

Effective Time Management Strategies

*Bruce Williams
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How many hours do you have in a day? I hope your answer is the same for everyone. I have 24 hours in a day, too. We all get 24 hours a day, every day. Nobody gets more, and nobody gets less. But if everyone gets the same amount of time in a day, why do some people accomplish so much more than others? And why do some of us feel so swamped?

Time is a finite resource, a budget that cannot be increased. Once a moment is past, the time

is spent, and it's gone forever. Still, most everyone wishes—at some point or another—that they had more time to do something in particular. But the fact is, if you think you don't have the time to do something important, it's because you have chosen to spend that time on something else. Perhaps the hardest thing to understand is that it truly is your choice how you spend your time. For many, that responsibility is hard to accept.

The key is to set priorities. If you don't spend your time working on your own priorities, you can bet you're spending it on

“Other People's Priorities.” It's fine for your priorities to line up with someone else's. In fact, that's extremely important to building and maintaining successful relationships, both personal and professional. This is crucial for team efforts and achievements. But to take charge of your time, you must make your priority choices consciously.

Think about your goals. What do you want to achieve, have, do, become? Remember that the power to say “no” to something comes when you have a deeper desire to say “yes” to

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something else. Good perspectives for goals include:

- lifetime
- five years from now
- one year from now
- this month
- this week
- today!

We all need both a long-term vision plus shorter-term steps to turn that vision into reality. This happens by developing an action plan. While this may seem complicated, it is actually quite simple. An action plan defines Point A and Point B and describes how to get from A to B. What are the resources you need? Each step in an action plan starts, confirms, or changes a direction. Choose your steps carefully. If

you don't like where you are, remember you took a path to get there; but you can blaze new trails, starting right now. Periodically review the long-term goals you have established. Do you still want them? Are you getting closer? Is there a faster or better way to achieve them?

Do a good job of planning. Invest front-end time to avoid problems later. Try to eliminate wasted steps. Skipping important steps and backtracking will lead to the old refrain, "You can pay me now or pay me later." Be sure that each step in your plan is in the same direction, and they should start building more and more momentum. Use that momentum to get you excited, motivated and creative.

Time management is all about planning and organizing. You can be effective TODAY by

making progress on longer-term goals. Successful time managers always keep a to-do list. When something new comes up, figure out where it belongs on the list. Don't drop the list and do what seems most urgent without making a conscious decision. And remember: don't overbook. Stuff ALWAYS comes up unexpectedly.

Execute your plan. You need to engineer your own daily progress. Stay on track and focus on the important things. Filter out any unnecessary or irrelevant information. Cut the clutter out of your life. Delegate so that you can focus on high-leverage tasks. It is crucial to train well, and the bonus is that you are helping other people grow in their skills and development. Communicate effectively, as clear expectations and feedback are essential for success. ■

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