



Effective Time Management

Time is a funny thing. It's in itself an oxymoron.

- It is given to us free, but will cost us dearly if we waste it.
- Spending it wisely – can prove a worthy investment.
- Time is intangible, but we easily lose track of it.
- Time is always the exact same unit of measure – yet we feel we have less of it than ever before!

What is meant by all these contradictions? Time is there for the taking. We can use it any way we want. Just like money, we can choose to waste it, or manage it.

Everyone needs more time. Yet, how many of us are actively doing something about it? Think back to the past 48 hours – how many interruptions did you have? And, what are you doing to prevent them tomorrow?

Managing your time effectively requires proper planning for the expected. And, even more importantly, preventative measures must be taken to handle the unexpected.

When planning your time, it helps to be mindful of the following:

- Separate the urgent from the important
- Follow the 80/20 principle
- Strive to be effective, not just efficient

Separate the Urgent from the Important

There is a vast difference between the two. Many “urgent” matters are unimportant. Even worse, they hinder what's truly important. At all costs, avoid the urgent. Resist your natural reaction to jump in and solve problems. Prioritize the important and plan your time.

The 80/20 Principle

80% of your unfocused efforts will net you only 20% of your results. Many people spend their day juggling activities, never really accomplishing much. And that can be costly. Proper time management can narrow the gap and help you achieve the greatest payoff possible. Invest 20% of your time planning and organizing, and you'll accomplish more in the other 80%.

Efficient vs. Effective

The words efficient and effective are listed in the dictionary as synonyms. But, you can be efficient *without* being effective. It's one thing to perform a function well, but if it wasn't the required function, then you won't be effective. Being effective means doing the right things and doing them efficiently.

Enough people have wished for “more hours in a day,” to constitute a cliché. But, what if we got that wish? Let's face it, we would still be just as behind, and have only sheer exhaustion to show for it!

Before we try to add more time, let's see if we can get more out of the time we have! The next section offers some suggestions on how to put your time to more prudent use.

Calendars

- **One is best** and easier to maintain.
- **Keep a photocopy.** Got an assistant? Great! Have them keep a photocopy of your schedule. If not, and even if so, be sure the front desk also has a copy.
- **Keep it portable.** “Have Schedule, Will Travel!” Always carry with you a photocopy or computer printout of your daily schedule for fast and handy reference.
- **Numbers count.** For those of us who may not have the benefit of a hand-held electronic calendar, take ten extra seconds to jot down phone numbers and addresses along with names, dates, and times of your appointments.

Scheduling

- **Record all of your committed time.** Identify all your appointments, staff meetings, presentations, speaking engagements, and other business functions. (Rule of thumb: committing more than 50% of your time may cause you to have to “take time” later to juggle things around.)
- **Divide remaining time** into projects and tasks that “should be done.” Whatever time you have leftover is discretionary – like an allowance, to use as you wish or for those things that would be “nice” to get done.
- **Don’t over schedule.** Build yourself a cushion between activities.
- **Anticipate the unexpected.** It gives you greater flexibility, and will make unavoidable circumstances less stressful.
- **Set aside 30 minutes each day for your own wrap-up session.** Recount your day’s activities, re-assign unfinished activities.
- **Jot down all pertinent contact information,** regarding people you’re meeting, places you’re going on your schedule for quick reference.
- **Group things together.** For example, plan to return phone calls in one sitting.

Delegation

- **Get rid of your headaches.** Delegate to an assistant or secretary or any other capable individuals within your department or organization. Think about tasks you’ve been doing or have been neglecting. Could someone else handle them for you? If so, let them! Avoid being labeled as a “control freak.”
- **Let them run with it!** Explain what needs to be done, establish internal progress reports and deadlines for completion. Then, let go! (How much you let go will depend on their experience and reliability. But they’ll only gain knowledge and experience by doing.) Guidelines are okay as long as they’re not rigid. It’s important that they have leeway to add their own creativity to the cause. They may come up with a better time / cost-saving system than before.
- **Make them an owner.** Take a moment at the onset not only to explain what the project is, but why you are doing it, and how it fits into the overall goals of the organization. This will give the person a better appreciation of the task, and a better appreciation of you.

General Practice

- **Manage by wandering around.** Doctors aren’t the only ones who need to make rounds. You should, too. Managing by wandering around is a great way to see what’s really happening and ensure important activities are being completed.
- **Avoid the paper chase.** Even in the age of computers it is hard to get around good old-fashioned paperwork. But make it a point to handle each piece of paper only once. Don’t let it collect dust on your desk. As it comes to either can it, sign it, store it, or route it.
- **Keep a master company calendar** that the entire staff can access.
- **Eliminate vague directions** like “ASAP.” Be specific about deadlines.
- **Never meet just to meet.** Hold meetings only when trigger events show them to be necessary. It is a far more effective use of everyone’s time to schedule a meeting when you have an announcement to make, a subject to discuss, or an idea to brainstorm. Too many organizations hold routine meetings that only result in wasted time and annoyed employees.
- **Minimize distractions.** Closing your door selectively won’t hinder any “open door” policy you might encourage at your company. But, it will keep the “time stealers” away!