



## A Few Techniques for Time Management

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### ABSTRACT

*"Tomorrow is always the busiest day of the week"- Jonathon Lazear.*

*Lack of time is a common complaint in western society. In response, there has been a proliferation of ... books, articles, and seminars on time management, along with their assertions, prescriptions and anecdotes. However, what exactly is time management? Despite the epidemic of time management training programs, there is currently a lack of agreement about the definition of time management and a dearth of literature summarizing time management across disciplines. Furthermore, it has been argued that there is a lack of a theoretical model of time management. Although self-report instruments purporting to examine time management exist in several disciplines, to date, there has been no published psychometric review or comparison of these instruments for assessing generic time management. Therefore, this article examines the different dimensions time management to improve effectiveness and efficiency with in organizations.*

**Key Words:** Money, Time, Management, Effectively, Efficiently

### INTRODUCTION

We all have 24 hours in a day. It does not matter in which part of the world we live, whatever is our gender, whether we are professionals or non-professionals, we have 24 hours in a day. **The question is: How can we manage our time effectively? Why some people achieve so much within 24 hours and some people are still struggling?** One of the answers, which come to our mind-- Successful people manage their time effectively!

**How can we make our lives productive by better time management?** Do you often feel overwhelmed by the amount of work you have to do? Or do you find yourself missing deadlines? Or do you sometimes just forget to do something important, so that people have to chase you to get work done? All of these are symptoms of not keeping a proper **"To-Do List."** To-Do Lists are prioritized lists of all the tasks that you need to carry out. They list everything that you have to do, with the most important tasks at the top of the list, and the least important tasks at the bottom.

Whatever job you do, if you are in a management or executive role, you will utilize a number of resources. Men, Money, Materials, and Machine – all are important. In any particular job, one resource may predominate. But there is one resource we all have in common: TIME. In addition, time is a hard taskmaster. Everyone occasionally experiences problems getting everything done, and doing it all in the time available. For some, such problems seem perpetually to exist to one degree or another; others

will admit to having moments when things seem to conspire to prevent work going as planned, and a few to living in a state of permanent chaos.

Who then needs to think about time management? Everyone, potentially, can benefit from reviewing how to manage their time effectively. In any organization many of the things that actually characterize its very nature make proper time management difficult: hierarchical structures, people, deadlines, paperwork, e-mail, computer problems, meetings, pressures and interactions, both around the organization and externally; all these and more can compound the problems.

This article aims to help solve the problems of time management for all those working in executive or managerial positions within organizations, whether commercial or otherwise, and who are charged with getting things done and achieving results. If you are in this category, even if you have already made strenuous attempts to organize the way you work, then you may pick up ideas that will help you achieve more. If you see yourself as having too much to do, if you have too little time in which to do it, if coping with the urgent means you never get to all the important things on your list, and you would like to be more organized and do not quite know how to go about becoming so, then this article is directed at you. If your desk is piled with untidy heaps of paper, you are constantly subject to interruptions, your deadlines are impossible and you despair of ever being able to get your head above water, then this article is definitely for you.

Time management is not optional. It is something that everyone who wants to work effectively must consider, whether formally or informally. In fact, virtually everyone practices time management to some degree; the only question is how well they do it and how it affects what they do. Yet, time management is not easy – as you may have noticed! Nor, even for those who work at it, is it something that anyone gets 100 per cent right. If you think that is a rather ominous start to a book on time management, there is worse to come. The classic author G K Chesterton wrote: ‘The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.’ So too with time management: just because it is difficult, the temptation can be to despair of ever making a real difference, and to give up on it, letting things take their course and muddling through somehow. To varying degrees, this temptation is often very strong.

### What is Time Management?

Time management has been described using many different terms including spontaneity, balance, flexibility, and having control over time (Lakein, 1973). Time management has also been characterized as a habit developed only through determination and practice (Simpson, 1978), as prioritizing and respecting those priorities (Soucie, 1986), and as setting priorities and scheduling tasks (Jordan et al., 1989). Time management can also be considered as the process by which an individual more effectively accomplishes tasks and goals (Schuler, 1979), a process by which an individual obtains control over the timing and the content of what he/she does (Oncken & Wass, 1985), and as what can be accomplished with time (Mackenzie, 1972, 1975, 1990).

In order to utilize time effectively, individuals must first be able to predict how much time is needed for the activity (Kelly, 2002). An individual will become effective in using their time only when the individual clearly knows what they want to do, what they need to do, and for which specific target date (Soucie, 1986). Individuals need to become more disciplined in their use of time by respecting their established priorities while minimizing distractions from others as well as from situations that have the ability to displace priorities in terms of time and energy (Soucie, 1986). According to Crutsinger (1994), time management involves determining what one should do by setting goals, deciding which events are the most important and realizing that other activities will have to be scheduled around them (prioritizing), making decisions about how much time to allow for certain tasks (time estimation), adjusting to the unexpected (problem solving), reconsidering goals and

priorities on a regular basis (evaluation), and observing patterns and trends in behavior.

There is debate over exactly what skills and behaviors constitute effective time management. For example, Shipman (1983) identified six principles for effective time management. These principles included *being aware of self, structuring time appropriately, setting goals and priorities, increasing personal efficiency and effectiveness, scheduling time for activity, and scheduling relaxation time*. Time management behaviors have more recently been characterized as making lists, organizing, goal setting, keeping and routinely evaluating one’s schedule, and breaking down tasks into simpler parts (Kelly, 2002). Empirical research investigating the effects of time management behavior has identified three broad clusters of behaviors. These behaviors include setting goals and priorities, engaging in the mechanics of time management, and having a preference for organization (Adams & Jex, 1999; Macan, 1994, 1996; Macan et al., 1990).

However, seven time management skills or behaviors can be considered essential to effective time management due to their repetitive prominence in the literature: (a) time analysis, (b) planning, (c) goal setting, (d) prioritizing, (e) scheduling, (f) organizing, and (g) establishing new and improved time habits (Barkas, 1984; Feeny Jonson, 2002; Hellsten & Rogers, 2009; Jorde, 1982; Lakein, 1973; Mackenzie, 1972, 1975, 1990; Morris, 2001; Woolfolk & Woolfolk, 1986). Although, time management documentation activities such as making lists, writing down goals, and utilizing calendars have been identified by many authors as necessary for effective time management, they tend to cross all seven-skill areas.

### Seven steps for setting priorities to manage our time

We cannot do everything in 24 hours. We have certain priorities in life. Our family, our hobby, our studies, our professional education or any other aspect of the career development, we have to set priorities in life. Here are seven steps to set priorities in life:

1. Decide exactly what we want.
2. Write it down.
3. Set a deadline for achieving our goal.
4. List out what we must do to achieve our goal.
5. Organize the list into a plan/ Execution of Plan.
6. Take action on our plan immediately.
7. Resolve to do something every day that moves us towards our major goal.

Thus, Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance and saves time. There is a rule called



80/20 rule – It states that 20 percent of our activities produce 80 percent of results. What are a few activities, which produce most of the results in our lives? **Three key questions**, which we can ask ourselves to prioritize our work, include:

- What are my **highest value** activities?
- What can I and only I do that, if done well, **will make a real difference**?
- What is the **most valuable use of my time right now**?

Do it right now as suggested.....you will be profitable and will have time to.....

### **Time wasters and its Management**

Just ask someone: Do you have time? Most common answer: I am too busy. Sorry I do not have time! As mentioned earlier, everyone has 24 hours in a day. No one has a minute more or a minute less. However, look around: We will find some people achieve much more in same 24 hours. Why is it so? During our daily routine, we also set our priorities to complete XYZ tasks but at the end of the day, we find ourselves still working on our initial “to-do list”, though we had a very busy day! Here are seven major time wasters and a few tips on managing time effectively. Let us see if we are wasting time because of any one of them:

**Telephone interruptions-** Is it really necessary to take all calls when a phone is ringing?.....

**Inability to say “No”** We find it really difficult to say No at times. At times, we do not know how to refuse.

**Lack of self- discipline-** Do we have our objectives in writing? Are we following our goals? **If we can set ‘key result areas’ and focus to achieve those areas, our efforts will pay off.** If we try to handle one task only once, we will have more time.

**Management by crisis-**If we do not “anticipate” problems in advance, we will be managing by crisis. This is also called “fire fighting” in management terms. It is said: Expect the unexpected and plan accordingly! If we try to plan for unexpected, we will be in a position to manage crisis fast and effectively.

**Ineffective delegation-** At times, we want to do “everything” ourselves.

**Lots of paper work-** Technology has made life easy. Is it true? ....If we organize our filing habit, we can find our papers easily.

**Socializing-** Thanks to face book, email, and others, we have lots of time to socialize! Socializing and networking is a good habit but not at the cost of wasting time. If we plan to obtain information on a systematic basis and try to control our urge to log on to face book five or six times a day, we can focus on tasks on hand and do them better / faster.

### **Seven time management tips for managers**

Managing people takes time. It may take inefficient or ineffective managers longer to plan, supervise, and evaluate someone else’s work than to just do the work themselves. The answer is not to fire the staff. The answer is to manage them more effectively. Here are seven time management tips that will help you do it.

#### **I. Never Waste Their Time**

Does the sight of one of your workers standing idle threaten you? If so, resist the temptation to assign busy work just to keep your staff moving. You waste their time and your own. If it is a task that is not important for you to be doing, it is not important for your staff either. You will also be eroding their trust in you and your decisions. They know it is busy work! Do not fill their time for them. Show them what needs doing. Show them how to do it. Make sure they have the tools they need. Then get out of the way, but do not disappear. You are interested in the results of their work; ask for feedback, but not as a means to micromanage. Do not interrupt them needlessly. If one or more employees are continually idle, it may not be their fault; they are either more efficient than you thought, or they just do not have enough work to keep them busy. It’s time to reevaluate their duties, but don’t punish them for working hard or your own poor planning.

#### **II. Make Sure the Time Savers Are Really Saving Their Time**

Many of us have witnessed the introduction of a new business process, an improved method for accomplishing some task. These improvements often are part of a package purchased by management from consultants who were retained to find solutions to waste or inefficiencies. Typically, a simple task involving a form that captures a schedule or some repetitive action becomes a Web based process. Now the information can be managed, combined, compared, analyzed, archived, and made accessible to anyone who wants it. The price paid for the power this new process offers is normally the extra time spent entering and editing the data, applying the correct codes, and filling in all the required fields. Somewhere in the



organization, someone benefits by having this information in a new, accessible format, and for the rest of us, well we are usually not given a choice.

As a manager, whose task is it to promulgate company policies, objecting to or resisting these changes? is not only a waste of effort, but also a sure way to destroy your image as a team player. If you have input in the decision-making process that results in the adoption of new methods, it behooves you to raise the issue of time as a factor; too often, it is overlooked in the organization's zeal to reap promised rewards. If your staff needs to learn and implement a system more cumbersome than that used previously, your managers need to understand and appreciate its effects on your team's productivity. It also helps your staff if they understand the reasons for the change, particularly if the benefits are not obvious to them.

### **III. Separate the Important from the Merely Urgent for Your Staff**

For your staff, as for yourself, you need to distinguish between truly important activities, those that serve the central mission, and the stuff that seems to demand immediate attention without really meriting it. Ask "Why?" for the phone calls and memos and e-mails demanding your staff's immediate attention. Can you relieve some of the pressure and release your staffers for more important work? And let them know you are on their side in reducing the busy work. Delegate interesting assignments, ones that stretch imagination and creativity, and encourage personal and professional growth. Do you and your staff ever engage in long-term planning, skills training, or needed conflict management? Alternatively, do these things get lost in the daily clamor? You will never "find" time to do these vital (but seldom urgent) activities with your staff. As a good manager, you must be sure to make the time. As you schedule these activities, you'll find that staff becomes better at managing their own time, more mission oriented and future-thinking. You are training them to improve quality, not just quantity.

### **IV. Tell Them Why**

"Why do I have to do this?" If that question from a staffer feels like a threat to your authority, if you become defensive when you hear such a question, your staffers will learn to keep the questions to themselves. But they'll still wonder. They have the right and the need to know the purpose of their work. When you ask them to do something, give them a good reason. You will have a more motivated and more efficient workforce if they understand the goals and not just the process.

### **V. Allow Them Enough Time for the Task**

Be realistic in your demands. Never put "ASAP" on assignments- instead indicate a specific date that assignments are to be completed. Do not overstuff the staff. If you do, you will get shoddy work. You might even get less work. Even a conscientious, willing worker does not perform well under unreasonable pressure. In addition, you will gain the reputation of being unreasonable. On longer assignments, consult with your staff to determine a reasonable due date.

### **VI. Encourage Them to Do One Thing Well —at a Time**

Watch your staff at work. Are they on the phone, jotting notes, eyeing the computer screen, all while trying to grab a fast sandwich? Getting a lot done? Probably not. And they're probably not getting anything done well. If your coworker is on the phone with a potential client, you want that worker's total attention on the task at hand, not thinking about the next project or the last project or the work that isn't getting done. They will work faster and better, with less need for clarification during or revision later.

### **VII. Have Productive Staff Meetings**

Ask your staff to make a list of things they least like to do and chances are "go to a meeting" will rank right up there with "take work home over the weekend." Most of us hate meetings, and with good reason. We avoid them if we can, resent them when we cannot, and complain about them before, during, and after. That is because most meetings are a waste of time, too often involving certain individuals talking to hear themselves talk. However, you really do need staff meetings. You can create a productive interaction that just does not occur with memos or e-mails or phone calls or one-on-one conversations. People get a better grasp of the whole operation. Names become faces, and faces become individuals.

### **Conclusion and Managerial Implications**

Making time management work is important to everyone. At worst, the alternative is a life of permanent muddle, pressure and frustration – not to mention the fact of actually achieving less than you would want or believe possible. Therefore, there are considerable advantages to getting to grips with the process. To recap: principally, effective management of your time will allow you to:

- ✓ Achieve greater productivity, efficiency and effectiveness;



- ✓ Give more focus to your efforts and make any particular way of working, for example creativity, easier;
- ✓ Be more likely to achieve your various objectives;
- ✓ Be more likely to be able to develop the job long term;
- ✓ Get more satisfaction and enjoyment from what you do;
- ✓ Find that home and family and job responsibilities fit better together.

These benefits incorporate many things, from fewer missed deadlines to more time for key projects and better relationships with the people working with or for you in the organization. Further, because time management affects results and efficiency so directly, it can have a direct bearing on your career progress.

Thus, there certainly seem to be more than sufficient reasons to make it work for you. Some of the ideas that help seem very obvious and when you take them up they quickly fit in, become habits and work well without great effort. Other aspects of the process are, as we have seen, inevitably harder. At the end of the day, is time management really something to bother about or is it just another management panacea, actually only taking up time that could be better spent simply getting on and doing the job? I firmly believe that it is not just worthwhile, but essential. I hope this article has demonstrated that the time it takes to become better organized need not be prohibitive, indeed that, as good habits develop, the techniques, tricks and, most important, the attitudes adopted, clearly pay dividends. What makes it all work is not simply having an understanding of the principles and enough ideas, but the discipline and ultimately the habit to make it stick as an overall way of working.

The results stemming from it have been stated. Even so, is the net effect worthwhile? I believe the answer is certainly yes. It is one business technique that not only affects the organization through the individual's job and the results it generates, but also affects the individual – your job satisfaction, state of mind and general well-being. Becoming a better time manager may take a commitment and needs working at but as the saying has it, 'There is no such thing as a free lunch.' Most worthwhile things do need some investment of time and effort. This is no exception. It is no exaggeration to say that good time management can change your life quickly for the better and, if you foster the habits involved, forever (or, more realistically, for the remainder of your career).

Therefore, Organization and time management go together. Being well organized creates the right time environment. Poor organization is insidious; everything takes just a little bit more time than it should and this adds up day-by-day, inevitably reducing effectiveness. To survive and prosper you have to be productive, efficient and effective. Time management is about working actively to create efficiency and effectiveness in a way that makes achieving your targeted results more likely. Success does not just happen. You make it happen. So be effective in your time management!

*“Success is a process, a quality of mind and way of being, an outgoing affirmation of life”- Alex Noble*

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