



Time

Top tips for time management

And all my endeavours are unlucky explorers come back, abandoning the expedition, the specimens, the lillies of ambition still spring in their climate, still unpicked: but time, time is all I lacked to find them, as the great collectors before me.'

Keith Douglas 'On return from Egypt, 1943-4'

Why time management?

The signs of poor time management are everywhere to be seen. Endless meetings that proceed without a clear focus or structure because of a weak chair or lack of a clear agenda, desks piled high with cluttered paper work, late for appointments, missed deadlines and failure to achieve objectives, higher stress levels and so on.

Poor time management costs employers and the economy as a whole billions of pounds each year. It contributes to higher sickness and absence rates, lower staff morale and reduced productivity. These are all good reasons for persuading organisations to address this problem. However, perhaps the most compelling reasons for dealing with poor time management are the negative effects on the individual. Poor time management can mean a failure to achieve personal goals, which in turn can reduce self-esteem.

Life Goals

Begin by looking at your life goals, those outcomes that you would like to achieve in your life outside work. It may be that you want to improve your golf handicap, to do an Open University degree, and to simply have more personal time for yourself and your family. Whatever the case, it is important to try to visualise these outcomes as clearly and specifically as you can. Try to imagine how you would feel if you were to achieve your goals

Many of us fall at the first hurdle and never get beyond expressing faint desires and hopes. We say that we haven't enough time, and that provides a convenient excuse for failing to realise our dreams. So to be successful, we must really want to achieve our goals. It is this that will provide the motivation to make time by saving time. If it is important enough, you will make the time.

Time Stealers

Once we have defined our goals, we need to examine what has prevented us from making the time in the past. Sometimes it is because we waste time. Invariably however, we find that we lose time without being fully conscious of where the time leakages have occurred. If you suspect that you lose time in this way, try keeping a log of your time. Take a typical day, and record what happens by accounting for each 5 minute increment during the day.

You may be surprised to find that you lose a lot of time through interruptions, phone calls, unscheduled visits from reps, poorly managed meetings or simply other people who like to idly pass time with you. If so you need to take charge by controlling the way others steal your time. Be gracious with people and ruthless with time.

'Well we can't stand here doin' nothing, people will think we are workmen.'
Spike Milligan

Time Management - an attitude of mind.

Time Management is much more than a set of techniques. It is an attitude of mind. To change our attitudes about anything we need to be motivated to change. In other words we have to want to do it. So what prevents us from achieving our goals?

Brin Bendon, well known to many who attend BIGGA Management training courses, starts a new series aimed at improving your off-course skills

waster?

Procrastination

'Procrastination is opportunity's natural assassin.'

Victor Kiam

These are many reasons why people procrastinate: perhaps to escape an unpleasant or overwhelming task by doing easy, low priority jobs first or to excuse poor work. They might try to get someone else to do the job for fear that they won't be able to do the job or because they don't know where or how to start. Or they argue that there won't be time to do the job perfectly.

These are some of the 'escapes' people use: indulging in something they like doing such as reading, socialising or day dreaming; indulging in negative feelings like anxiety, fear or worry and running away from the job or using perfectionism as an excuse, and blaming others for interruptions.

Attitudes to adopt

So if you are serious about improving your time management, here are some attitudes to adopt:

- Admit you have been wasting time.
- Decide work isn't necessarily unpleasant - adopt a positive attitude.
- Separate your feelings about the job from your decision on what to do about it.
- Recognise and acknowledge the futility of procrastination.
- Decide to face unpleasant tasks square on.
- Think through previous jobs - and recognise that fears of failure are usually unfounded. Use this to boost your confidence.

Taking control of your time. The Pareto Principle

Wilfredo Pareto, the Italian philosopher and economist, was the author of something that we now refer to as the 80/20 Rule, namely:

- most of our effectiveness (say 80%) will come from a relatively small

number of key activities (say 20%).

Poor time management often means that we can spend a great deal of our time (80%) on things which contribute very little to our overall effectiveness (20%). We may be busy, but not particularly productive or effective.

So to be effective we need to:

1. Define clear goals and tasks
2. Prioritise tasks in terms of urgency and importance i.e. Must do Now, Should do Soon, Like to do Later
3. Delegate or ask for help if you are up against tight deadlines
4. Make a start

'Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion'

Parkinson's Law - Professor C Northcote Parkinson

Techniques to help you work smart, not hard

- Decide to do the most unpleasant job of the day first.
- Break the job down into small tasks.
- Start anywhere, if starting is a problem.
- Commit yourself by telling someone you're going to do the job.
- Set your own deadlines
- Reward yourself at stages through the job.
- Remove or avoid your escapes and distracters, eg socialising.
- Schedule start times for jobs.
- Stick to high priority jobs.
- Consider the consequences of procrastination.
- Do one job at a time. Breaking off and having to come back to it wastes time
- Ask 'what's the best use of my time now?'
- Regularly review your progress and take corrective action when necessary.

30 ways to make more time

Preparation and organisation

1. Become aware of time
2. Place a clock where everyone can see it.
3. Prepare a daily to-do-list
4. Prioritise tasks in terms of Importance and Urgency
5. Delegate tasks
6. Be assertive
7. Say 'no' to jobs that aren't yours
8. Set realistic deadlines
9. Give yourself private time.
10. Keep your desk or workspace tidy

Dealing with interruptions

11. Work out who needs access to you at all times and insist that others make appointments
12. Get your secretary (if you have one) or a deputy to deal with the rest
13. Ask people why they've come to see you
14. Stand up when they come in
15. Be gracious with people and ruthless with time
16. Suggest you arrange a meeting later when it suits you
17. Make the meeting in the other person's office
18. Perch on the edge of the desk
19. Save small talk for the pub

Meetings

20. Be conscious of wasting other people's time. If you have to attend, do have to be present for the whole meeting or for just part of it?
21. Plan the meeting - have a clear objective. Start and end on time.
22. Don't allow meetings to be interrupted or side-tracked.

Dealing with the telephone

23. Use telephone technology to field your calls and have a call back system
24. Make your calls in blocks. (It's

a good idea to make them just before lunch and just before people are about to finish work for the day. It focuses their minds and prevents rambling telephone calls and pass-timing.)

25. Write down the points raised in the call

26. Be especially aware of time passing on the phone. Use an egg timer to time your calls and complete them within 3 minutes

Office systems

27. Finish one job before you go on to the next

28. Spend 5 minutes in the morning planning the day

29. Have an administrator screen mail and handle each piece of paper only once

And finally...

30. There is no such thing as dead time if you are serious about managing your time. So make use of committed time such as when you are in your car or on a train. These are opportunities that afford you the time to think. Embrace these ideas and make them into habits and you will be able to achieve much more with less.



Brin Bendon is the Managing Director of Vector Training Ltd., an approved training provider for BIGGA and many other corporate and public sector clients. Brin is well known to many Greenkeepers in his role as one of the lead tutors on the BIGGA's Management Development Programmes. Vector Training can be contacted via telephone on 01904 642462 or by email: enquiries@vector-training.demon.co.uk.