

Effective Time Management

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We've all heard, or said, "There just aren't enough hours in the day" at some point in our career. There are no standard schedules or day plans. Every job and each individual within that job will have a different way of prioritizing and handling the responsibilities associated with that job. Despite this uniqueness, there are a couple of strategies that lead to better time management.

Plan Ahead

Planning is fundamental to good time management. The time spent planning is worth it, but only if you can implement the plan. You should accurately assess the time it takes to handle the tasks you set out in your diary, taking into account the usual interruptions, crises and delays that can crop up during the day.

In addition, you should apply this concept of planning ahead to your whole life. It may sound callous to schedule in time for family, friends or leisure pursuits but it is much better than leaving these important things to "the time left". By writing down the time spent under each activity you will be better able to see the balance, or lack thereof, in your life.

Under-promise and Over-deliver

One of the smartest scheduling tools is to set dates that somewhat over-estimate the time it takes to complete a job. This allows you to deliver on-time even when unforeseen delays occur and to surprise and delight your boss, clients or colleagues by delivering sooner than expected! Breaking big tasks into manageable steps, setting a timetable and action plan makes almost anything achievable and leaves you with a lot less stress.

A diary, whether manual or electronic, is a must. As well as accurately scheduling tasks and appointments your diary should include space for information and work-in-progress notes. This way you can keep track of your progress and ensure that if, for any reason, you are unable to deliver on the expected date, you can warn your boss, clients or colleagues ahead of schedule and revise the date.

Delegate wherever you can

Many people avoid delegating tasks, often using comments like "It will take less time to do it myself" or "I'll end up having to re-do it myself". Whilst it does take time to train someone to assist you with the tasks it will be time well-spent and will release much more time in the future when you can delegate the mundane, time-consuming jobs to others.

Ridding yourself of these routine jobs will relieve stress levels and allow you to focus on the specific tasks that require your personal attention.

Make and follow a list of priorities

Not all tasks have to be done immediately but some of those tasks may be time-sensitive or require your full attention. Making a list relieves stress by giving structure to your day. Schedule the most important tasks at the top of the list so that if you only manage to get through half the tasks during the course of the day, you can go home knowing that the crucial ones have been tackled and the others can wait for tomorrow. Try to schedule the mundane, routine tasks that don't require much attention to the times of the day where you are at your lowest.

Learn to say "No!"

Whilst we can all expect to work longer hours or take work home at some point in our careers it should be noted that if this becomes the norm rather than the exception you're severely damaging the balance that should exist between work and leisure. This is unhealthy and leads to increased levels of stress. Once you learn to say "No" to others and especially to yourself, you will feel liberated and better equipped to handle the workload.