

TIME MANAGEMENT -Work smarter!

At the heart of time management is an important shift in focus where we concentrate on results and not just being busy! Many people spend their days in a frenzy of activity, but achieve very little because they are not concentrating on the right things and by doing so are not achieving maximum results.

The 80:20 Rule

This is neatly summed up in the Pareto Principle, or the '80:20 Rule' which argues that typically 80% of unfocussed effort generates only 20% of results. *The remaining 80% of results are achieved with only 20% of the effort.* While the ratio is not always 80:20, this broad pattern of a small proportion of activity generating non-scalar returns recurs so frequently as to be the norm in many areas. And so by applying these time management tips and skills you can optimize your effort to ensure that you concentrate as much of your time and energy as possible on the profitable tasks. This ensures that you achieve the greatest benefit possible with the limited amount of time available to you.

Time Management Tools

There are some simple but effective tools you could use:

- Manage your time – and best procrastination.
- Tackling the right tasks first – learn to prioritize.
- Finding out how you really spend your time – use an Activity Log
- Small scale planning – put together an Action Plan
- Deciding what your personal priorities should be – goal setting.
- Planning to make the best use of your time – effective scheduling.

By the end of this article, you should have a much clearer understanding of how to use your time to its greatest effect.

Beating Procrastination - Manage your time and get it all done.

If you've found yourself putting off important tasks over and over again, you're not alone. In fact, many people procrastinate to some degree - but some are so chronically affected by procrastination that it stops them achieving things they're capable of and disrupts their careers. The key to controlling and ultimately combating this destructive habit is to recognize when you start procrastinating, understand why it happens (even to the best of us), and take active steps to better manage your time and outcomes.

Why do we Procrastinate?

In a nutshell, we procrastinate when we are put off things that we should be focusing on right now, usually in favour of doing something that is more enjoyable, easier or that we're more comfortable doing. Procrastinators work as many hours in the day as other people (and often work longer hours) but they invest their time in the wrong tasks. Sometimes this

is simply because they don't understand the difference between urgent tasks and important tasks, and jump straight into getting on with urgent tasks that aren't actually important. They may feel that they're doing the right thing by reacting fast, getting in that quick return e mail. Or they may not even think about their approach and simply be driven by the person whose demands are loudest. Either way, by doing this, they have little or no time left for the important tasks, despite the unpleasant outcomes this may bring about.

Another common cause of procrastination is feeling overwhelmed by the task. You may not know where to begin. Or you may doubt that you have the skills or resources you think you need. So you seek comfort in doing tasks you know you're capable of completing. Unfortunately, the big task isn't going to go away - truly important tasks rarely do. And it's the one that will probably make you more money, satisfy an important customer or make you feel better in the long run because you have completed it!

Other causes of procrastination include:

- Waiting for the "right" mood or the "right" time to tackle the important task at hand;
- A fear of failure or success;
- Underdeveloped decision making skills;
- Poor organizational skills; and
- Perfectionism ("I don't have the right skills or resources to do this perfectly now, so I won't do it at all");
- I need peace and quiet to do this so I'll do it at home;

How to Overcome Procrastination:

Whatever the reason behind procrastination, it must be recognized, dealt with and controlled before you miss important opportunities or your career is derailed.

Step 1: Recognize that you're Procrastinating

If you're honest with yourself, you probably know when you're procrastinating. But to be sure, you first need to make sure you know your priorities. Putting off an unimportant task isn't procrastination, it's probably good prioritization. You could start your week by quickly compiling a Priority Matrix to identify your priorities e.g. a simple do within the next hour, do this morning, do this afternoon, do tomorrow, etc and then work from a Prioritised To Do List on a daily basis. Or perhaps just use these tools for a short time until you eradicate procrastination from your work style.

You will know you are procrastinating when you start:

- Filling your day with low priority tasks from your To Do List just because it makes you look busy and you feel great crossing them off when completed!;
- Reading an e-mail or request that you've noted in your notebook or on your To Do List more than once, without starting work on it or deciding when you're going to start work on it;

- Sitting down to start a high-priority task, and almost immediately going off to make a cup of coffee or checking your e-mails as soon as a new one arrives;
- Leaving an item on your To Do list for a long time, even though you know it's important;
- Regularly saying "Yes" to unimportant tasks that others ask you to do, and filling your time with these instead of getting on with the important tasks already on your list.

Step 2: Work out WHY You're Procrastinating

Why you procrastinate can depend on both you and the task. But it's important to understand what the reasons for procrastination are for each situation, so that you can select the best approach for overcoming your reluctance to get going. Common causes of procrastination were discussed in detail above, but they can often be reduced to three main reasons:

- You find the task unpleasant; or
- You find the task overwhelming
- You feel you don't have the right skills to do it.

Step 3: Get over it!

If you are putting something off because you just don't want to do it, and you really can't delegate the work to someone else, you need to find ways of motivating yourself to get moving. The following approaches can be helpful here:

- Make up your own rewards. For example, promise yourself an early finish if you've completed a certain task.
- Ask someone else to check up on you. Peer pressure works! This is the principle behind slimming and other self-help groups, and it is widely recognized as a highly effective approach.
- Identify the unpleasant consequences of NOT doing the task.

Work out the cost of your time to you or your employer. As your employers are paying you to do the things that **they** think are important, you're not delivering value for money if you're not doing those things. Shame yourself into getting going either for your sake or the sake of others.

If you're putting off starting a project because you find it overwhelming, you need to take a different approach. For example:

- Break the project into a set of smaller, more manageable tasks. You may find it helpful to create a simple action plan.
- Start with some quick, small tasks if you can, even if these aren't the logical first actions. You'll feel that you're achieving things, and so perhaps the whole project won't be so overwhelming after all.

Key points:

To have a good chance of conquering procrastination, you need to spot straight away that you're doing it. Then, you need to identify why you're procrastinating and taken appropriate steps to overcome the block. Part of the solution is to develop good time management, organizational and personal effectiveness habits. This helps you establish the right priorities, and manage your time in such a way that you make the most of the opportunities open to you. This is not rocket science and you know all of this already so why not have a Nike moment and - **JUST DO IT!**

ACTIVITY LOGS

Activity logs help you to analyze how you actually spend your time. The first time you use an activity log you may be shocked to see the amount of time that you waste! Memory is a very poor guide when it comes to this, as it can be too easy to forget time spent on non-core tasks. And don't say you don't have time to do this – make time because in the long run you will be more focussed and more productive.

How to Use the Tool

Keeping an Activity Log for several days helps you to understand how you spend your time, and when you perform at your best. Without modifying your behaviour any further than you have to, note down the things you do as you do them on this template (see last page). Every time you change activities, whether opening mail, working, making coffee, driving to your next appointment, gossiping with colleagues or whatever, note down the time of the change. As well as recording activities, note how you feel, whether alert, flat, tired, energetic, etc. Do this periodically throughout the day. Don't look on this as another thing to do in an already full day as you will only do it for a short time and this will be used as the basis for important changes to your working day.

Learning from Your Log

Once you have logged your time for a few days, analyze your daily activity log. You may be alarmed to see the amount of time you spend doing low value jobs! You may also see that you are energetic in some parts of the day, and flat in other parts. A lot of this can depend on the rest breaks you take, the times and amounts you eat, and quality of your nutrition. The activity log gives you some basis for experimenting with these variables. Your analysis should help you to free up extra time in your day by applying one of the following actions to most activities:

Now start by focussing and:

- Eliminate jobs that you are not paid to do. These may include tasks that someone else in the organization could or should be doing, or personal activities such as sending non-work e-mails and chatting on the phone.

