

RECLAIM TIME



FOCUSING ON WHAT TRULY MATTERS

Introduction

Time Management is the skill of using your time efficiently. It's not about getting things done quickly but rather – making use of most of your time so that no single minute is wasted.

It's important to note that time is a finite resource. You only have more or less 24 hours of each on any given day – but the things that need to get done may sometimes feel like you need more than that 24 hours each day.

Time Management is a way of fitting in all those 'chores' within the 24-hour period so that when taken together, you'll be able to see a significant improvement in your overall goal.

In the example scenario, Time Management could have been practised by writing as little as 333 words per day in a month to get your 10,000 words. It can also be writing 2500 words every Sunday for 1 month or writing 1000 words per day for 10 days. It can, therefore, be approached on a piecemeal fashion so that you can (1) easily include it in your schedule

while (2) ensuring that you can actually have it finished by the time it is needed.

Tip 1: Learn How to Prioritize

For busy workers and even busier bosses, prioritization is one of those things that serve to challenge even the most competent professionals. There are individuals, who specialize in managing projects, and there is software readily available for it, but scheduling priorities continue to depend on your skill in assessing situations and generating a concrete plan of action.



You cannot simply categorize every task as a top priority. It takes practice for one to do this right. Sadly, not everyone has the time - hours, days, and weeks - to spend on it. Here are some helpful tips in prioritization that will not only help you manage your team's workload but your own professional deadlines as well.

Make a list of all the tasks your project involves.

A lot of people fail to recognize the importance of a taskmaster list. Plenty of people consider this a chore. What they don't realize is that spending a couple of minutes planning things out actually helps reduce the time spent completing a project by reducing the stresses and distractions that hinder a project's completion. It gives you the initial push, a clear direction, on how to begin your work.

Think about the project in full then break it down into processes. Collect these processes into a list. Do not start cutting things short at this point. Pull together everything that is required for the project. No need to place the tasks in order, just list them down. Surely, you will have a working deadline in play so collect these tasks and organize them based on what can and cannot be done in a day.

Assess these tasks according to gravity and value.

The next step is to assess all of these tasks and determine their value to the project. The thing about project management is that not all tasks being managed are

important. Some can actually be cut saving you a lot of valuable time and effort. Look for the tasks that need the most attention, those that are of high importance to your output. Follow this by identifying which are of middle to low relevance. Always keep in mind that the more people have to be involved in a task, the higher its value usually is.

Organize these tasks into categories.

Now that you have assessed each task for gravity and value proceed with ordering. Arrange them based on the amount of effort required to accomplish a task. Also, provide an estimated time of completion for each one. It is suggested that you start working on tasks requiring the lengthiest amount of time to complete, but you can do the opposite if this suits your abilities better. Again, go with a process that works best for you and your team.

The focus is subjective. Some people find it easier to work on shorter tasks first. The end goal does not change even if you start ticking off easier tasks from the list. For as long as

things are being done in the time that they need to be completed then you are good to go.

With every kind of project, you should be flexible and adaptable at all times. Things can change in an instant, and when this happens, you should be able to shift with the tide just as fast. Uncertainty will always be a given so be prepared for it before you even begin working on your project.

Determine which tasks to cut.

As you go through your master list, be aware of the tasks that have little to no value to the project. In some cases, these can be removed completely without compromising the outcome of the project. In other cases, it might be better to delegate the work to a different person or team. Do not fret if there is something you have to cut or delegate. This will give you more time to focus on the more important elements of your work.

As you move along and gain more knowledge with regard to proper prioritization, you will see how effective and productive you can be in the workplace given proper task

scheduling and planning. Practice your skill with each project that comes your way and sooner than later, you will be a pro in handling your workplace demands, simple or complex.

A very important concept that you will learn with prioritization is another strategy that can help you better manage your time, and it is called time blocking.

Tip 2: Time Blocking

The lack of focus can easily alter one's level of productivity. Instead of accomplishing tasks on time, you can waste hours procrastinating at your desk. An excellent strategy to help you manage your time better is called time blocking. The concept is simple. To make every workday as productive as possible, you should assign specific tasks to specific time blocks during the day.

Rigid as it may seem, scheduling tasks on fixed time blocks actually works quite effectively because doing so trains the

mind to work with time limits per task. It is also a great way of keeping track of your work. By having distinct time allotments for your entire shift, you can do away with costly distractions and unproductive multitasking. Every minute has a purpose.

Although a number of people consider multitasking to be a special skill, it has been proven counter-intuitive to being productive. It removes distinct focus away from each of the tasks. Instead of tasks being completed, each one is left partially done.

With time blocking, you can ensure that you achieve certain levels of progress on specific tasks at the right time. By having a full-proof structure in place, you get to experience close to double the productivity that you are used to given your standard workweek. You will be surprised as to the number of tasks you get to accomplish a shift.

Like other time management strategies, to succeed at a time blocking, you need to engage yourself in serious and dedicated planning. It is very important that you give sufficient time for planning. By doing so, you can actually save more time during your workweek for other, more

meaningful, activities. Your time spent planning will indeed be time well spent.

You can do this overnight, before heading for the sheets, or in the morning as you prepare for your upcoming shift. Start by writing out about three to five of your most important tasks for the day. Focus on tasks that need to be completed as soon as possible. Follow this list with another one this time to carry three to five secondary tasks, those that can be pushed to the next day if time doesn't permit their completion.

After completing your lists, proceed by chunking your shift into time blocks. For example, if you have a typical 8-hour workday, divide these eight hours into blocks fitting the five vital tasks for the day. Estimate how much time you need for each high-priority task. If you have done so and still have time leftover, proceed with scheduling any of your secondary tasks.

Always remember to divide the tasks accordingly. Be mindful of the time you allot for each one. Although it can be tempting to make a schedule that fits everything into the day, always remind yourself to be practical. The goal is to finish as

much as you can without pushing yourself too hard. Keep in mind that if you become overwhelmed with your schedule, you may find it difficult to focus and end up procrastinating.

If you want to try the time blocking strategy out, here are the things that you have to take into account.

Set schedules for all tasks, major and menial.

Surely, you have different tasks that need addressing during your workday. There are those who require your utmost attention to reports, project updates, and the like while others are routine like answering calls or responding to emails. When you time block, you should consider all of these tasks. Every single one should have a schedule. What will vary is how much time you will spend on them and on which hour of the shift you will schedule them in.

For example, if your work requires constant internal and external communication, allow a couple of hours for answering emails and work-related calls. It would be best to inform your correspondents about your schedule, especially for phone calls, so that they will know when to expect a

response from you. This way, you won't be interrupted while you work and you won't miss any important communication.

Remove distractions.

Distractions should be avoided as much as possible. Doing so will not be a walk in the park, but you have to set limitations not only for yourself but also when it comes to the people that you work with. For example, putting up a simple "Do Not Disturb" sign by your door or desk will be a good effort in letting people know that you are currently unavailable.

The key to successful time blocking is keeping up with the time blocks - sticking with the principles in play – addressing scheduled tasks as they have been planned and foregoing the rest for the time being. Focus on the task at hand, keep calls, emails, other correspondences, even your social media exposure at bay. Try it out, and you will be amazed at how well your sense of focus will develop.

Avoid being over-specific when scheduling tasks.

When it comes to time blocking, although it is important to specify tasks, you should not be over-specific when it comes to what you wish to achieve. For example, if you have an hour to allow for a task, it is better to program it as “Create project layout” rather than “Complete project layout.”

In essence, both have the same integral meaning, but the first one allows ideas to be collected during the hour while the second one implies that you will fail if you don't have a ready layout by the end of the hour. By not being too specific, you get work done without placing any unnecessary stress on yourself. Doing so, you will remain motivated for the entire day.

Keep and update detailed notes.

One of the most important things with the process of time blocking involves serious note taking. Considering that you will be faced with several tasks that need addressing, having

as many details as possible with regard to the nature of the task, the effort needed to complete it, and your plan of action will help you become more organized in turn helping you use time more wisely.

Especially if a certain task will not take a single day to complete, have updated notes as to what you did last and at what point you need to continue working. Do not push note-taking to the next day. While you work and as soon as you complete the scheduled component of a project, immediately jot down everything. This ensures that you will always be on the right track.

Monitor your progress.

In the same way, as you review each component of a complex task, you should also review your progress, efficiency, and productivity when you time block. Start by creating a personal progress report after every week. Review the projects that you have undertaken and those who have been completed. Review your level of productivity for the time blocks you have applied.

This information will help you tweak the system into something that works for your benefit. By understanding your capacity and ability to work, you can better schedule time blocks for future endeavours. Using this information, you can have a better gauge of estimating how much time is needed for certain kinds of work and which time of the day it would be best to work on them.

Be mindful of your body clock.

Aside from understanding your capacity for work, you should also have a clear understanding of your body clock. Your body clock determines what kinds of tasks - simple or complex - you are more capable of handling at the start of your workday. It also determines at what time of the day your brain is most active and ready to tackle your most complicated or demanding workplace requirements.

By knowing at which hours of the day you are at your most productive element, you can schedule tasks better and get more things done before you sign off for the day. For example, if you discover that your level of focus reaches its peak in the afternoon rather than in the morning, you can

then plan to address your most important projects later in the day and deal with menial tasks when you arrive for work.

Don't be a stiff.

Do not misconstrue time blocking with being anything but professional when it comes to working. Even the strictest of professionals set aside time for play. In the workplace, it is ideal for you to take breaks every now and then. Aside from your lunch hour, take several minutes in the morning and afternoon to walk around and stretch. Even a few minutes can do you good. Take a breath and clear your mind.

Use reminders that actually work.

Use reminders. No matter how impressive you think your memory is when the brain is filled with tons of information, there is always a chance of ideas slipping off your mind. Use reminders that work for you. It can be something as simple as coloured post-it notes or something that pops up from your mobile phone.

Time blocking is an effective way to increase your productivity by helping you manage your time efficiently. Time blocking prevents procrastination thereby reducing time wastage. If you stick to it, not only will you get plenty of things done during your shift but also you will surely experience less stress throughout the day.

Tip 3: Learn to Delegate or Outsource Work - Get Help When it is Necessary

You might be highly competent and, on most days, can handle every responsibility handed to you at work but there are times when you will need extra sets of hands. This is where outsourcing and delegation enter the picture. It means having another individual complete a task on your behalf.

There is nothing wrong with delegating a task or two to someone else. Not only will it help you meet deadlines much faster but it will also free up more of your time - time that can be used focusing on something more complex and in need of greater attention.

The problem with most professionals is that they cannot help but be controlling micromanagers when they outsource work. Although you can update for progress, looking over the shoulder of the person you've delegated a task to defeats the purpose of delegation.

Delegation is an important and highly beneficial time management strategy and here are some simple steps that will help you overcome your doubts and trust your outsourced colleague.

Control your instincts to hard work.

Everyone has an urge to be in control. In the workplace, there are plenty of professionals that take on more than they can handle because of this very reason. They put themselves in situations where they have to juggle multiple projects with coinciding deadlines.

Aside from wanting to be in control, the urge to prove oneself worthy of praise is another reason behind why people hoard tasks at work. Everything turns into a self-serving competition for recognition and worth.

If you can handle the load, then taking on a number of tasks is fine but if it is beginning to affect your output and demeanour, then it may be high time to share those tasks with others. It may be difficult at first to control this habit, but at some point, you will realize that you will benefit tremendously by trusting others to handle some aspects of your project.

Find the right people to delegate tasks to.

If you have convinced yourself to delegate some of the tasks on your master list, the next thing that you have to do is find the right people to delegate these to. You should always consider the skill level and competency of the individual that you have in mind.

Delegation should ease your stress, not add to it. Make sure that you assess the skills and expertise of your colleague to ensure that he or she can deliver excellent output without the need for constant management. Go for self-starters with an entrepreneurial mindset as these are the kinds of people that invest in their work and ensure that everything is done in the most efficient way possible.

Establish a timeline and set all expectations.

When you've found the right person for the job, make sure you clarify all expectations, deadlines, and address all concerns they may have before any of the work begins. Before starting a project, you should already be on the same page as to what you want to achieve and what processes need to be followed.

Try your best to be as specific as possible with regard to what tasks need to be completed and when they should be delivered for review. Make sure that the person you are delegating the tasks to understand all of these and can commit to the guidelines and timelines that you have provided.

Define your involvement in the process.

You may be delegating the task to someone else, but this does not mean that you will have zero involvement in the process. It is very important that you define your level of involvement early on so that your colleague will know what

to expect and you won't end up burning bridges due to any misunderstanding.

Trust, but verify. Recognize. Allot windows for mistakes.

Part of outsourcing work is trusting that you've chosen the right person for the job and that this individual will provide you with the kind of output that you require. Recognize their efforts and give praise when and where it is due. Everyone makes mistakes, even yourself, so set a window for revisions and the like.

Create alliances at work.

One of the best ways to have an available support team when you need it the most starts with you creating alliances in the workplace. As much as possible, be sincere, show concern, and be ready to help your colleagues when necessary. When it's you who needs assistance, you can rely on most of them to return the favour.

Tip 4: Plan Your Breaks

Did you know that taking breaks at work actually makes you more productive throughout the day? Being “too busy” is not an excuse not to take breaks every now and then. The thing about taking breaks is that it gives you space and time to think. Especially if you are immersed in a complex project with a nearing deadline, figuring out a better and faster approach will help keep you away from staying at your desk slumped over paperwork.



Breaks are there to keep you from getting bored. When you are bored, you lose focus and start to procrastinate. You may be in the groove for some time, but this won't last. At some point during your idea rush, you will drift into a different headspace, and this is where the trouble will start.

Science dictates that our brains were not built for extended activity and focus. It does require breaks every now and then. As we are naturally alert to numerous things in our environment, it is always a challenge to have to focus on one thing for a prolonged period. This is where a brief interruption will help bring our heads back in the game.

When you take a break, you take time to think about these things and re-evaluate whether or not your plan of action suits your goal. By assessing your objectives, you generate a clearer picture of what has to be done and how to go about it better.

Here are some activities that you can engage in that will help your mind focus on the tasks you need to accomplish for the day.

- Take a walk around the office to increase blood flow to your brain-boosting thought.
- Eat and replenish your system but make sure that you indulge in a healthy snack. Junk food will make you sluggish so avoid these. Coffee is good. If you can, take it black.
- Listen to music. Classical music is the best type to consider for the workplace, as it does not rattle the mind. Not only does it improve your reasoning skills but it also helps boost your motor abilities.
- If you are constantly on the computer, spend this time to rest your eyes.
- Read publications, online articles, any resource that will foster your thinking.
- Exercise and meditate. A few stretches here and there and several minutes of complete calm will help you release any tension or stress that's clogging up the flow of your creative juices.

Tip 5: Minimize or Eliminate Workplace Distractions

There are plenty of things that lead to procrastination and a waste of time. One of the things that you should learn to do to be able to manage time better is to minimize these distractions so that you can accomplish more tasks during your shift at work.

Here are some of the distractions that might constantly be plaguing you at work and the tactics that you can apply to them to help you increase your productivity and efficiency in the workplace.

1. Mobile phone

There are some offices that don't allow the use of mobile phones on the floor, but this policy does not apply to many companies. Mobile phones are responsible for most of the time wasted during a shift. It can be a text message, a phone call, or an app notification - all of which tend to distract you from what you are doing.

- Put your phone on silent mode when you are at work. If you can turn it off for the time being, then do so.
- Make a call schedule that you can provide to your personal and professional contacts. You can also use this when you apply the time blocking technique discussed earlier. Only have a certain time of day to take or make calls.
- If you have the capacity to do so, have two phones - one for work use and the other for your personal needs. See to it that you keep your colleagues as contacts only on your work phone.
- Jot down notes regarding your conversation especially if it involves an urgent or additional task that you might have to do. By doing so, you eliminate the need to call back for information that was already provided.
- If you have contacts that you converse with often, program their numbers on speed dial.

2. Paper mail and email

You will receive all kinds of mail in the office both online and on paper. Although most of these correspondences are important, they can take up much of your valuable time

without you noticing. Instead of using it for something more fruitful, you end up wasting it reading messages.

- Set a specific time to check and correspond to your mail. Once in the morning and another one in the afternoon will do.
- Leave paper mail by one corner of your desk and close your email client while you work so that pop-up notifications on new mail don't distract you.
- For your email, do use labels and folders to organize them accordingly. If you constantly receive spam messages, flag these so that they are thrown out immediately.
- When you check your mail, provide an immediate reply and get them out of the way. If someone with more knowledge on the matter can address the message, forward it to that person or department.

3. Unscheduled meetings or visitors

The thing about meetings is that these are inevitable, but there are relevant meetings and those that you can choose not to attend at all.

- Only attend meetings that are relevant to the work that you are doing and skip the rest.
- Never be late for a meeting. If you are late, or if anyone else is late, the meeting will take up more of your time than it should.
- Set a specific time schedule and have a list of discussion points for the meeting so that you don't stray from the subject.
- Go over the meeting's agenda before you head on to the conference room. Having an idea about the meeting's purpose reduces the time needed for a briefing. Once you begin, you can start pitching ideas to the team.
- Unless it is highly urgent, have an unscheduled meeting rescheduled to a different time.

When it comes to visitors, both personal and professional, simply some people fail to realize that you may not be available to accommodate them during your workday. It would be best for you to prepare for such occasions so that you can address these people in the best possible way and with the right attitude.

- Have a clear schedule as to when you will be available to meet.

- Schedule all of your appointments at a specific time during the day.
- If possible, limit your appointments to a maximum of twenty minutes per appointment.
- Do accommodate urgent requests for visits for as long as these are relevant.
- Accommodate emergency visits but learn to refuse impromptu visitors when necessary. Saying “no” is not always a bad thing. But give these people details on when it is convenient for you to meet with them. Don’t leave them hanging.

4.Social media

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and other social media pages have taken over the world, and these can also take over your time at work. Unless you are working for a digital agency where these tools are part of your daily operations, you should see to it that you control your access to social media while working in your professional endeavours.

- Turn off your social media and instant messaging accounts.
- Only access social media sites during your break.

5. Internet browsing

Especially if your office is connected to the Internet, you will have access to numerous websites during your shift, most of which may not be related to your work. Browsing articles and such during your break is acceptable but letting it take over your intended work time should be avoided.

- Set a time for browsing.
- Close a page after you've finished viewing it.
- Backup your work to protect it from viruses and malware.

Tip 6: Achieve a Flexible Work Schedule

These days, tremendous pressure is placed upon professionals thanks to the highly competitive corporate landscape. There are some companies that strictly apply the

eight-hour shift, but others impose workweeks so lengthy that employees burn out even before the weekend arrives.

In most cases, you don't have to put in all of these extra hours at work if you manage your time well. Your company might not be offering work options that are more flexible than usual, but this should not stop you from making a request. Always keep in mind that for as long as productivity is boosted, deliverables are given on time, and you keep your end of the bargain, there is a higher chance of your request being granted.

Start by preparing a proposal. If you are intent on asking for a flexible work arrangement, see to it that you focus your proposal on the needs of the company, not for your personal benefit.

The first question that you should ask yourself is whether your proposal will help; the company resolve any issue that it is currently facing.

If you are able to find a justifiable reason or two to support your request, then use that for your proposal. Have it in writing and be as clear as you can but be concise. Provide a

layout of the proposed schedule and include details on why you are requesting such and how it can be advantageous for the company to consider.

Always focus your mindset on the company and how it will benefit from this new arrangement. Highlight the different advantages that this flexible work schedule will have on daily operations, performance, and overall costs. The more benefits a company will achieve from your proposal, the closer you will be to having it granted.

Always be open to performance evaluations if your manager mentions it. It will benefit the company, but it will also benefit you. Through regular evaluations, you will see how productive you are given the new arrangement, and you will know how it affects your colleagues or teammates. With this information, it is possible to tweak your schedule for improvement.

Find the perfect time to submit your proposal. Also, be prepared to wait because it will surely take time and effort to have a request for flexibility granted. Always keep in mind though that it starts with a worthy proposal that considers the needs of the company first and foremost. If you focus on

how to improve the company's performance, then you will be on the road to receiving a positive response.

Tip 7: Explore Ways to Reduce Your Commute

Another excellent timesaving strategy for professionals involves the reduction of your commute. Many do not notice the fact that as much as 2 hours, sometimes even more, are wasted because of the commute to and from work every single day. This time can better be spent on something with a beneficial return, say a project at work.

Because of the time professionals allot for their daily commute, they end up working longer hours. For example, a typical workday should only consist of eight hours but the 2 hours spent commuting turns it into a 10-hour day. Given that a professional works five days a week, it immediately translates to 10 extra hours of work that is unpaid - over one full day of your time wasted in line and on the road.

Aside from the wasted time and unpaid effort, a lengthy and inefficient commute can also lead to the generation of added stress that can decrease your productivity in the workplace. This is why it is a very important strategy in time management to reduce your commute. There are different

ways to go about it and here are some that you might want to consider.

Leave for work early in the day.

Do not start your day commuting during the morning rush hours. You might have access to different modes of public transport, but the lines will surely be extremely long. If you catch a bad break, you might even end up spending more time in line rather than on the actual commute itself.

Aside from the lengthy lines, expect heavy traffic during the rush hours. Especially if you have a personal vehicle, you might end up stuck in traffic for hours on end. Aside from the wasted time, you also incur added costs for petrol and added stress. When you do reach your office, you have to spend even more time looking for a parking space.

It would be best for you to leave for work earlier in the day to avoid the rush. It might involve the sacrifice of waking up earlier, but you save a lot of time that can be used for other purposes if you do this.

Leave your workplace later.

Using the same concept as leaving for work earlier in the day, do leave your workplace later, after the afternoon rush lapses. Free yourself from the rat race and save yourself from thoroughfare clogs and packed buses or trains.

You might want to take a run after work, hit the gym, take care of some errands, or meet with friends. This way, you get to use your time for more meaningful things. Even if you arrive home later, all that's left to do is rest for the night.

Take advantage of mapping and GPS devices and services.

Modern day technology has vastly improved over the years, and it's about time that you took full advantage of it. There are different GPS (Global Positioning System) and mapping devices that you can make use of. Use these to find less constricted roads during your commute. Also, use them to discover new routes that you can then use for future travels.

Learn different routes.

As you make use of technology, take note of the different routes that you can take to the office. In some cases, passing through side streets might seem long, but the absence of heavy traffic will turn it into a less stressful experience.

Live somewhere closer to your workplace.

Probably one of the best ways to save time is to live somewhere closer to your workplace. If you live close to your place of work, you need not bother with the lengthy commute, and you might not even have to pass through major thoroughfares to get to work. If you live quite closely, you can even choose to walk to the office. Aside from the stress-free commute, you get your daily exercise to boot.

Thinking about ways to reduce the time you spend commuting is integral in time management. If you want to become more productive with your work, you should take the time to evaluate your options. Start assessing your commute situation and try out different solutions to reduce commute times and costs. Figure out what works best for you and work it into your daily process.

Conclusion

There are plenty of time management tools that you can take advantage of to help you become more effective, efficient, and productive in the workplace. Most of these can be found online, so there is no excuse for you not to try them out.



Task Calendar

Task calendars are extremely helpful and readily available from different online sources. There are calendars, which can be downloaded directly to any mobile device allowing you to keep track of your appointments and deadlines on the go.

Most of these are free of charge so do take advantage of them. Some work with the basics where you gain access to a digital calendar. You can schedule appointments and reminders, which you will be alerted to as they come up. You will also find other calendars that can be linked to more than one user. If you are working with a team, anyone can set notes and reminders for the entire group.

Email Manager

Email managers carry a function similar to task calendars. What makes them different is that they work solely by managing your email accounts. You can program multiple email accounts under one main program where you can access all of them. No need to log into multiple sites to get your mail. It saves you valuable time and effort.

Depending on the email management system, you may also gain access to features that allow you to categorize emails. You can set certain addresses as high-priority. You can also apply a spam filter to other messages sending them directly to the trash. There are other categories that you can work with one of which separates personal messages from those related to your work.

As your digital inbox becomes more organized, it will become easier for you to address messages that need your immediate attention and save the rest for later. To further improve your efficiency, you can also use labels to help you sort messages according to their subject heads for easier archiving.

Workplace Communication

Surely, you will be working in teams on some of the projects that you will be handling. This means that you have to maintain constant communication with everyone involved and the best way to do this is by using workplace communication tools on your desktop or mobile device.

The services offered online come with little to no cost and offer services similar to chat rooms but with added features such as extensive file sharing, data archiving conversation history, and video calls. You might not have everyone in the same room at the same time, but every member of the team can be on point when it matters the most.