

20 Time Management Tips

- 1. List your priorities for each day.** In order to avoid getting sidetracked and distracted, we need to know which activities deserve the lion's share of our focus each day. The only way to stay on track is to write these things down according to their order of importance. Once an item is completed, check it off and move on. Unfinished items get carried over to the next day's list.
- 2. Synchronize your calendars.** If you have a calendar in your computer, a daily planner, a wall calendar, and a handheld device, they all need to say the same thing. Obviously, too many calendars and planners can lead to unnecessary confusion. So, try to get by with one, or, if that's not possible make sure that they are all synchronized.
- 3. Each project needs an action plan.** There is always a most efficient sequence of steps for every project. To save time and effort we need to identify what that sequence is and follow it. Before beginning any project try to identify this sequence and write it down.
- 4. Schedule the most important tasks first.** If you tackle your most important tasks first it will be much easier to find time for less important ones. If you allow yourself to get sidetracked on unimportant tasks or busywork, chances are you will never get to the things that really matter.
- 5. Set realistic goals.** The greater control you have over a goal the better your chance of reaching it. One of the keys to success is creating realistic goals that can be achieved in a reasonable amount of time.
- 6. You can't do everything, live with it!** Focus on activities that yield important results. For other activities that simply need to be done, see if you can spend less time on them. It may be possible to put some of these off for days, or even weeks, while you focus on the things that really matter.
- 7. Keep track of your time.** To find out where your time is going, try keeping a time log for a week or two. How much time is being lost on unimportant activities? Where do most of your interruptions come from? Do they occur during certain time periods or on specific days of the week? Once you have this information it will be easier to eliminate time wasting activities.
- 8. Schedule less.** If you cram too much into your schedule you will always feel rushed and frustrated, and in the end you won't get much done. Try to be realistic about how many things you schedule into your day.
- 9. Minimize interruptions.** Block off portions of the day during which you are not to be interrupted unless it is an absolute necessity. Whenever possible, turn off your phone, pop-ups, instant messenger, twitter notifications, and anything else that tends to grab your focus away from the project at hand. Learn to focus on a single task.
- 10. Pick your time carefully.** One of the keys to getting things done effectively is to schedule the most challenging work for the time of day when you are most energetic and alert. Ask yourself, "When it's easier for me to focus?" Morning? Afternoon? Evening?

11. **Do the most unpleasant tasks as soon as possible.** Rather than postponing things you don't really want to do, get them out of the way as soon as you can. Once they are done you will feel more energized and free to focus on the things you really want to do.

12. **Expect the unexpected.** Stuff happens, that's just the way life is. If you schedule yourself so tight that you don't allow for the unexpected, you dramatically raise your chances of feeling frantic throughout your day. If you need to be somewhere and you think you can make it in 15 minutes, allow 25. Leave little blocks of time throughout the day unscheduled so you have a buffer against the unexpected.

13. **Use transition time to your advantage.** If you commute, try to use that time for something productive. Could you find a way to listen to important information that you would normally have to read later? Have something on hand that you can do whenever you are stuck waiting. Making use of time that would normally be wasted is a simple way of creating more time for the things you want to do.

14. **Apply the 80/20 rule.** Generally speaking, 20% of our effort produces 80% of our results. That means that if I have a list of 10 things to do, two of those are likely to produce greater results than the other 8 put together. Try to identify which tasks really move you toward your goals and give those priority. You will probably find that some of the lesser tasks no longer need to be done at all.

15. **Avoid getting overwhelmed.** We all know what overwhelmed feels like and it's not my favorite way to feel. When you feel overwhelmed, try writing each task on its own index card. Now divide those cards into two groups. Group 1 calls for action today, group 2 calls for action tomorrow. When tomorrow comes, do the same thing.

16. **Take periodic breaks.** Use applied focus sessions in which you do 45 minutes of focused effort, followed by 15 minutes of something else. After 45 minutes our ability to focus begins to taper off and we no longer perform optimally. Use those 15 minutes for walking around, getting a drink, answering phone calls, or anything else that distracts me from the task at hand.

17. **Think on paper.** When you feel stuck, write the problem down. Describing the problem on paper will help you sort it out. Now, make a list of as many solutions as you can possibly think of. Chances are, you've just solved your problem.

18. **Don't be a perfectionist.** You can spend endless amounts of time trying to get something just exactly perfect. Don't spend 90% of your time trying to make a 3% improvement. It's important that we know when it is time to move on to the next activity. Learn to let good be good enough.

19. **Ready, fire, aim.** Sometimes the best approach is to just start working on the project. Don't get too weighed down planning every little detail and end up never getting started. Once you start working you will discover what needs to be done. Even if you wind up having to backtrack a little bit, you will still be ahead of the game because you are taking action instead of waiting.

20. **Be flexible.** These are only suggestions; they are not hard and fast rules. Experiment, find out what works for you personally, don't be afraid to customize the ideas to fit your individual circumstances and needs. Some of these may work for you and some of them may not, but you'll never know until you give them a try.

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