

Never Enough Time?

How many times have you heard the following common expressions?

- “If I could just find the time...”
- “I never have enough time”
- “Too much to do, too little time”
- “I couldn’t get it done, I just ran out of time”
- “What happened to the &^%@#! time!”

If you’re like the rest of us, you hear them all the time!

What is it about time that makes it so difficult to manage? How come we never have enough time? What can we do to improve how we manage it? After all, you have a big choice. Do you manage time, or does time manage you?

Today’s newsletter gives some useful tips to help you get the most out of time!

The 80/20 Rule

The more I study this commonly accepted truism, the more it seems to apply almost everywhere, including time management.

You’re all heard the theory: 80% of your sales will come from 20% of your prospects. 80% of your productivity comes from 20% of your actions. Alternatively, 20% of your activities account for 80% of your results. 80% of the tax revenue in the US comes from 20% (or less) of the citizens. 80% of crime is committed by 20% of the people.

But what about managing time? Does the rule apply here? You bet!

Eric Lofholm, famous sales trainer, puts it this way: “Time Management is about Time Choices.” We all have a choice when it comes time to select which activities we will perform during the day. We can just take any action items which arrive on our desk, rushing helter skelter through the day, or we can PLAN our day. Lofholm advises that you spend 1% of your time at the beginning of the day writing down your plan for the day....about 14 minutes to be exact. Without a plan, you’ll never accomplish what you set out to achieve.

The plan must be written, and it shouldn’t be longer than one page, hopefully shorter. And here’s the most important tip. For every 10 items on your “to do” list, you need to highlight the 2 which absolutely positively must be completed. This requires you spend some time analyzing which of these tasks is most important and must be accomplished

today. When you have selected these two items, highlight them on your list. I like to use one of those big yellow markers for this task. When the task is done, cross it off your list.

At the end of your day, review the list and determine if you accomplished your two critical items. If you did, you are successful! Anything else you completed is a bonus, because you achieved your primary goals for the day. You selected the 20% of your tasks which had the biggest payoff and you completed them. You were successful.

That's how you apply the 80/20 rule to time management.

Forget about minutiae

Your typical workday is filled with a plethora of small and relatively unimportant tasks. Statistics consistently prove that the #1 time-waster in business today is email. How much time do you spend answering trivial emails, reading forwarded emails that should never have been sent in the first place, or writing emails to get answers to things you could easily research yourself. Are you guilty of avoiding work by simply forwarding the task to someone else, regardless if they have responsibility? How about participating in one of those endless "email chains" or passing on a series of jokes? Yep, email can be an enormous waste of time.

Email is not only the #1 time waster; it's also the most popular method of avoiding work!

Another huge time waster in the office is surfing the internet, closely followed by text messaging and instant messaging. At home, the biggest time waster is watching television. Wait a minute! Weren't we promised that all this technology would improve our productivity?

"Being Busy" is a science unto itself. Just because you're rushing through the office talking on a cell phone and carrying a sheaf of papers does NOT mean that you are important. More likely it means you need to slow down and FOCUS. How many of those endless cell phone calls are really productive?

We need to prioritize what is important and avoid spending our valuable time on non-productive activities. This probably means reducing the number of meetings and conferences, eliminating many conference calls, and avoiding most water-cooler conversations.

In the above section, we encouraged you to prioritize your time on the top 20% of your tasks, those which are most important. Here's another important tip; once you have figured out the 20% of your tasks/projects that are most important, block out time for them. Put them on your schedule with a time, and commit to completing that task from start to finish within that time. Put it into your Outlook calendar, or write it down on your Day-Timer. The key is blocking out the time and completing the task from start to finish. Anything else comes up, ignore it. Focus on completing that one important task.

Another strategy you might want to try is to schedule yourself to complete the task in a **shorter** time window. If the task normally takes two hours, schedule yourself to complete it in one hour. You might amaze yourself with this tactic. When you decide to focus and complete the task, with a singular focus, it's amazing how quickly things get done.

Finally, forget about multi-tasking. It doesn't work. You can't give your complete attention to multiple tasks, regardless what you may have learned in school. Focus on the job at hand and get it completed. Then move on to the next most important task and complete that. That's how to manage time with maximum efficiency!

Patrick McClure is a speaker, trainer, consultant, and author who enjoys working with individuals and corporations to help them achieve maximum performance. He has dedicated his practice to helping others become more successful. To learn more, and to receive Patrick's free Newsletter, please visit www.connexiagroup.com or email patrick@connexiagroup.com