

How to improve your time management skills

What is time management?

The idea of managing time has been in existence well over a century. However, the term "time management" frequently creates a false impression of what it actually is, and what a person is able to do... Clearly it isn't actually "time" that is managed, as time is uncontrollable - we can only manage ourselves and our use of the time we have. So in effect, what we loosely call "Time management" should really be called: "Self Management".

Where does all my time go?

Effective time management is primarily about developing a number of good habits and working towards eliminating of some of the bad ones. If you want to use your time efficiently to accomplish all that you have to do, then you need to be aware of the things that control your use of time. Keeping a journal or a 'time log' for a period of time will help you to see exactly where you spend your time - where it is put to effective use, and where it is wasted. You may feel that the added paperwork involved in keeping a time log is a waste of time in itself, but it can be time extremely well invested.

How do I improve my use of time?

Identifying your most common 'time wasters' and 'time stealers' and learning to minimise or even eliminate these will certainly buy you a great deal of time that you can put to better use. It's not a matter of becoming an automated efficient machine with no sense of fun or personality... but there are always place where you can easily and painlessly take greater control of the way that you use time. If time were money (which many people believe to be the case) then you wouldn't be happy knowing that your hard earned cash was just draining away day by day... it's the same with your time - you need to respect it and look after it - choosing where and when to 'spend' it and making sure that it's not wasted.



Below are some common time wasters and time stealers that you may identify with - together with some brief suggestions about how to minimise them.

Crisis management

Many people say this is the form of time-management they prefer, however it often leads to dealing with things that are urgent, rather than important... Whether they like to admit it or not, the stressful state that crisis management often produces is not the most efficient or effective way to work.

Begin by convincing yourself that reactive 'fire-fighting' is an ineffective way of working. Always be alert to finding actions that will help to prevent fires in the first place. You should also check whether you are spending enough time on the things that may not be urgent now, but are the things you need to do to develop yourself or your career.

Telephone Interruptions

Although the telephone is a key communication tool, it can be your biggest enemy to effectiveness if you don't know how to control it, rather than it control you.

Learn to manage your use of the phone. If there are people who you enjoy long chats with – restrict these calls to times when you have fewer time pressures. Think of ways to excuse yourself firmly but politely.

Attempting too much

Many people feel that they have to achieve everything yesterday, and don't give themselves enough time to do things properly – this leads to half-finished projects and no feeling of achievement.

Feeling the pressure of time leads to stress, and this in itself can result in the temptation to rush things to get them done. Instead, when you're feeling under pressure, try taking a few deep breaths, clearing everything away apart from the most important task, and allowing yourself the time to do it properly.

Ineffective Delegation

There are many blocks to effective delegation – but whatever the reasons, doing a task that should be done by others is a major time waster for many.

If you are in a position to delegate, then identify the barriers (it may be that you find it hard letting go) and make a conscious effort to overcome them. Always ask yourself: "Is this a task someone else should be doing?" If it is, then you must pass it on – no matter how tempting it is to do it yourself!

Cluttered workspace

The most effective people work from clear desks – if you have less than 80% of your desk clear of clutter, then you are probably suffering from 'desk stress'.

Research has shown that the environment has a significant impact on your ability to think clearly and to operate effectively. Although some people say that they function best in 'organised chaos' – it is likely that they are kidding themselves. A desk full of clutter will mean that things take longer to find, and will go missing. Think of the time you'll save when everything is to hand!

Procrastination

Decision and action avoidance is the biggest stealer of time. Reducing the amount of procrastination you do can substantially increase the amount of time you have available to complete important tasks.

If you are a natural procrastinator, then you will need to take steps to enable you to make decisions and take action without delay. Putting unpleasant tasks off will not make them any easier – so learn to get them out of the way, and see how good you feel when you've completed them ahead of schedule!

Meetings, meetings, meetings

It is commonly acknowledged that as much as a third of the time spent in meetings is wasted due to poor meeting management and lack of planning.

Don't assume that meetings are always the best way forward. Before agreeing to attend a meeting, ask yourself 'Is this the most effective way of dealing with things?' If it is, then try to influence the way the meeting is run – using an agenda to keep it focussed and to time.

How do I keep it going?

Time management (or self management) is not a particularly difficult subject to understand - and there are many sources of advice and words of wisdom to be found on the topic. However, unless you are convinced of the value of time to yourself and to others, and unless you are committed to building a range of tools and techniques into your daily routine, any changes you make won't last for long. You'll then be joining the countless masses who end up saying: "I tried time management once and it didn't work for me".



If you remember just one thing, then understand that the time you spend effectively planning your time and activities will actually give you more time for undertaking them. By setting yourself realistic goals and by eliminating obvious time wasters, you will almost certainly find that you will have extra time to spend on those people and activities most important to you... now there's a thought!

Would you or others in your team benefit from training in time management?

We hope that you'll find these tips useful. However, most people derive huge additional benefit from the interaction, practical exercises and valuable feedback that face-to-face training gives. H2 offers:

- A 1-day scheduled Time and Stress Management course from £175 + VAT per person
- Bespoke training in Time Management from just £62 + VAT per person per day

Here's what some satisfied customers said after attending our training in time management:

- *"Great course - excellent course materials and exercises"*
- *"It is rare that a course makes the individual feel better afterwards, but this session took a big weight off my mind."*
- *"This course enabled me to focus on my problems as an individual"*
- *"I expected the course to enable me to perform my work more effectively, but I was also able to explore and understand the reasons for my lack of productivity and resulting stress."*

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