

## Time Management

Good time management demands a large degree of commitment and perseverance, and a readiness to stay with each advance, no matter how small.

### Time

The one thing we all have in common is 86,400 seconds in a day. While some people are able to run businesses, families and even countries, others only marginally avoid a nervous breakdown trying to get to work on time.

Personal time management is about controlling the use of your most valuable (and undervalued) resource. Consider these two questions:

- What would happen if you spent the organisations money with as few safeguards as you spend the organisations time?
- When was the last time you scheduled a review of your time allocation?

Good time management allows us to:

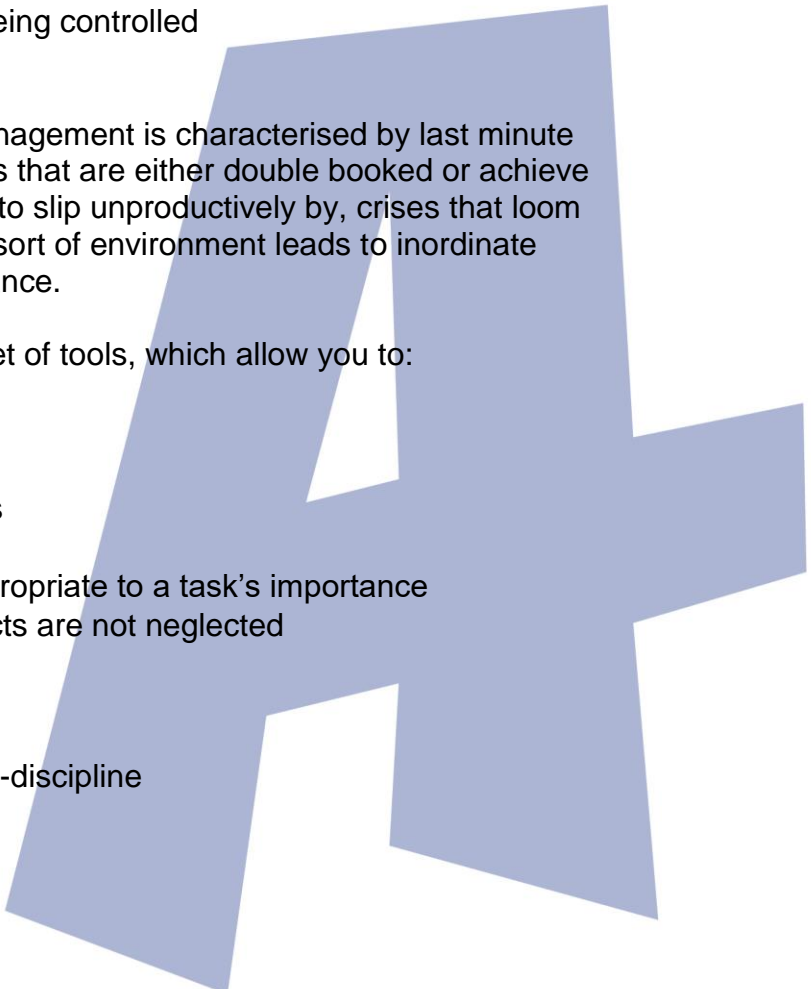
- Do the things we want to do when we want to do them
- Be organised
- Feel in control rather than being controlled
- Reduce stress in our lives

The absence of Personal Time Management is characterised by last minute rushes to meet deadlines, meetings that are either double booked or achieve nothing, days that seem somehow to slip unproductively by, crises that loom unexpectedly from nowhere. This sort of environment leads to inordinate stress and degradation of performance.

Personal Time Management is a set of tools, which allow you to:

- Eliminate wastage
- Be prepared for meetings
- Refuse excessive workloads
- Monitor project progress
- Allocate resource (time) appropriate to a task's importance
- Ensure that long-term projects are not neglected
- Plan each day efficiently
- Plan each week effectively

And to do so simply with a little self-discipline



Since Time Management is a management process just like any other, it must be planned, monitored and regularly reviewed. Since true understanding depends upon experience, you will be asked to take part by looking at aspects of your own work. If you do not have time to do this right now – ask yourself: why not?

**Work / Life Balance**

Category	Effort	Importance
Spirituality/Beliefs/Religion Personal Relationship Family Life Social Life Personal Development Career Finance Health Physical Fitness Home Hobbies /Leisure Tangibles		

**Instructions**

For each of the above areas of your life, score from 0 – 10, 0 being poor and 10 being excellent. Score twice once for how much effort you put into the area and secondly for how important it is to you.

If there is an imbalance in the scores between the 2 areas, think about areas you would like to improve to bring balance to your life. For each of the imbalanced areas identify tasks or activities that you can either stop or start doing, to create the right balance.

Take up to ten minutes to think about what you can stop and start doing which will make you happier or help achieve your goals in life. If you are able to do this will help you begin to manage your time and take control.

The key to time management is to have control and self-discipline. If you have a lack of control you will see everything you have to do – at home and at work – as an unstructured, incoherent heap of tasks. Large and small all mixed together, entangled and devoid of any order or system.

If your desk, inbox or private drawers, are in a mess – full of loose bits of paper, various piles of things, bills, statistics, magazines, notices of meetings, stray notes, half-used meeting pads and other *interesting things*. In this way it becomes impossible to tell the important from the unimportant. We will forget tasks and will do things in a random way. The result is that we never feel up to date or properly in control.

In order to take control you to have a clear overview of all your goals and responsibilities. These can then be broken down into tasks and activities, so that you are aware of what needs to be done and which is most important.

### Setting S.M.A.R.T. Goals

Positive goals underpins effective planning and desk management. The goals need to meet certain criteria:

**S – specific**, to be specific a goal should have a clearly defined outcome. You should be able to describe how you will know when you have achieved a goal and it needs to be stated as a positive.

**M – measurable**, your goal should be measurable, it should be clearly defined to let you know how you are doing and, of course, when you get there.

**A – achievable**, achievable is a more subjective statement. How achievable do you feel the goal is? This question can make you realise how much work and effort is needed to achieve the goal. It is most important that you focus on the different activities needed to achieve the goal. If you can create an activity plan for the goal, then the goal is probably achievable, assuming that you are prepared to do the necessary work.

**R – realistic**, is the goal truly realistic or is it just a pipe dream – only you can judge.

**T – time bound**, finally, the goal should have a time scale. Ensure that you place some realistic milestones, deadlines and time scales on your goals. Using a deadline will focus your attention, energy and commitment to achieve the goal and will assist you plan the time necessary to complete the goal in line with other goals that you will be setting.

### How to set goals using the four feature approach

Setting a SMART goal, whether it is business or personal, short or long term, simple or complex is a very easy process. There are just four features that you need to write down to create a goal plan:

## 1 - What?

- Write a detailed statement of what the goal is, make the goal sound both necessary and compelling.

## 2 - Why?

Describe fully:

- Why do you want to achieve this goal?
- Why is this goal important to you?
- What will you gain by achieving this goal?
- How will you feel when you have achieved it or how will you feel if you do not achieve it?
- What is the alternative?
- How does it fit in with other goal or plans?

## 3 - When?

- When do you want to achieve this goal?
- Is it part of a larger goal?
- Could the late start of this goal impact the completion of your whole plan? Create realistic start and finish dates. A Gantt chart or other planning technique may be found on your PC. It could be very useful here.

## 4 - How?

- Action plan. If necessary the goal needs to be broken down into clearly defined actions and tasks.
- Ensure that you enter the plan into your time management system so that you can allocate time to the goal and monitor its progress.

## Where does goal setting fit in?

Understanding where goal setting fits in to your life, both in your private life and whilst at work will develop a personal sense of time within you. This will enable you to identify short-term, middle-term and long-term plans to achieve your overall goals in life.

Only you know what you want to achieve in your life, your dreams, your aspirations, your desires and the realities that could prevent or enable you to accomplish them.

Take time now to contemplate what you want to achieve during your lifetime.

Consider –

- Your private life; family, friends, social life or hobbies
- Special dreams and aspirations
- Personal development
- Career development
- Ultimate goals
- How you will view your achievements in five, ten, twenty-five years from now!

Irrespective of what your goals are, to ensure that you achieve at least some of them, you need to arrange them into a short, mid or long-term plan and write them into your diary management system, using the four feature and SMART goal plan already discussed.

Once you have created your goals, you have the foundation for successful time management. The next step is to create and define your responsibilities, so that you are able to take control over your time.

### **Establishing Your Key Responsibilities**

Once we have established our goals we then need to create and identify our Key responsibilities. Key responsibilities give you the structure and definition for your time management. Key responsibilities are the main areas into which your private and work life can be divided. The areas on which you need to concentrate your time and energy in order to achieve your goals.

When you define your Key Responsibilities and keep them up to date, you establish a perspective over your time and life. It will then be easier for you to decide what is most important for you. You can determine how much time you want to spend on each Key Area and plan your diary accordingly.

#### **Guidelines for your KEY RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Try as far as possible to take the following guidelines into consideration when defining your Key Responsibilities:
- Be brief – don't use more than 4 words
- Key Responsibilities – have to aim at your output, but shouldn't include quantified goals. Think of where does the question "why" lead you to what do you spend your time on?
- Complete – They must cover all your activities and tasks. All you do and have to do must come in as a task within a Key Responsibilities.

- Key Responsibilities - cover your own responsibility – not that of subordinates, your colleagues or your manager. In addition, you have to be involved yourself physically to be able to consider something as one of your Key Responsibilities.
- Unambiguous/clear - Must be immediately intelligible by the people you work with.

Individual Key Responsibilities must not overlap. If two possible Key Responsibilities are only two sides of the same question, then combine them under one Key Area heading.

### How to define your key responsibilities

Key Responsibilities are not intended to indicate *when* or *how much*? Do not use verbs to describe Key Responsibilities. Verbs are action words which describe what you want to do. For example, a sales manager may have the Key Area *Exports*. The organisation may wish to increase exports by 10%, discontinue exporting to country Y, establish a new network of agents. Key Responsibilities do not say anything about the results you want to achieve or the specific tasks you want to have carried out. The Key Area only *lays down the area within which you want the results*.

### How to establish your own key responsibilities

You can use several methods when establishing your own Key Responsibilities:

- List all the activities you can think of that you do every day. Then ask “why” you do them, so they can be divided into logical, coherent groups. Finally, give these groups *headings*, i.e. Key Areas.
- Identify the overall requirements or goals of your job. Ask yourself the question, - “On which main areas (Key Responsibilities) must I then concentrate my efforts in order to achieve these goals?”
- Ask yourself – What would happen if my position or department were to be abolished and not replaced? Which essential areas (Key Responsibilities) would then be neglected? “What is my main contribution?”

### Tasks and activities

Once we have established our key responsibilities we then need to break these down into tasks and activities. This enables us to identify what we do, the work we conduct and the tasks we perform. There could be several tasks

within a key responsibility and these need to encompass all the work that takes place in that area. If the tasks are large, then they need to be broken down further into activities.

You then have to decide whether a task needs to be broken down into activities. When looking at your tasks and activities, the important factor in determining whether we need to break tasks down into activities, is whether you can schedule, control and manage the task. One of your key areas if you are manager is – Team. Each person in your team would be a task. For each individual you would then have various activities that you perform throughout the year. So, when identifying an activity, it might be 30 minutes or it could be a couple of days. If the activity is too large it is more difficult to manage and is more likely to miss its deadline. So be realistic in your estimating.

Each task and activity can also be prioritised, so that when it comes to scheduling, you can plan what needs to be done first. Once you have established your tasks and activities within each key area, you can then use these to create your plans and schedules. Once a week you would look at your key areas and identify which tasks and activities need to be conducted and then put them into your schedule. Once every few weeks you would review your tasks and activities and update them as necessary. If you have a change in responsibility or one of your goals has been completed, you then would update your key responsibilities. This enables you to keep control of your time, responsibilities, priorities and gives you structure to your work.

If you are able to create this structure for your job, it will save you huge amounts of time. Without this structure, it will be difficult to succeed in the management of your time and therefore your job. If you think you don't have time to do this, then create a key responsibility of - TIME – and spend several hours a week on tasks to ensure that you take control of your time. If you don't do it then nobody else will and others will continue to steal your time.

## Planning

The final stage is how you take the tasks and activities you have identified and create your plans. The golden rule is to plan an outline for each day a week ahead, and plan for the day in detail the day/evening before it.

Go through your key areas and look at your tasks and activities and identify what **MUST** be done, what **SHOULD** be done, and what **COULD** be done.

Once this has been done, they can be slotted into your schedule. If you then spend your time according to your plan, you will have addressed the important jobs, and allocated time for the routine and non-important ones.

Wherever possible, follow these rules for planning your day:

- Group items together, such as telephone calls and letters
- Block time out to do the important tasks
- Schedule time for preparation e.g. for meetings, training, appraisals
- Schedule time when you can be interrupted, and allow time for unplanned interruptions
- Plan time for breaks (for tea, coffee, walking around)
- Share your plan with colleagues and your team

Remember that the average person's attention span is 20 minutes – people work best in concentrated bursts. This can considerably help with creativity as well as in-depth work.

### **Freeing Your Mental Thinking Space**

Writing things down frees the mind from having to try and remember what it is we should be doing. Many observers notice a similarity between the brain and our modern computer systems. In managing your day better, storing your thoughts on hard disk is definitely the way forward. So whether you write down on a notebook or into your electronic version, make sure you do write or type what you have to do.

### **Ideas to Master Each Day**

- Take ten minutes to make a note of important times, dates, projects and actions
- Ideally carry a notebook with you all the time – to capture ideas, messages, records of telephone conversations, meetings, actions, etc.
- Avoid using loose-leaf notes or sheets, these are easily lost, or get in the wrong order
- Avoid using post-it notes or similar, these attach themselves to other documents or fall off. They can also encourage cluttered thinking!
- Write a problem clearly at the top of a page in your notebook, in the form of a question and then brainstorm twenty ideas to deal with it.

### **Batch Tasks Together**

In your daily activity plan put groups of similar work together so that you can be more effective and productive.



A list of calls with telephone numbers along each side can be generated. These should be time scheduled in order that you can make one call after another in a fairly intensive fashion. Apply the same methodology when producing letters, working on the computer, visiting colleagues around the office, or filing.

Try to avoid the 'Butterfly Syndrome', flitting from one task or activity to another at random. This may start by opening the mail, then getting a coffee, stopping for a chat, making a few telephone calls, half writing a memo or completing filing left over from the day before. Every time you stop and start a task, it takes a small element of time. Simply picking up the paper, loading the file, finding the number for the person to telephone and just mentally changing tasks can take two or three minutes at the end of each task. If you do this between ten and twenty times a day, which is not uncommon, you have said good-bye to almost an hour of productive time.

### **Plan Your Week in Advance**

Whether you choose to use an electronic device, or a paper-based calendar, diary or notebook is up to you. The effect is the same. Planning your week in advance will allow you to schedule and 'make' time for things that are important, but not yet urgent. In this way your actions can be more carefully thought through, and plans can be followed.

The advantages of creating a weekly plan first thing on a Monday morning, last thing Friday evening or on a Sunday night are as follows:

- 1 It provides a sense of proportion for the work that is most important.
- 2 Writing the plan down or committing it to your notebook, actually helps you to be more self-disciplined.
- 3 When you are wondering what to do next you can look at your plan for guidance. If you find yourself completing tasks quicker or sooner than you anticipated, then simply bring other task across from your notepad or electronic "To-Do" list.
- 4 A weekly plan helps by deflecting distractions and interruptions. Your weekly plan says that you are busy and it looks very convincing. In addition, people will make the assumption that you are so efficient that maybe they should plan meetings with you in future!
- 5 It gives you a sense of control. One of the most important elements of beginning to get better control is to create a sense of control in what you are doing. Sitting down and taking a few moments to make a weekly plan will certainly help you do that.