

WHY BE A SLAVE TO TIME? MANAGE IT WELL AND BECOME THE MASTER.

Today everybody is crying 'time poor' as we try to fit more and more into our waking hours. Our frenetic days are stretched thinly between our work and personal activities, often leaving us wondering why we don't feel we have accomplished more.

This is often the result of not being in control of our time, but rather letting time control us. Managing time wisely is about working smarter, not harder, and achieving efficiency and productivity. The key is about being in control of how we actually allocate our time, and of handling our workload in the most efficient manner.

Even with a heavy or unpredictable work load, strict deadlines and a limited time frame there are some aspects of your day which you can plan. Planning allows you to become more productive, work more efficiently and actually achieve set objectives.

How do you go about planning, regaining control and become more efficient?

Firstly, do you really know what constitutes a typical day for you? Are there slow and fast times at work? Is there any consistency about the slower periods? How much free time do you actually have? What you do with this time? Do you unknowingly waste time?

SIX EASY STEPS FOR TAKING CONTROL

1 KEEP A MONTHLY LOG

Over a month keep a log of your activities, no matter how small or trivial.

Analyze your log. Determine:

- Did you do the right thing at the right or wrong time?
- Did you do something that could have been delegated?
- Did you have a daily written plan with clear priorities?
- What could be done in a better way? Faster? More simply? With less detail?
- How often were you interrupted, for how long and how important were the interruptions?
- How long did it take to return to what you were doing before the interruptions?
- How many interrupted tasks were left unfinished at the end of the day?
- How important were the contacts you had with others in terms of your priorities?
- How often, how long and how appropriate were these contacts?

2. ELIMINATE TIME WASTERS

Identify and eliminate those things which rob you of time on a daily basis. Management issues like:

- a lack of objectives, unclear instructions, shifting priorities, unrealistic time frames, poor delegation, duplication of effort, too many meetings etc.

Workplace issues like:

- 'drop-in' representatives, inadequate or problem staff, telephone interruptions, too much paperwork, administrative duties, poor filing systems, visual distractions and noise etc.

Personal work practices like:

- indecision, disorganisation, too much time spent on emails/memos, socialising or in idle conversation; doing tasks that someone else should be doing, or that shouldn't be done at all etc.

3. PLAN AND SET GOALS

Plans will vary by how far ahead they project, how precise they are, and whether they are limited by how far ahead it is feasible to plan. A good plan will always answer the questions: What? Why? How? Who? When? Where?

Setting goals helps you think strategically about your work. Ask yourself: "What am I trying to achieve in the short term, and in the longer term?"

4. PRIORITISE AND SCHEDULE ACTIVITIES

Determine which are active tasks – those that you must do to achieve the objectives of your job; and reactive tasks - everything else that lands on your desk and that must be dealt with to keep things running.

Prioritise in relation to importance and urgency.

Code your activities so that their priority and completion date is readily identifiable.

Review your priorities periodically.

5. KEEP A "TO DO" LIST

This will:

- Eliminate the chance of forgetting small but important details
- Enable you to keep track of what you have achieved
- Help you focus on one thing at a time
- To what extent did you reach your goals?

- Enable you to know where to pick up after interruptions
- Identify clearly where and when you need extra help; and when you don't have time to take on extra tasks.

6. ALLOW FOR UNPLANNED TASKS AND INTERRUPTIONS

All plans need to be tempered with a few realities. Interruptions can and will occur. Don't overlook unplanned tasks and allow a buffer by building in adequate chunks of time.

HOW PLANNING WORKS IN PRACTICE

Tina Jowett, a Barrister at Windeyer Chambers in Macquarie St. Sydney is married to the CEO of Standards Australia, John Tucker. Both high profile executives with demanding careers that require long hours, they are parents to three children, the youngest being 7 years old.

Tina works across all areas of law, and keeping abreast of legal issues is very demanding. She is also a mentor to a 4th year law student, does some pro bono work and once a year writes a paper for publishing. Her traveling often takes her to Perth, Darwin and country New South Wales.

John's role sees him travel overseas and interstate frequently and he is required to attend many evening functions.

Their life is made even busier because of the children's music and sport activities. The ferrying of children to piano and trumpet lessons, musicianship training, rugby union, trapeze and rowing coupled with homework supervision means that Tina has to co-ordinate and plan work and family activities very carefully.

Tina's diary is her best friend. To keep track of John's many international and domestic trips and evening functions, Tina records them in pencil initially, and in red when they are confirmed.

"This is so they don't get confused with my own diary entries, says Tina. "I know what dates are best to avoid when I am planning a business trip or attending Court.

"This careful planning and co-ordination means that we are only away at the same time about twice a year and this is when a logistics plan is put into place. I draft up a weekly roster of daily events and who is responsible for their outcome. Our two eldest are 14 and 18 and though they have specific needs, most of the infrastructure now centres around our youngest. "Careful planning, coordination communication and the use of a diary are essential to the way I manage my t

- Give you a sense of achievement when you complete and cross off a task

THE BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORKPLACE ARRANGEMENTS

Ron Kruger, PR and Communications manager, Australian Business State Chamber finds that juggling a demanding job, with a wife who works fulltime and two small children of pre-school and school age, is both challenging and rewarding.

“As PR Manager for one of Australia’s largest employer groups, I need to continually be aware of managing my time effectively. Having a considerate employer makes all the difference.

“My employer provides me with a flexible working arrangement permitting me to drop my children off at school and leave early if necessary. It’s a mutual arrangement which frequently sees me working evenings or the occasional weekend to keep up to date with workloads and deadlines.

“Employers who don’t seriously look at such flexibility may lose a valuable employee and often this can be a prohibitive cost to the business considering the amount of time and money it takes to replace them.”

TIPS FOR IMPROVING WORKPLACE TIME MANAGEMENT

- Use time management software, and/or a planner or diary.
- Delegate or outsource appropriately.
- Establish routines and follow them whenever possible.
- Set time limits for tasks.
- Handle each piece of paper only once.
- Screen phone calls.
- Set aside time for making and responding to phone calls and reading and responding to emails.
- Reply to complaints and problems immediately.
- Read smarter – not necessarily faster.
- Devise and use standard letters / proformas.
- Think carefully about attending and holding meetings – do you really need to be there, can the message be communicated face to face, or via phone, fax or email?
- Keep staff memos short, factual and to-the-point.
- Sort paperwork into following categories:
 - ? Action – give them priorities and assign a time.
 - ? Opinion - you need someone else’s opinion or expertise before you can act.
 - ? Information - material which you are required to note and/or comment upon.

- ? Reading - does not need to be read at once. Save it for quiet time.
- ? WPB - no further action. Put it in the waste paper bin.
- Keep an organized computer. Create a computerized filing system just like you would with paper, so information can be easily and quickly found

