



The 10 priorities of
effectively managing time
and accomplishing more

the business guide on time management

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time management **priorities**

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the 10 priorities of effectively managing time and accomplishing more

At its most basic level, time management is about choices.

As you and your team strive for balance between competing responsibilities, making the best use of your time eases your stress and makes you more effective in accomplishing what it is you want to accomplish. The key is to **focus completely** on the actions you deem most valuable toward achieving your goals. You'll feel greater motivation and satisfaction when you put time toward the activities that most impact your future.

Take the first step toward better time management by determining your goals and what course of action will take you there. With that information, you and your team can set the priorities that will focus your activities. This guide leads you through these first two actions, and then eight more steps that can set you in the right direction to achieving more.

Time is an absolute; it's perfectly equal for everyone – same days in a month, hours in a day, and minutes in an hour. But when you make time work for you, it becomes so much more abundant.

Choose to focus your time on what matters most-- period.

1

define goals

Effective time management begins with effective planning. You can best plan your time when working toward **clear and well-defined goals**. Begin your planning by answering two questions: where am I now? where am I going?

Where am I now?

Take the time to record your activities in 15-minute segments for a typical week. While this may seem like a big investment, it's a good use of time because you'll likely be surprised to see where your time is really going. As you review the results, you can eliminate unnecessary activities and redirect that time to more productive tasks. If you spend 15 minutes chatting every day when you get your morning cup of coffee, then consider bringing your coffee to the office and investing those 15 minutes reviewing your calendar and preparing for the day.

Where am I going?

As you determined whether an activity was unnecessary or productive, you considered the final results of the task. For example, you determined that attending the monthly lunch meeting of your professional society over the past year was productive because it gave you the opportunity to meet two colleagues who became clients.

Looking more closely at the activities you judged productive will reveal what results you believe are valuable. You judged the professional society as productive because you expanded your professional network and increased your revenue. Now consider to what end those results contribute. In this example, it's growing your business. This is your starting point for defining the goals that will lead to professional satisfaction.

Dost thou love life?
Then do not squander time,
for that is the stuff life is made of.

Benjamin Franklin
American statesman,
writer, scientist & printer
(1706-1790)

2

set priorities

To effectively set priorities, you must determine the importance of each activity by **considering its potential impact on the future** in accordance with your goals. Ask yourself, "Does this move me closer to my goal or is it *likely* to move me closer to my goal?" If the answer is yes, then the activity is worthy of your priority list. If the answer is no, then postpone or eliminate the activity. It's that simple.

Consider the impact of attending an industry conference. Will the conference move you closer to signing that new client or is it *likely* to move you closer to signing that new client? Yes. You can't guarantee the conference will lead to a win, but the information you gather and contacts you make may improve your presentation and your chances.

Stress and poor results come from working on low-priority tasks and accomplishing little toward your goals. With specific goals and solid priorities that contribute to those goals, you're ready to begin the work that will get you where you want to be.

3

create a 'to do' list

Now that you've established your long-term priorities, focus on short-term priorities by creating a 'to do' list. Keeping a **written record of tasks you must accomplish** for the day (and the week) organizes your thinking and allows you to track your progress.

Begin by listing your tasks for the week. Then, review the list to identify your top priority. Think it through with the idea, "If I get nothing else done today, I must do this one thing." Number it, circle it, put it at the top of a new list – whatever works for you. Repeat this process with the remaining items until you have an ordered list of your essential tasks to focus your activities. If it's not on the list, it likely doesn't require your immediate attention.

Keep in mind, there will be exceptions. Your list may change during the week as new situations arise, but carefully consider each new task before you add it to your list. Someone may want your thoughts on a new project by the end of the day or may want you to sit in on a conference call this afternoon, but is it the one thing you absolutely must do today? Every interruption and distraction is a priority for someone else. To make it on your list, the priority must be your own.

4

schedule time

You can more effectively accomplish the tasks on your 'to do' list if you schedule time for the work. Invest a few minutes each day to plan your time – find a few minutes at the end of one day to plan for the next or start the day with your coffee and calendar.

Parkinson's Law states that work will expand to the time allotted to it. Make a commitment to complete a task by **designating a specific amount of time** to it. You'll also set limits because you'll need to move on to your next appointment. By viewing each task as an appointment rather than an item on a 'to do' list, you are less likely to allow yourself to put it off. Think about finding time to exercise – you can easily skip the gym if it's a 'to do,' but you'll get there if you have an appointment with a personal trainer. Keep track of the actual time it takes to complete a task and scheduling will become easier and more accurate.

How you spend your time
defines who you are.

Oprah Winfrey
American TV host & producer,
publisher, philanthropist
(1954-)

Plan your day with your personal characteristics in mind. If you're most alert in the morning, then that's the time for projects that require concentration and analytical thinking. Scheduling time for correspondence or phone calls in between more demanding tasks will give you a chance to recharge. Schedule a block of 'quiet time' for yourself each day, too. Whether you consider it a reward for completing a task or simply time to think, your focus and productivity will improve, so it's time well spent.

5 organize

Keep to your schedule by allowing time to organize – your work space, your files, your email. Handle paperwork, mail and email once by filing it, scheduling it, answering it or tossing it. You'll spend less time **assigning something a place immediately** than searching for it later. Create a logical filing system for paper and electronic files. Consider color coding to prioritize or identify specific projects. You'll reduce stress by eliminating clutter and the visual image of work piling up.

6 work smart

If you know you can't possibly get everything done, then work smart and **do the important things the right way**, the first time. Gather all of the information you need to complete the task to avoid stops and starts.

Set specific deadlines for assignments and stay on schedule with interim checkpoints to track progress. Allow sufficient time to do the work so you avoid the mistakes that force rework.

If other people are involved in a particular task, pull them in up front so there's no need to backtrack or play catch-up.

When faced with a big project, break it down into smaller, manageable pieces. This will help you make steady progress toward completion rather than putting off an effort that's perceived as overwhelmingly difficult.

7 delegate

You don't need to personally handle everything that comes across your desk. Delegate anything someone else can do (and/ or should do). **Rely on the people around you** to complete tasks that don't require your immediate attention or approval. When you hand off a task, provide minimal instruction. Let your staff learn from experience – they may find a better way to do it.

Things which matter most
should not be at the mercy
of things which matter least.

Johann Goethe
German dramatist,
poet & novelist
(1749-1832)

If you find it difficult to let go of work, begin with simple information-gathering tasks so you can quickly check the results. You'll learn to rely on your support staff while developing their skills so you can move on to delegating bigger assignments.

8

learn to say 'no'

You can avoid unnecessary work and many tasks that fall outside your range of duties when you learn to say 'no' more often.

Determine whether the work and the results contribute to your goals before you accept a new task. Consider whether completing the task makes the best use of your time at that moment given your goals and priorities.

A coworker asks you to review and edit a report due this afternoon. If you do this, you'll put aside completing the notes for a presentation you'll deliver tomorrow. Does the report involve your team? Does the impression the report makes impact your standing in the department? If not, then say no and focus your attention on the work that directly reflects on you and can move you closer to your goal.

If you don't have the option to decline the task, then review your priorities to decide what else is flexible. Try to move something off your desk rather than just piling more on it. **Accept that you have a certain capacity** for what you can accomplish, and identify what it is you really don't need to do.

9

manage meetings

In so many cases the longer a meeting runs, the less the group accomplishes.

Manage meetings before you take a seat at the table. Question whether your presence, or the meeting itself, is necessary. While personally connecting with others can be a valuable benefit to holding a meeting, a concise memo or a few quick phone calls may be equally effective but require much less time. If the meeting is necessary, **keep to the topic** by preparing and circulating a list of objectives and an agenda. Set a timeframe and stick to it. Try allocating a specific amount of time to each agenda item and appointing a timekeeper to watch the clock.

Before you adjourn, briefly review the objectives to ensure the meeting met its purpose. Confirm any decisions made regarding each objective and clarify responsibility and deadlines for any action items. Those action items set the framework for the follow-up memo or meeting.

10

stay flexible

Create a realistic schedule to avoid overload, and stay flexible to **allow for the unexpected**.

Don't pack your day so tightly that any deviation throws you completely off track. Leave early for an appointment and avoid the anxiety of rushing to be on time. Resist the urge to fill every bit of white space between scheduled tasks. When something comes up that might better serve your long-term goals, be opened to adjusting your schedule.