

Time Management At Work

Practice Guide



Good time management means being effective as well as efficient within the time you have available to achieve tasks. It requires planning, strategic thinking and action! Time is a precious resource, and if you manage it well, you can be more productive in every area of your life. This will give you the ability to meet all your personal and professional goals.

Good time management makes you successful. That is because you get more done on time, in a more productive way. You become known for your work ethic and happiness. Yes, good time management makes you happy because you achieve more, feel less stressed, and consequently have better mental and physical health.

Here are some principles and ideas to help you achieve good time management:

Organise your workspace and work environment

Declutter and have a place for everything. Reports, filing, equipment and items laying around should all have a home. Create a system that works for you, where you can find things easily.

A clean and organised work environment is good for your health

Know your energy cycles

If you like mornings, schedule complex tasks, like report writing or anything that requires high concentration, in the morning and plan to do low concentration tasks during the afternoon. If analytical tasks sap your energy, then make sure you take regular breaks to do something creative until you feel more energised again. Do not waste time when you are feeling tired or lack focus.

Work out where you waste time

Do you waste time looking for lost items, searching the internet, changing your screensaver, socialising in the lunch room or writing unnecessarily long emails? Once you have made a list of time wasters or situations that steal your time, ask yourself if you can avoid, reduce or limit them, or if you can do them at a better time. That is half your problem solved!

Plan ahead

The best way to work smarter, not harder, is by planning how to spend your time. You should plan annually (for long term goals), monthly (for medium term goals) and weekly (for short term goals). By breaking down all your goals into manageable steps, this will make them achievable.

You can make goals more powerful by making them SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound). Break down tasks into actions. Update your 'To Do' list as often as is necessary. Use a wall planner or diary to schedule meetings, when reports are due and other important dates and deadlines. If you have regular meetings or deadlines, mark them on your wall planner and be very reluctant to change them!

Then sort your actions into priorities. Map your actions under these headings:

- Essential and immediate
- Essential but not immediate
- Immediate but not essential
- Not essential and not immediate

Aim to reduce the amount of work in the 'essential and immediate', and plan to spend some time on actions under each heading each week. Allow for emergencies and contingencies, but having your plans written down and visible at all times will keep you heading in the right direction.

If you plan, but you are still not achieving your goals, ask a colleague or mentor (manager, colleague or coach) to support you and make you accountable. If you share your goals with others, you are more likely to be motivated to keep on track.

Become uncontactable

Sometimes you need uninterrupted time or a task will take much longer to complete or not get finished at all. Turn off your phone, close the door or work somewhere quiet to help you concentrate. Be assertive if you find people are distracting you. Ask them to call you back later, or tell people how much time you have to give them before you have to get back to a task.

Make email work for you

Schedule time to look at and respond to emails two to three times a day. This is a much more efficient way than looking at your inbox every five minutes to see if you have mail. Turn off

Time Management At Work

Practice Guide



email notifications that make you tempted to read the email when you are doing something else. Organise your emails using Rules, Filters and Tags. This is a great way to manage and declutter your inbox. Your inbox should be organised and have folders named “To Do” “Follow Up” or “Newsletters”, for example. Create meaningful subject lines when sending emails, which helps the person you are emailing, and, if they reply, helps you prioritise your time.

Protect your time

Do not attend meetings you do not really have to attend. Read the minutes instead, or use teleconferencing, if it saves travel time. Telephone, if email is going to take too long. Use technology (e.g. macros, auto signature or shared calendar) for tasks that you do frequently. Learn to read by scanning. If you know how to read documents and newsletters quickly, then you will save a lot of time. You sometimes cannot afford to be a perfectionist. There comes a point when tasks can waste your time because you are too pedantic. Learn to respectfully say “No”. Be assertive when you know you do not have the time or ability to give away your time. It is a precious commodity!

Work as a team

Be a good communicator by being brief, direct, logical and clear. Often, teams waste time because of confusing and misinterpreted messages between colleagues and managers. If you are a manager, avoid micromanaging. You do not have the time and your team does not appreciate it.

Do not be afraid to call on your colleagues or a manager if you need some help with a task that is complex or taking too long. With some brainstorming or help in some small area, you might find you achieve the task quickly and easily.

Stressed? Stop and refocus

Stress and anxiety limits clear thinking and productivity. So, when things are getting frantic or overwhelming, step back and re-assess your priorities and time management. Take a break to clear your head. Do what it takes to chill out, lift your energy levels, or get some help or support.

Deal with procrastination

The biggest time waster is doing nothing at all! The first step in overcoming procrastination is to understand it. Ask yourself why you are procrastinating and what motivational thoughts you need to have to help you overcome it. Usually the act of procrastination is a defence, a way to protect yourself. However, this can prevent you from achieving success. Instead, become a person of action.

For team leaders and managers

If you are in a leadership role, it is important to role model good time management. Your team will learn the skills of planning and working efficiently by watching you. Invest in resources, coaching and training to help your team become more productive and maintain high standards in regards to self care, clutter in the workplace and time wasters. Hold meetings only when necessary, and make sure you run them efficiently and productively. Learn the art of effective delegation to benefit both yourself and the person to whom you delegate. Delegating can motivate your team and leave you with more time to keep on top of your own workload. If there are members of your team who are taking up too much of your time, do something to change that. If you can, find a good administrator/assistant.

Schedule in down time

Sometimes, people become stressed and unproductive because they simply have not scheduled in any rest and relaxation for a while! Work/Life Balance is recognised as an important necessity that ensures you are healthy and enjoying your work. Do not put yourself at risk, plan to take time out and do something creative or fun. Make sure you always get enough sleep and exercise.

REFLECT

How can I organise my work environment and task list more efficiently?

What are my time wasters and what can I do to limit them?

What skills or resources would help me manage my time more efficiently?

Where can I improve my written or verbal communication?

How important is work/life balance to me and how do I achieve it?

