



Top tips - Making the most of your time



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How well do you manage your time? If you're like many people, your answer may not be completely positive!

Time is certainly one of our most precious resources and if we fail to manage it effectively it makes it so much harder to manage everything else.

Perhaps you feel overloaded, and you often have to work late to hit your deadlines. Or maybe your days seem to go from one crisis to another, and this is stressful and demoralising.

Many of us know that we could be managing our time more effectively; but it can be difficult to identify the mistakes that we're making, and to know how we could improve.

When we do manage our time well, however, we're exceptionally productive at work, and our stress levels drop. We can devote time to the interesting, high-reward projects that can make a real difference to a career. In short, we're happier

What are the biggest mistakes we all make in managing our time and what can we do about them?

1. Failing to Keep a To-Do List

Do you ever have that nagging feeling that you've forgotten to do an important piece of work? If so, you probably don't use a To-Do List to keep on top of things. (Or, if you do, you might not be using it effectively!)

The trick with using To-Do Lists effectively lies in prioritising the tasks on your list.

If you have large projects on your list, then, unless you're careful, the entries for these can be vague and ineffective. For instance, you may have written down "Start on budget proposal." But what does this entail? The lack of specifics here might cause you to procrastinate, or miss key steps. So make sure that you break large tasks or projects down into specific, actionable steps - then you won't overlook something important.

2. Not Setting Personal Goals

Personal goal setting is essential to managing your time well, because goals give you a destination and vision to work toward. When you know where you want to go, you can manage your priorities, time, and resources to get there. Goals also help you decide what's worth spending your time on, and what's just a distraction.

Learn how to set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed), effective goals.

3. Not Prioritising

Sometimes, it's hard to know how to prioritise, especially when you're facing a flood of seemingly urgent tasks. However, it's essential to learn how to prioritise tasks effectively if you want to manage your time better.

One tool that will help you prioritise effectively is the Urgent/Important Matrix.

This helps you understand the difference between urgent activities, and important activities. You'll also learn how to overcome the tendency to focus on the urgent.

Urgency	High	Urgent, Not Important	Urgent and Important
	Low	Not Urgent, Not Important	Not Urgent, Important
		Low	High

Importance

4. Failing to Manage Distractions

Do you know that some of us can lose as much as two hours a day to distractions? Think how much you could get done if you had that time back!

If you want to gain control of your day and do your best work, it's vital to know how to minimise distractions and manage interruptions effectively. You need to focus, and let people know if they're distracting you too often. You should also learn how to improve your concentration, even when you're faced with distractions.

5. Procrastination

Procrastination occurs when you put off tasks that you should be focusing on right now. When you procrastinate, you feel guilty that you haven't started; you come to dread doing the task; and, eventually, everything catches up with you when you fail to complete the work on time.

You might find it helpful to use Action Plans. These help you break large projects down into manageable steps, so that it's easy to see everything that you need to get done, and so that you can complete small chunks at a time. Doing this can stop you from feeling overwhelmed at the start of a new project

6. Taking on too Much

Are you a person who has a hard time saying "no" to people? If so, you probably have far too many projects and commitments on your plate. This can lead to poor performance, stress and low morale.

Or, you might be a micromanager; someone who insists on controlling or doing all of the work themselves, because they can't trust anyone else to do it correctly. (This can be a problem for everyone - not just managers!)

To stop this, learn the subtle art of saying "yes" to the person, but "no" to the task. This skill helps you assert yourself, while still maintaining good feelings within the group. If the other person starts leaning on you to say "yes" to their request, learn how to think on your feet, and stay cool under pressure. e.g. "I would love to be able to help, unfortunately with the other pressing projects I have on, I would not be able to get that done on time"

7. Thriving on "Busy"

Some people get a rush from being busy. The narrowly-met deadlines, the endless emails, the piles of files needing attention on the desk, the frantic race to the meeting... What an adrenaline buzz!

The problem is that an "addiction to busyness" rarely means that you're effective, and it can lead to stress.

Instead, try to slow down, and learn to manage your time better.

8. Multitasking

Did you know it can take 20-40 percent more time to finish a list of jobs when you multitask, compared with completing the same list of tasks in sequence. The result is also that you do both tasks poorly.

So, the best thing is to forget about multitasking, and, instead, focus on one task at a time. That way, you'll produce higher quality work

9. Not Taking Breaks

It's nice to think that you can work for 8-10 hours straight, especially when you're working to a deadline. But it's impossible for anyone to focus and produce really high-quality work without giving their brains some time to rest and recharge.

So, don't dismiss breaks as "wasting time." They provide valuable down-time, which will enable you to think creatively and work effectively.

If it's hard for you to stop working, then schedule breaks for yourself, or set an alarm as a reminder. Go for a quick walk, grab a cup of coffee or just sit and meditate at your desk. Try to take a five minute break every hour or two. And make sure that you give yourself ample time for lunch - you won't produce top quality work if you're hungry!

10. Ineffectively Scheduling Tasks

Are you a morning person? Or do you find your energy picking up once the sun begins to set in the evening? All of us have different rhythms, that is, different times of day when we feel most productive and energetic.

You can make best use of your time by scheduling high-value work during your peak time, and low-energy work (like returning phone calls and checking email), during your "down" time.

So what can we learn from all this?

One of the most effective ways of improving your productivity is to recognise and rectify time management mistakes.

When you take the time to overcome these mistakes, it will make a huge difference in your productivity - and you'll also be happier, and experience less stress!

25 Proven Time Saving Techniques

- Arrange jobs in order of priority and not by “this is the one I like to do best”
- Set priorities based on your Key Result Areas.
- Ask yourself, “do I really have to do this job or could it be delegated successfully to someone else?”
- Get your house in order. Clear your desk of clutter and organise your workspace and paperwork based on what’s important and frequently used items.
- Post your to-do-list and priorities and reward yourself when items are completed.
- Set realistic goals, break these down into smaller steps and get on with it. How do you eat an elephant? Answer; one piece at a time!
- Plan tomorrow’s work at the end of work today.
- Don’t be too open to interruptions.
- Work in large chunks of time.
- Have set times for regular callers. It enables you to plan your day.
- Make phone calls brief, don’t chat and gossip.
- Identify tasks that give you the most profit.
- Go with your internal clock. Some people are morning or night people. Get things done when your energy and productivity is at its highest.
- Get the ‘tomorrow I’m going on holiday attitude.’ Ramp up your productivity and get all urgent matters, phone calls and emails taken care of.
- Learn to make good decisions quickly.
- Keep the ‘monkey’ where it belongs (a ‘monkey’ is another person’s problem).
- Don’t over commit. Learn to say no.
- Be an optimist. Put enthusiasm into everything you say and do.
- Be ruthless in meetings. Insist that all taking part are brief and to the point.
- Develop your motivational skills.
- Learn to delegate with greater skill.
- Examine your old habits for possible streamlining or elimination.
- Stay focussed on and plan for your ‘category 2’ (important, not urgent) activities.
- Live in situation tight compartments. Remove distractions, minimise interruptions and get focussed on the task at hand.
- Give yourself a pep talk every morning.

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