

TIME Management 101

Take Control of Your Time

By Gregory Smith

Louis Boone, a poet and novelist, once said, "I definitely am going to take a course on time management... just as soon as I can work it into my schedule."

Time management is one of those skills needed in today's "24/7" world. A person who can't manage time hurts teamwork. Poor time management makes for a poor project manager. A worker who doesn't show up for work on time will get fired. But those who manage time well experience reduced stress and anxiety.

Included here are a few time management tips I've picked up over the years.

1 Know what is important. Clearly define the most important aspects of your job—the effort that generates key results. To determine what is important ask questions such as, "What has the greatest impact or value on my team members?" "What will increase sales?" Focus on the 20 percent that generates 80 percent of the results.

2 Prioritize and make "to do" lists. Now that you know what is important about your job, make a master weekly "to do" list. Write an "A," "B," or "C" next to each item based on importance. At

the beginning of each day make a daily "To Do" list. Stop and think—which item absolutely must be completed today? This does not include items you'd like to get done today, but only the item(s) that have to be completed today.

3 Avoid the "feel like it" effect. Poor time managers base their actions on their feelings and moods. You know the type, "Yeah, I know the garbage can is overflowing, but I don't feel like taking it out right now." Effective time management is more about habit than feelings.

Most people do the easy and simple elements of their job first... like reading their e-mail, scanning the newspaper, cleaning off their desks, etc. Good time managers do what is important first, regardless of their feelings. As Nike says, "Just Do It!"

4 Schedule your biggest project for your peak energy period. It took me many years to figure out not everyone is a morning person like me. I hop out of bed before the sun comes up ready to head off to the office, while others don't hit their stride until 3 p.m. When is your peak energy period? Focus your mental and physical resources on the largest projects during those times when your energy level is high.

5 Learn to delegate. A person who refuses to delegate will likely be very busy, frustrated and heading for burnout. It is not necessary for a manager to personally handle every item. One very successful regional sales manager readily attributed part of his success to the fact that he trusted his administrative assistant to handle routine items that did not require his personal decision. This left him free to concentrate on working with sales personnel outside the office.

6 Toss it or file it. Follow the rule to touch paper only once. Know what is important and throw away every piece of paper you don't think you will need. If you want to keep it, spend 10 seconds fil-

ing that important paper now rather than 30 minutes searching for it later.

7 Use folders to prioritize your work; subdivide files. If you prefer to go paperless, use your computer to subdivide files. For example, I created electronic folders for my articles titled, "Articles for 2003," and "Articles for 2004." This way I can quickly find what I am looking for.

If you have paper files, use colors folders to see which jobs need your immediate attention. I use red folders for hot projects and client files. Yellow folders are for new ideas and projects. Blue folders tell me this is for research. Get the idea?

8 Be realistic and stay flexible. One way to set yourself up for a panic attack is to plan an unrealistic amount of work for one day/week/etc. Use your common sense to recognize when you have over-scheduled yourself. Make adjustments and tackle tasks "one bite at a time."

9 Schedule time for you. Schedule a "personal time" appointment on your calendar each day. If someone wants to see you at that time, just say, "I'm sorry, I have an appointment then." Whether you use this for personal reflection or as a few quiet minutes to catch your breath or simply time to think, it's a legitimate use of time. And you will still get as much, if not more, done.

10 Make sure your electronic planner does not cost you time. The appeal of personal digital assistants (PDAs) is the orderly convenience they provide. But unless you spend some time learning the "grafitti" necessary for entering and maintaining information in a PDA, it may be faster for you to jot it down with a pencil in an old-fashioned paper planner. Decide which system would be more efficient for you.

11 Deal with e-mail immediately. The same rule applies to e-mail as paper. Read e-mail once and do something with it. Don't let messages pile up, thinking you will get back to them. Keep your inbox clutter-free. Create a "keeper" folder and transfer the e-mail you want to keep for later. Create another folder for "Actions pending," etc.

Also, use the delete key aggressively and delete junk e-mail without reading it. Use your filters to eliminate spammers.

Time is valuable, and time management can help you be more productive, successful and less stressed out so you have more time to enjoy life. ♦

Gregory P. Smith shows businesses how to build productive and profitable work environments that attract, keep and motivate their workforce. He is the author of the book, *Here Today Here Tomorrow: Transforming Your Workforce from High-Turnover to High-Retention*. He speaks at conferences, conducts management training and is the president of a management consulting firm called Chart Your Course International, located in Conyers, Georgia. His Web site is www.chartcourse.com.

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