



GUARDING YOURSELF AND YOUR TEAM IN A WORLD OF DEMANDS

How to effectively manage your time



BY CAROL BROOKS, SR/WA

A lot of people believe money is their most important resource but according to experts in a recent study, the most important resource is time. You can get more money through various avenues but once time is gone, it's gone forever. Time is a limited resource that expires every day. As a team, we all have to be very careful with our time.

We've all had to face the challenge of not having enough time to devote toward all that is demanded at the office. At one point in my frenzy to manage my time, I fantasized what it would be like to have two little extra hours in my day. In other words, having a 24-hour day stretch to a 26-hour day. Think about it. Two more hours could surely be the panacea to staying a few steps ahead of a hectic schedule. But then I thought, "If I can't manage 24-hours, how can I handle 26?" Bookstore and library shelves are stocked with all kinds of ideas on how to become better stewards of our time, which explains the human dilemma to manage our time more effectively. But how can we do that? Here are a few helpful tips to methodically manage your time:

Count All Your Time

When we think about our day, we typically look at chunks of time: morning, noon, afternoon and evening. But our day doesn't consist of only chunks. Precious minutes tend to slip away unaccounted for. Because our moments are gone in a flash, we must account for all our time. Of course, tracking every minute is overkill, but finding satisfaction out of every task is key to managing your time. In order to do this, I determined I needed a motivator. This needed to be a sweet spot to keep me focused and diligent. For me, the motivator was to approach each task—boring and tedious as it may be—with a positive attitude. Why? Because negative thoughts tend to bog us down and make the task uninteresting. This stale attitude causes us to take longer to complete an assignment, and the result is that we squander our time.



Create a To-Do List

We know that a to-do list helps us to stay focused on matters we've identified for a day, but there's another valuable benefit of keeping to-do lists. At the end of each day, look over tomorrow's list. This gives you an advantage to organize yourself for the next day and set priorities.

Over the years, I've stuck with this mantra that has served me well: "An emergency on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part." Because someone else is unorganized and has created an emergency doesn't mean that you need to have one. It is good to be helpful, but you must do so responsibly. Of course, there are unexpected pop-ups as each new day progresses, but we can filter through them by asking:

- How urgent is this new request?
- Do I need to be flexible?
- Can I fit this in without unreasonably disrupting my entire day? The remainder of the day?
- Can I negotiate another day that would work better?
- Is this new task that my client added to the project more important than the original job? Which of the projects would my client consider deferring?

Reschedule a Meeting

What's the best way to reschedule a meeting? Simply offer the person you were going to meet with two alternative dates. If you offer more, it will easily get out of control, and both parties will waste time and energy trying to decide on a date. After offering two alternative dates, lightly pencil them on your calendar. This way if something else comes up, you know that a tentative engagement has already been scheduled and this will avoid double booking. Once a new date and time are definitely decided, retrace the chosen penciled entry as a firm commitment and erase the other option. Some people like a lot of choices, but when it comes to time management, less is more.

Keep Your Schedule Under a Microscope

Once time is lost, it can never be retrieved. It is helpful, therefore, to examine any bad habits that interfere with good time management. Be critical, honest and thorough in your assessment of yourself. Identify those habits and search for ways to change or eliminate them. Take time to look ahead of your commitments during the month. This review can help you remember upcoming appointments and due dates and it provides you with enough time to plan and prepare for them. Looking at time under a microscope better organizes your days. That's empowering!

Deal with the Dreaded P Word

The dreaded P word is "Procrastination" with a capital P. We've all procrastinated. We need to get busy on a task, but suddenly we need to work on something with a lesser priority. Or have a cup of coffee. Or get something to eat. When we catch ourselves procrastinating, we should ask, "What am I avoiding?" Maybe you've taken on a project that started small, but grew into a mountain. Any task can be sectioned into smaller pieces, thus bringing manageability to an assignment. Remember, if at all possible don't procrastinate a task for the next day. Taking care of business today means becoming responsible and being a better steward of your time. After all, who among us wants a task hanging around our necks to haunt us the next day? Why would we want to make our burdens heavier? Why would we want to defer a task until tomorrow? Don't let procrastination plague you. The more you defer, the more discouraged you'll become and the further away from success you'll be.

Create Breathing Space

How many times have we been faced with an incredibly demanding day in which we don't seem to have time to eat, think or even breathe? That's when we should create a relaxing place. I call it breathing space. This is an important part of time management. When relaxing in our breathing space, it helps to become conscious of our breathing. Are we taking short, staccato breaths or deep-down-to-our-toes kinds of breaths? Taking deep breaths gets you into a breathing rhythm: start with a long inhale, momentarily hold your breath, then end with a long exhale. Repeat this until you are breathing deeply. Try to close your eyes during this exercise. You'll get the optimum benefit by avoiding any possible distractions.

In Summary

You'll provide a better service to your team when you can discipline yourself to stay on task and honor your own time management plan. You'll be more confident in your judgment of priorities because you'll be determined to stick to them. When we can harness our time and use it efficiently, we'll protect ourselves from the inevitable demands that can be made upon a stressful day. 🌟



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