

## **10 TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS**

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**Time is our most precious asset**, which makes time management our most important administrative task. Prioritizing, delegating, and improving skills are the cornerstones of time management. These 10 tips will save some minutes and some major blocks of time.

1. *Stop worrying.* Unfortunately, for many people worry feels like a responsible response to a problem. For example, worrying about a test feels like a motivator to study. But there is a huge difference between thinking about an issue and worrying. Worry focuses on anxiety. Worry clouds thinking and slows it down. It can produce irrational responses, which take time to repair. Stress from worry can cause illness, which wastes more time. It can even cause a heart attack and kill you – the ultimate time waster. Worry is a habit that can be difficult to break. If you learn to consider risks and not suffer from the anxiety of worry, you'll be better at solving problems, feel happier, and save lots of time.

2. *Don't allow preferences to postpone priorities.* People do what they like. They cling to the familiar. Too often, the task at hand is unpleasant or unfamiliar so it's easy to feel too busy to address it. But procrastination is time consuming. For example, failure to correct quickly the inappropriate behavior of an employee could cause a morale disaster, and low morale produces low productivity, which wastes time.

Another example is failure to collect a delinquent receivable promptly, which may give the client more time to squander your money. Then you may have to get a loan; borrowing is not only costly but time-consuming.

To improve your ability to act swiftly, try doing unfamiliar or unpleasant priorities first thing in the morning, before your comfortable activities kick in. Another approach is to decide on a problem-solving strategy, give yourself a deadline, and enter that deadline in your calendar. Many of us respond to a written deadline.

Decide on a time to stop a task, too. A tight limit on the time to implement something makes an unpleasant task easier to start. It also increases the likelihood that you'll use the time effectively.

3. *Supervise, don't micromanage.* Micromanaging means controlling an employee's every step. It does not save time, it duplicates effort. Supervision, however, enhances the likelihood that the employee won't waste time moving in the wrong direction. A good supervisor, after giving instructions, asks for questions. Too often employees are too self-conscious to ask questions and will exit with unclear directions.

A good supervisor keeps a short rein. One technique is to request that the person think about the assignment and return within an hour or two to discuss his or her understanding and approach to the matter. At the follow-up meeting, be sure to listen rather than talk. A short follow-up meeting will quickly demonstrate the person's ability to do the job correctly.

4. *Promote brevity.* If you enjoy speaking ad nauseam, you set a low standard for your employees. Keep your words (both spoken and written) to a minimum and require the same of others. An obstacle to brevity is concern about appearing rude. One way to maintain control without rudeness is to tell a person at the beginning of your conversation that you have only five minutes to talk. Explain that you know his or her time is valuable too, so you'd prefer to talk now rather than later. Notifying people of time limitations helps them get down to the meat of a meeting. It's a way of cutting them off without putting them down.

Another technique is to stand as you talk briefly with another person. Your body language does not offer the other person a chance to sit down. Too often people unwittingly sit down and get comfortable, enjoying their coffee or playing with that magnetic sculpture on your desk. A "standing meeting" is usually a shorter meeting.

5. *Learn to use voice mail.* Voice mail is more time efficient than leaving a message with a receptionist. A detailed message dictated to another person is rarely relayed accurately. Inevitably, you'll have to repeat yourself when you get the return call. That wastes time.

Voice mail allows you to offer options to the person. For example, "I can give you three options for our next meeting: the 15<sup>th</sup> at 10 A.M. or 3 P.M. or the 16<sup>th</sup> at noon. Please choose a time or leave me a message with other options that work for you later in the week." Option-based voice mail is so effective you may want to try calling some contacts late at night when you're sure they're not in. That way you save the time you would otherwise spend chatting.

Here's some time-saving etiquette for the benefit of both you and your callers: Let callers know at the beginning of the call that they can skip the message by pressing the # sign, rather than waiting until the end when it's too late to have any value. When leaving a message, remember to speak clearly and slowly. In the race to be efficient, many callers actually waste time by rushing through their message and mumbling the telephone number.

6. *Limit interruptions.* Lawyers love to solve problems. They enjoy it when someone presents them with a dilemma they can solve – even in the midst of another matter. Interruptions, however, are time-consuming because they require refocusing. Instead, set aside time for problem-solving. Don't confuse customer service with unnecessary interruptions. Even the most demanding clients understand that you have other issues to attend to.

7. *Clean your office.* A messy office is an inefficient office. Files get lost. Papers end up in the wrong files. People who need access to documents can't find them. From a marketing perspective, clients have to see a messy office. It reveals a lack of organization and could erode their confidence.

Messy lawyers usually justify piles of files as a visual “to-do” list. But, that visual stimulation actually wastes time because the files act as distracting “mental magnets.”

If you have a problem with clutter, consider adding a couple of filing cabinets to your office. If you need a visual reminder, try technology. Electronic organizers and software packages can really help.

My own reminder system is a collection of Post-It® Notes stuck to an acrylic board on my desk – one note for each task. Each note is visible at a glance. As each matter is handled, I toss the note.

8. *Don't confuse laziness with R&R.* Rest and relaxation do not necessarily mean being idle. Yes, you should take a vacation from telephones and deadlines, but not from the pursuit of your goals. You can rest and relax as you catch up on reading, think about marketing opportunities, socialize with clients and prospects, and create your vision of your future. These activities rest the body but build the mind, spirit, and bank balances. Laziness may be restful, but it's wasteful. To waste time is to waste life.

9. *Avoid the black holes.* It sounds obvious, but people tend to invest the most time in the least valuable activities. Think of your worst clients. They often require a lot of your time and squabble over every invoice. Think about the problem employee who never responds to your motivational efforts yet keeps you flushing away hours of dialogue and aggravation. Beware of chronic time wasters and have the courage to terminate your relationships with them.

Get rid of the negative thoughts and emotions that steal your energy and time. Time-wasting, negative black holes include jealousy, self-pity, bitterness, blame, shame, remorse, guilt, prejudice, and many more.

To avoid the black holes become more aware of your moods and feelings. Listen to your inner voice and decide if the messages you're hearing are promoting a good use of time or wasting it.

10. *Seek a lesson in every task.* As you implement each task, whether fun or unpleasant, look for the lesson it can teach you. The process of seeking the lesson makes unpleasant tasks easier, sharpens your observation skills, and trains you to be innovative and creative in accomplishing your goals.