



Management Bulletin

North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health | Laboratory Improvement Unit

Effective Time Management

Why is time management important? Time is your most priceless resource. You can use it or waste it. Effective time management means you work smart so you get full value from your time and improve the quality of your life.

Definitions

Time - the system of those sequential relations that any event has to any other, as past, present, or future; indefinite and continuous duration regarded as that in which events succeed one another.

Time management - the analysis of how working hours are spent and the prioritization of tasks in order to maximize personal efficiency in the workplace.

Statistics

- Seven in ten Americans feel rushed.
- The average person wastes 13 years on meaningless activities.
- Many people spend 20 percent to 30 percent of their time looking for things they have misplaced.

Interesting...

Goals

There are two kinds of goals:

1. Give-up goals – like quitting smoking or losing weight.
2. Go-up goals – like getting a raise or promotion, acquiring your professional certification, saving money for a new car.

To be effective:

- Put your goals in writing. Writing a goal clarifies it.
- Make your goals specific. “Work on QA” is not specific. “Complete two QA monitors each month” is. Similarly, “clean out emails” is not specific. “Spend one hour each day on emails” is.

- Make your goals believable. Your goals must be realistic and achievable. The test of a realistic goal is knowing what it will take on a daily basis to make it a reality.
- Make your goals challenging while keeping them realistic and achievable.
- Make your goals adjustable to changing conditions.
- Include your loved ones.
- Make sure your goals don’t conflict with each other. If your goal is to be completely ethical and you cheat on your time sheet, you’ve got a conflict!
- Review your goals each day. Keeping them in your datebook organizer will help.
- Give yourself target dates for completion of your goals. Goals without schedules quickly become daydreams.
- Make your goals long-range ones. What you do every day to move toward your goals are objectives; goals are longer term.

Prioritizing

You need to prioritize your goals by placing a value on them. One way of deciding your priorities is to assign each task the letter A, B, C, or D.

- Priority A items are must-dos of vital importance. Items may fall into this category because of management directives, customer needs, deadlines or opportunities.
- Priority B items are should-dos. These items are important, but don’t have immediate deadlines.
- Priority C items are nice-to-dos. These errands, phone calls, visits, or other items could be eliminated, postponed, or rescheduled for a time when you’re not so busy.
- Priority D items are shouldn’t-dos. These activities have no real value, so you don’t need to do them. One example is reading junk mail.

Delegating

Delegating involves maximizing the number of things that get done by using others.

- Select people who have the ability to do the job.
- As long as the requirements of the task are met, it doesn't have to be done your way.
- Make sure they understand what is expected.
- Make sure they are committed to completing the task.
- Follow-up.
- Don't do it for them.
- Reward them – even a "Thank you!" goes a long way.

Interruptions

The first step in getting control of interruptions is to prevent unnecessary ones. Then reduce the time you spend on the necessary ones:

- Screen your phone calls, if that's appropriate.
- Make your open-door policy figurative, not literal. Close your door when you are planning or writing reports, for instance.
- Keep meetings or phone calls short by letting the person you are talking with know up front how much time you have available.
- Keep a record of interruptions for one or two weeks, noting who interrupted you, when, and why.
- Announce that there are certain times of day you won't take interruptions.
- When an employee asks to discuss an important matter with you, take control of the timing by saying something like, "Come now," "Come in 15 minutes," or "Come at 2:45 this afternoon." Of course, you must always find five minutes to 10 minutes for key people.

The Telephone

Try these time-management tips for telephone calls:

- If appropriate, screen phone calls.
- Small talk accounts for up to 90 percent of many calls, so make an effort to keep it to a minimum.
- Learn to "cut off" calls as appropriate.
- Group your outgoing calls. Return calls from 11:30 a.m. to noon and 4:30 to 5 p.m.

- Keep pen and paper by the phone. Also make certain that your datebook organizer (paper or electronic) is with you.
- Say, "What can I do for you?" rather than "How are you?"
- Use an autodialer.
- Jot down key points in your planner before making a call.
- Let people know when you are available to receive calls and when you do not want to be disturbed.

Paperwork

Clutter expands to fill the space available for its retention. Paperwork quickly becomes clutter and an interruption when not properly managed. There are five things you can do with paperwork:

1. Toss it.
2. Refer it to someone else.
3. Act on it.
4. File it.
5. Recycle it.

If possible, handle a piece of paper only once. If you really need to handle something more than that, put a check mark in the top left corner every time you handle that piece of paper. When you see three check marks, it's time to act. You might find it helpful to separate paperwork into the following categories: letters, reports, files, and reading material. Then separate paperwork into three categories: items that require action, items that you want to read, pass on to someone else, or file, and items that can be thrown away and forgotten.

Procrastination

The reasons why we procrastinate include the following:

- We fear failure.
- We don't want to do something.
- The task is too big.
- The task is not high on our list of priorities.

The first step toward controlling procrastination is to examine your procrastination habits. You will want to delve into your personal history of what, when,

why, and how you procrastinate. This will help you get a handle on what kinds of things you procrastinate on, how often, and why.

Conclusion

Do you run out of time before you get the important things done each day? We are all being asked to do more with less. By managing time effectively and working smarter, we can accomplish this. We must be flexible if we want to thrive in the 21st century's business world. If you try the ideas and suggestions in this bulletin, you should be able to free up several hours a day. Even if you don't need to go that far, you'll discover ways to work smarter, not harder. You may be able to free up 20 minutes to 60 minutes a day just by trying some of these tips regularly.

Many people never attempt to improve their time management ability. It's easy if you tackle one time management tactic at a time. Try one tactic, assimilate it into your everyday routine, and then go to another time management tactic. Some time management skills are easy and some are not. Don't dismiss a skill or tactic just because it sounds simple. Also don't dismiss a time-management skill or tactic because it isn't new. You may just need to reaffirm what you are already doing. Improving your time management skills can help you take control of your life, increase your productivity, increase your confidence, allow you to meet your goals, and free up more time to do the things you "want" to do.

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