal productivity and effectiveness
Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2005

Taking control of your time
Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2005

Managing workplace chaos: solutions for handling information paper time and stress, Patricia J
Hutching
New York, NY: AMACOM, 2002

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