

MANAGING YOUR TIME EFFECTIVELY.

Checklist 016



INTRODUCTION

Effective time management in the workplace is simply about making the best use of the limited time available to work towards achieving personal and organisational goals and objectives. Managing your time well will give you greater control over your activities, increase your efficiency, help you to become proactive rather than reactive in preventing or dealing with problems, and improve your work-life balance. Taking control of your workload will enable you to decrease the intense stress of work overload. Developing good time management skills will help you to function well both in your work role and your personal life as a whole. However, this checklist focuses primarily on managing your time at work.

While there are a number of tools and techniques which can help you to manage your time effectively, the right mindset is a vital key to time management. Developing confidence in your own abilities, trust in your own judgement and assertiveness in dealing with others will form a firm foundation for effective time management.



DEFINITION

Time management is the deliberate exercise of control over the amounts of time spent on particular work activities in order to maximise personal efficiency. Time management involves analysing how time is spent, prioritising the different tasks and reorganising work activities to concentrate on those that are most important. Various techniques can be used to complete tasks more quickly and effectively. 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 log sheet to work out how you spend your time. If you have not previously done so, log your activities for a period of two weeks to assess where your time is going.

Ask yourself:

- › how much of your activity is planned and how much is unplanned?
- › how accurate your planning is - do you complete tasks in the time allowed?
- › how much time is spent on important and/or urgent matters compared with routine activities?
- › how much time is spent on routine activities which could be delegated
- › how often do interruptions divert you from your planned activities?

- › at which times of day are you most productive?

2. Determine the problem areas

Identify what is causing you to use time ineffectively? 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 covers personal inefficiencies, including poor planning, lack of assertiveness in turning away unwanted callers, and putting off dealing with problems or tackling unattractive activities.

3. Be clear about your objectives and priorities

Before you can successfully manage your time, you must make sure that you are familiar with the responsibilities of your job role and with what you should and should not be doing as part of this. Make sure that your precise responsibilities, objectives and targets are agreed with both your line manager and team members, so that everyone knows what is expected of you.

4. Tackle the 'Enemy Without'

If you find that dealing with problematic relationships, handling complaints, and reacting to situations which are beyond your control take up too much of your time, find ways to minimise this. For example:

- › improving interdepartmental communication and setting service level agreements which detail what other departments expect from you and your team
- › reviewing complaints procedures and setting up a more efficient system
- › examining personnel policies which might be giving rise to inefficient working practices or interpersonal tensions
- › asking colleagues to be concise when giving written or oral reports.

5. Tackle the Enemy Within

Use your time more constructively by:

Reviewing how you work

- › Plan to do important activities at the time of day when you function best
- › Break complex tasks down into manageable chunks
- › Avert unwanted interruptions - if necessary, ask your secretary, if you have one, or another colleague to ward off unwanted callers, work somewhere other than your office, or simply put a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the door. In an open plan office consider how best to send a similar message (using a pendant flag, for example) and make sure that people know that it means what it says.
- › Work from home occasionally, if this is allowed and if home is a quiet environment
- › Talk to people instead of writing or emailing - this can produce quicker responses and quicker decision making
- › Avoid task hopping and multi-tasking - concentrate on one thing at a time
- › Batch similar tasks together
- › Take a break or change activities when you feel tired or come up against a mental block
- › Keep accurate records and file documents systematically to save time locating information or rewriting documents
- › Make use of new technology - but only if it really will save time, not for its own sake.
- › Minimise paperwork and avoid unnecessary duplication of effort
- › Only attend meetings that 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?

Planning

- › Utilise some form of a diary or task management software –many different types are available, including those which can be synced with smartphones and other PDA devices
- › Map out your activities at least a week in advance
- › Spend five minutes each morning reviewing your plans, and re-adjusting them 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 could be dropped, who could be called on to help out, and who would need to be notified if some activities are delayed as a result
- › Recognise the need for quality thinking time, free from interruptions and schedule this in, especially when writing important reports and policies.

Prioritising

- › Rank tasks in order of importance - try to be objective and avoid giving a high ranking to tasks that you enjoy doing but are not vital
- › Be firm but polite in refusing to do tasks which are not your responsibility
- › Maintain clear objectives for what you are trying to achieve and allocate your time accordingly.

Use this grid to help you categorise tasks according to how urgent and important (or otherwise) they are and to decide how to handle them:

Group A Urgent and important tasks Do now	Group B Urgent and Not Important tasks Delegate or Reject
Group C Not urgent and important tasks Plan to do	Group D Not Urgent and Not Important tasks Discard

Important tasks are those which contribute to your long term goals and objectives. If you are not clear about what your aims are, it will be difficult to prioritise tasks and plan to complete them, so this should be your starting point. Tasks which are urgent and important might include: emergencies, customer complaints, meetings and appointments or reports that need to be delivered within a specific time frame. These need to be carried out straight away or delegated to someone else if appropriate.

It is vital to plan time slots in advance for tasks which are important but not urgent. This will ensure you will have time to give them the attention they deserve and to complete successfully.

If you judge that tasks are urgent but not important - requests from others, interruptions and distractions, for example, you should assess them carefully and try to avoid doing if at all possible. You may be able to delegate them to others or to explain sensitively why you are unable to complete them.

Tasks which are neither important nor urgent may be time wasters and you should try to exclude whenever possible. Cross them off your task list or keep them on a holding list until time becomes available for them or it becomes clear that they are no longer relevant or necessary.

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.

6. Maintain a good work-life balance

Overwork is counter-productive. It can cause stress and decrease your overall effectiveness, productivity and creativity. However hard you work or how 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. Resist the pressure to work excessively long hours or the temptation to work through the lunch hour to complete urgent tasks. Don't be afraid to take a tea break, go for a walk round the park, or visit the gym. Try to maintain a healthy work/home-life balance as this will pay dividends in the longer term.



POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Managers should avoid:

- › wasting time on less important tasks when really important ones need doing
- › procrastinating on dealing with problems
- › forgetting to make time for personal development
- › neglecting their families and friends
- › failing to make time for social life and leisure activities



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

Find your balance point: clarify your priorities, simplify your life, and achieve more, Brian Tracy and Christina Tracy Stein
Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2015

Time management for new employees, Prakash V Rao
Birmingham: Impackt Publishing, 2015

Creating a time management system that works for you: paper, electronic, or hybrid?, Laura Stack
Highlands Ranch: The Productivity Pro, 2013

Maximize your time: simple ideas for managing your work, Ronald Bracey
Oxford: Infinite Ideas, 2012

Essential time management and organisation: a pocket guide, Sarah Cook
Ely: IT Governance Publishing, 2011

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Your scarcest resource, Michael Mankins, Chris Brahm and Gregory Caimi
Harvard Business Review, May vol 92 no 5 2014, pp 74-80

How to get stuff done, Alexander Garrett
Management Today, May no 5, 2013, pp 46-48

Making time management the organisation's priority, Frankki Bevins and Aaron De Smet
McKinsey Quarterly, no 1, 2013, pp 26-41

A personal approach to organizational time management, Peter Bregman
McKinsey Quarterly, no 1, 2013, pp 42-47



CMI PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

This checklist has relevance for the following standards:

- › PE1.3 Adaptability and time management
- › IE1.4 Meeting expectations
- › IE1.6 Ensuring resilience
- › PE1.2 Self awareness
- › PE3.1 Communicating effectively
- › PE3.2 Providing clarity
- › OP3.4 Driving delivery



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