

Easy Time Management

Do you always seem strapped for time?

Do feel that you can never fit everything you want to do in a day?

Does your confidence take a battering because you feel overwhelmed?

If so, then this resource is for you!

Having more time is one of the most precious and sought after resources we have.

When you feel in control over your time you have more confidence.

Everyone has the same amount of time. However, some have more than others!

When you think about it – what is time? In it's basic form it is that part of existence, which is measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years.

Everyone has the same amount of time to do his or her "stuff".

Yet the real winners in life are those that know what they have to do and when and they also don't get stressed out about those things that happen that have an affect on the amount of time we have between tasks, yet we have no control over.

So, how can you get more time!

The approach

The first thing that you should do is to perform a self-assessment of how you are currently spending your time. Complete a diary for 1 typical week.

Write down how you are spending your time.

It could look a little like the following real-life example:

Time	Task
08:00	Got out of bed
08:30	Left for work no breakfast
09:00	Got to work, had coffee – chatted to colleagues
09:30	Started reading emails
10:30	Meeting
11:45	Emails
13:00	Lunch
14:00	Meeting
15:30	Coffee break – chat
16:00	General Admin
17:00	Left for home
17:30	Arrived home – changed, coffee, put dinner on – watched tv
18:30	Dinner
19:00	Watched TV
23:00	Went to bed

This could be a typical day for anyone of us.

If it looks like yours, you may feel as though there were not enough hours in the day and also feel uncomfortable being under pressure with time.

Try this yourself for a week. After a weeks worth (5 working days) of time data, collate all of the hours spent on the various tasks and put them into one master table under specific headings.

An example of the output is below:

Activity	Hours spent
Sleep	47 hours
Travelling to work	3 hours
Arrive at work/coffee/chat	2 hours
Emails	14 hours
Meetings	9 hours
Lunch	4 hours
Afternoon break/chats	2.5 hours
Admin	3 hours
Travelling home	4 hours
Prepare dinner/chilling out	6 hours
Dinner	2 hours
Watching TV	23.5 hours

In this example there may be a feeling that there is not enough time in the working day to complete all of the work, yet the subject is spending 18 hours a week on just sending and answering emails and having coffees and chats!

Now I don't say that you shouldn't spend time chatting etc because that would not be realistic or the right thing to do.

But if I were to set a goal for this subject then it would be to cut down on the amount of emails/coffee/chatting time to 12 hours per week instead of 18. Wouldn't that be a good start?

That would be like gaining an extra day of productivity!

I would also make the following observations:

- 1) They are leaving to go to work at 8.30am, (possibly during rush-hour) and having no breakfast.
- 2) They are not actually starting work until 9.30am.
- 3) They watch a staggering 23.5 hours of television each week.

Through keeping some kind of time log it is possible to look at where time is being used productively and where it is being lost. Some kind of response can then be put in place.

For example:

- 1) By leaving for work thirty minutes earlier, it is possible to avoid rush hour traffic, have a leisurely breakfast and start the day on time and in a better frame-of-mind.
- 2) Better time-management relieves stress and pressure and makes individuals more productive.
- 3) By cutting down on watching television, it is possible to fit in more time for ourselves, our health, development and relationships.

With more time, we have more opportunity to install a better work and life balance. These are some of the alternative activities we could be looking at:

Alternative Activity	Why? Benefit?
Gym/Workout	Lose weight, have more energy
Read more – newspapers/books	Gain knowledge/keep up to date
Work an 30 mins at work	Miss out on 5:00pm rush, cut travelling time by 15 mins, get more work done
Go out in the week	Get out of the habit of staying in during work days. Enjoyment etc
Computer	Buy a computer, learn about internet etc
Night School	Get a business qualification
Start a part time business	Earn extra money!

So from being unproductive couch potatoes, all of a sudden we can be getting fitter, wealthier and more educated.

By analysing our time spent, we can find out if we are wasting time or if we could be doing some more productive. So, after you have gathered this information from your time log, what I would like you to do now is to look at some of the vital factors that you must consider when allocating your time more productively.

Lets have a look at them.

For the first factor, I would like you to write out the tasks or activities that you must do in order for you to achieve the objectives of your job or at home. What are the *essential* things that you *must* do to be successful?

These could include work tasks such as meetings, appraisals, emails, documentation and the like. Home activities could include cleaning, cooking, shopping, time with the children, watching television. Write all of them down.

Out of interest, compare this to the time log you have previously completed. How much time have you spent on productive and non-productive work?

After you have identified what you *have* to do, the next step is to schedule your work and activities.

In order for you to schedule your work there is a need to know two things.

Firstly - You will need to know how long you will want to spend on a particular task - this is determined by how important the task is.

Secondly - you will have to know how soon you have to get the task completed - this is determined by how urgent the task is.

Now, important and urgent are not the same. An urgent task is not necessarily important. It may be urgent but trivial.

A good rule of thumb is to remember that the tasks and activities that you have written will nearly always be important ones.

The unimportant tasks are usually known as reactive tasks.

These are the everyday running problems that have to be dealt with to keep things ticking over - for example, answering the telephone and responding to emails.

Take time to classify your tasks into one of six categories:

- 1) **Now Must**; essential tasks that need to be completed promptly. There would be a detrimental effect if they weren't completed in a short time frame.
- 2) **Now Should**; important, but not essential tasks that need to be completed promptly. There would be a negative effect if not completed in the right timeframe but can be salvaged by alternative actions.
- 3) **Soon Must**; essential tasks that need to be completed in the near future. There would be a detrimental effect if they weren't completed within a defined time frame.
- 4) **Soon Should**; important, but not essential tasks that need to be completed in the near future. There would be a negative effect if not completed in a defined timeframe but can be salvaged by alternative actions.
- 5) **Sometime Must**; essential tasks that need to be completed sometime in the future. There would be a detrimental effect if they weren't completed within an extended time frame.
- 6) **Sometime Should**; important, but not essential tasks that need to be completed sometime in the future. There would be a negative effect if not completed within an extended timeframe but can be salvaged by alternative actions.

The key is to have things escalated into categories one and two; **Now Must** and **Now Should**. Through advance planning, more of your everyday tasks should become proactive rather than reactive and unplanned. Now, it is highly unlikely that you can completely eradicate all urgent last minute tasks that are thrust upon you but you will now be able to plan and manage your time more productively to accommodate these eventualities.

One of the main tools for successful time management is a diary. Once you have worked out the tasks that you have to do and their relative importance - the next step that you have to do is to schedule these activities into your diary.

In your diary, block out time for certain tasks. Also allow time for reactive tasks and regular duties - let people know when you are available. Also allow time for reviewing and planning at the end of each day.

Scheduling out time for planning is essential on a daily basis. This should be done at the end of the working day or at night for your home duties.

Within this time for planning you should draw up your schedule and also a **TO DO** list for the next day using the techniques that I have already mentioned.

Cross out each activity as you complete them and make sure that you complete them all.

The last area that we can look at are time saving techniques.

These are the things that you can do to give yourself more time.

Firstly, by doing less, you can increase more of your available time.

I see so many people who are snowed under with their workload and agenda, these people never seem to have a minute to spare and just take on more and more work.

Let's have a look at some of the things that you can do. The first and most important question you can ask yourself is this:

Can I delegate certain activities?

You can reduce your workload by getting other people to do it for you.

You can also discourage unnecessary meetings, don't take work home, don't take responsibility for other peoples problems and don't become bogged down with detail.

These are some of the things that you can do to free up some of your time, but one of the most important things that you can do is just by saying NO to certain requirements and requests that are asked of you.

It is such an easy word to say in theory, but too many people don't use it in practise.

Secondly, another excellent time saving technique is by working faster, and by reducing the time for particular tasks.

Ensure deadlines are set and adhered to, keep your communications concise, take the most important tasks when you are alert - it is more time efficient and productive. Learn how to conclude meetings and conversations, ensure meetings are run promptly and on time - there are many others.

Another technique to reduce time is by working more effectively. Make sure that you plan your work, establish clear objectives, set priorities, be realistic, draw up **TO DO** lists daily and weekly, make efficient use of a diary, plan meetings and plan agendas.

The subject of time management could take up a whole series of manuals to fully explain. I have described some of the most important elements of time management and some of the techniques that would enable you to organise, schedule and help you to get the most out of your time. Once you have control over your time, you will perform more effectively and have greater enjoyment in your life.