

HOW-TO

# Better manage your time

BY PHIL HARWOOD

**M**any business owners, executives and managers struggle to manage their time well. Despite their best efforts, they're unable to stay on top of everything coming their way. Some even have trouble deciding what to do, what not to do and when to do it.

Most busy people have tried various time management or organizational systems. Some have given up because of the complexity of these systems or the weight of the burden they place on a person. A good time management system is simple, easy to use and results in less stress and anxiety.

Busy people who have many responsibilities are prone to becoming overwhelmed by worrying about everything in their lives. They can't concentrate and be productive because of the noise in their heads, constantly reminding them about all the things they need to do.

Albert Einstein said, "A happy man is too satisfied with the present to dwell too much on the future." Notice he doesn't say we shouldn't think about the future or plan for

it because we need to live our lives. When the burdens of tomorrow overwhelm you so much that you can't focus on what you need to accomplish, you can become paralyzed, confused and depressed.

Jesus said, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes." An effective time management system will reduce your tendency to worry about things you shouldn't.

In the mid-1990s, I was introduced to a time management system outlined in the book "Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity" by David Allen. Before this, I was dutifully using Franklin Planner tools with limited success.

For the first time, I could envision a comprehensive system for organizing and keeping control of my personal and professional life, using a simple, easy-to-understand methodology. I embraced the system and began to implement it immediately. (See "Web Extra" at the top of page 33.) As you'll see, the system is simple; the entire system diagram fits on one page. Being easy to understand allows easier implementation and use.

The beginning point of the "Getting Things Done" system is with our *stuff*—everything in our lives we need or want to deal with. Stuff comes to us differently. We receive phone calls, emails, mail, memos, packages, text

messages, Facebook messages and LinkedIn messages. Additionally, we have reoccurring and one-time tasks to accomplish. We have personal and business stuff. We also have stuff we should be doing that isn't written down or doesn't appear in our inbox. We want to:

- spend more time with our children, parents and neighbors;
- volunteer on a committee;
- vacation in a special place; and
- accomplish everything on our bucket list.

All of our stuff needs to be captured and entered into a system, which seems like a huge undertaking but isn't. Once committed to a system, you capture stuff and enter it constantly. In a relatively short time, all the stuff will be dealt with.

The beauty of the system is it helps capture and organize stuff and enables us to not waste time on stuff we shouldn't be wasting time on. Without an effective time management system, it's too easy to waste precious time and energy.

Much of our stuff doesn't require action: e-newsletters, advertisements, catalogs, etc. When stuff isn't actionable, we have three options:

1. eliminate it immediately;
2. file it away for review at a later date; or
3. take action when no action is required.

We become distracted and stop what we're doing. We drift off mentally and lose focus because we don't have a clear sense of our priorities



**QUICK TIP**

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**WEB EXTRA** → For a diagram and overview of the time management system Harwood uses, visit [landscapemanagement.net/2012/09/27/timemanagement/](http://landscapemanagement.net/2012/09/27/timemanagement/).

## A GOOD TIME MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IS SIMPLE, EASY TO USE AND RESULTS IN LESS STRESS AND ANXIETY.

and what we're supposed to be doing with our time. The distraction doesn't appear to be damaging, but it is.

Much of our stuff is actionable—we need to do something. If this is the case, we need to ask ourselves another question: What's the next action? Once we identify this, we can decide how to deal with it in our system.

There also are three options when stuff is actionable: Do it if it takes less than two minutes to do (option 1). If the item takes more than two minutes, you can delegate it (option 2) or defer it (option 3). Either way, the item stays

in your time management system to ensure it's completed eventually.

When we delegate or defer, we create next actions, which are the next steps that need to be taken to move an item toward completion. Next actions appear in our calendar if they're date specific. They appear in a categorized task list if they're not date specific.

Reviewing our calendars and tasks to determine what needs our attention is the next logical step in the system and must be done regularly. I review my calendar and tasks daily, with a much deeper review once a week. This might be sufficient for you, depending on how fast your world moves. **LM**

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