

Effective Time Management



In a Nutshell

What a hectic time of the year! Our calendars fill up with holiday celebrations ... and then there's the extra shopping or cooking that goes along with them ... not to mention the travel. Taking a few vacation days might help, unless it means you start to fall behind at the office! We really need effective time management to keep us sane in December.

Effective time management doesn't mean doing more things or doing them more quickly. Effective time management means getting more of the *important* work done in a day. In fact, effective time management is even more important than efficient use of our time. Of course, the best time managers are both effective and efficient..

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Know What's Important

To manage our time effectively, each of us has to have a clear picture of our personal principles and core values. We need to invest the precious resource of our time in the things that are important to us. That may sound self-centered, but it's only self-centered if all of our core values are self-centered. Personally, one of my core values is being helpful to others. Furthermore, I work for an organization that I really believe provides a valuable service to the community, so doing my job well serves more than just myself. I'm sure many of you have similar core values. Being helpful and being a "team player" are fantastic, but we want to avoid completely letting other people's demands schedule our time.

One of the fundamental challenges in effective time management is remembering the difference between "urgent" and "important." **Urgency alone cannot make a task important.** It is the connection to our personal principles and business priorities that determines the importance of a task.

- Write a personal mission statement and your list of core values.
- Write down long-term objectives--what you really want to accomplish in the next few years.
- Know the business priorities: Know the keys to your business' success.
- List and rank the business objectives that you need to pursue.

Schedule What's Important

With a clear personal mission and objectives, time can be scheduled with a definite purpose in mind. On a daily or weekly basis, making a "to do" list and scheduling time helps ensure that the important tasks will be completed.

- Daily or weekly, make a list of all the tasks you want to do and/or have been asked to do.
- Remember to include time for planning, reflecting, and being creative/innovative.
- Rate each task as "Important" or "Less Important."
- Rate each task as "Urgent" or "Not Urgent" (planning, reflecting, and being creative/innovative are examples of "Important/Not Urgent" tasks).
- Put the "Important/Urgent" and "Important/Not Urgent" tasks in your schedule first.
- Schedule a deadline for each activity as a reminder to use your time efficiently.
- "Less Important" tasks can be completed in your remaining time, delegated, or ignored entirely.

There will be times when we simply can't get everything done. Sometimes we have to say "no" or "not now" to other's requests. But, by scheduling what's important first and then trying to get to the less important tasks in our remaining time, we increase the odds that we will accomplish what's really important.

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Know and Exploit Your Work Patterns

Not every hour of our workday is equivalent in terms of our personal work patterns and the environments we work in. There are times of the day when we are most productive, when we are most creative, and when we can be relatively free from the distractions of the world around us. We should identify those times and schedule accordingly.

- Schedule your most important tasks in the best times for you to do them.
- Keep a log of how you spend your time for about two weeks in order to see how it's spent.
- Consider Pareto's law as it applies to your personal productivity--20% of the work produces 80% of the results. Think of creative ways to enhance the 20% and reduce the 80%.

Quick and Dirty Time Savers

- Read selectively. Read introductions, summaries, and skim bodies of memos, articles, etc. Underline key passages.
- Keep your workspace organized, but don't waste all your time getting organized. In other words, put things where they belong so that time isn't wasted hunting for them later, but don't use hours of organizing as a way to avoid actual work.
- Stand up! When you're in the middle of a task and someone comes by your workspace to see you, stand to greet him or her and remain standing. It's a nonverbal cue that you don't have time to sit and chat. "Stand up meetings" are also a way to keep meetings short.
- Identify "busy work" tasks (Less Important/Not Urgent) that can be done in 5-10 minutes. Work on those tasks during the chunks of time in the day that you find yourself waiting.
- Avoid multitasking. Recent research has shown that the divided focus reduces productivity. We tend to be more productive if we work on the first task until it's completed and then a second task rather than switching back and forth between two tasks.

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Motivational Tips

- If procrastination is a problem, do your most difficult or distasteful task first. Getting it over with can help reduce anxiety.
- Divide up large projects into subprojects. It makes them less intimidating, reduces procrastination, and allows a sense of accomplishment even before the project is complete.
- Complete at least one task each day, even if that's a small part of a larger project.
- Schedule time to worry. Try not to worry about task B when you're working on task A. Schedule task B and tell yourself that you'll worry about B at that time and not before.

About the Photo

A clock repairer from Cumbria Clock Company works on one of the faces of the Manchester City hall clock as part of its annual service, November 22, 2002. The minute hand on the clock face had to be removed to carry out the work. (REUTERS/Ian Hodgson: e-mailed to me from *Yahoo! News*, www.news.yahoo.com.)

Sources

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About the Newsletter and Subscriptions

LeaderLetter is written by Dr. Scott Williams, Department of Management, [Raj Sooin College of Business](#), Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio. It is a supplement to my MBA 751 - Managing People in Organizations class. It is intended to reinforce the course concepts and maintain communication among my former MBA 751 students, but anyone is welcome to subscribe. In addition, subscribers are welcome to forward this newsletter to anyone who they believe would have an interest in it. To [subscribe](#), simply send an e-mail message to me requesting subscription. Of course, subscriptions to the newsletter are free. To [unsubscribe](#), e-mail a reply indicating that you would like to unsubscribe.

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E-mail Your Comments

Whether you are one of my former students or not, I invite you to share any insights or concerns you have regarding the topic of this newsletter or any other topic relating to management skills. Please [e-mail](#) them to me. Our interactions have been invaluable. **Every week, I learn something new from *LeaderLetter* subscribers!** Let's keep the conversation going.

A Good, Clean Joke

If they had been *Three Wise Women* instead of *Three Wise Men*, they would have asked directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and brought practical gifts.

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