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How to Plan and Manage Your Time

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How to Plan and Manage your Time

Planning and time management is the process of organizing and planning how to divide your time between specific tasks. It enables you to work smarter, not harder - so that you get more done in less time, especially when your time is tight, and pressures or stresses are high. Good planning and time management enables you to complete more in a shorter period, makes you more productive and efficient, lowers your stress and anxiety, and helps you procrastinate less and produce a higher quality of work, getting more of your important work done in a day.

Make a task list

This stops you from feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work you must do. It stops you from missing deadlines or forgetting something important. A task list is a prioritized list of all the tasks you need to carry out, it lists everything you have to do, with the most critical tasks at the top and the least important at the bottom. This means all your tasks are written down in one place, so you don't forget anything.

A task list is essential if you're going to control your workload; using a task list effectively, you'll be much better organized and more reliable, and you will experience less stress. Prioritizing means spending your time on high-value or the most critical tasks first; helping you to meet your deadlines making you more productive and a better manager.

- Write down all the tasks that you need to complete. Break down larger tasks into smaller steps or sub-tasks. (Ideally, these should take no longer than 1-2 hours to complete each.)
- Run through all the tasks and allocate a priority. (Use High, Medium, and Low or Mandatory, Highly Desirable, Nice to have) based on when the task is due.
- If too many tasks have a high priority, run through the list again and demote the less important ones. Once you have done this, rewrite the list in priority order again.

Always spend 30 minutes at the end of the day organizing tasks on your list for the next day. It is fastest to use a simple pad and pen to make your list; otherwise, use a word processor, spreadsheet, scheduling, or teamwork software.

Use for small projects

Task lists can help you get and stay on top of important projects and piles of tasks or decisions. When working on a project, there are many tasks to do and many people to do them - staying on top of this can seem daunting.

For a project, structure your list by team member, writing out tasks and deadlines for every person on the project. As you write out your tasks, check your team task list to see what's due that day. Task lists are for when you have a small number of tasks (say 10-20) that you need to complete. When you have more extensive tasks lists, you need to move to a task scheduling App like MS Project, designed to manage larger and more complex task lists and projects.

Create a daily schedule—and stick with it

Don't start your day without a task list. Putting everything on paper will prevent you from lying awake at night tossing and turning over the tasks running through your head. Instead, your subconscious goes to work on your plans while you are asleep, which means you can wake up in the morning with new insights for the workday. If you can't do it the day before, make sure you write out your task list first thing in the morning. You'll find that the time you spend creating a task list (a clear plan) is nothing compared to the time you'll lose jumping between tasks when you lack such a plan.

Prioritize wisely

As you organize your task list, prioritization is critical for successful time management at work. Start by eliminating tasks that you shouldn't be performing in the first place. Then identify the three or four most important tasks and do those first—that way, you make sure you finish the essentials. Evaluate your task list and make sure you have organized it based on the importance of a task rather than its urgency. Important responsibilities support the achievement of your goals, whereas urgent responsibilities require immediate attention and are associated with the achievement of someone else's goals. We tend to let the urgent dominate when we should focus on activities that support our business goals.

Group similar tasks together

Save yourself time and mental energy by completing all of one type of task before moving on to the next. For example, create separate chunks of time for answering emails, making phone calls, filing, and so on. Don't answer emails and messages as they come in, as doing so is a distraction - which is an inefficient use of time. Turn off your phone and email notifications to eliminate the temptation to check at unappointed times.

Multi-task a maximum of three tasks

When working alone, aim to focus on the task at hand and no more than two other tasks or projects simultaneously. You will need to keep some time available for when team

members come to see you. It can be tempting to multi-task more than three tasks at a time, but you're just shooting yourself in the foot when you attempt to do so. You lose time and decrease productivity when switching tasks.

Learn to say no

You cannot manage your work if you can't say No. Only you know how much work you must do and how much time you have available. Declining a request to focus on more important tasks is exactly what you should be doing. And if you take on a task that is going nowhere, consider letting it go. Rather than doing a lot of tasks that yield little or no value, complete fewer tasks that create more value. Use the 80/20 rule—80% of your output comes from 20% of your inputs and focus on those tasks that produce the most value. Finally, if you can't say no, delegate it.

Actions

1. Start your day with a clear intention of what you want to do.
2. Set specific goals (What needs to be done.)
3. Focus on high-value tasks.
4. Make a task list.
5. Prioritize and regularly review your task list.
6. Plan for tomorrow and use deadlines.
7. Keep a weekly and monthly calendar.
8. Try to minimize interruptions, but at the same time allow for distractions.
9. Aim not to multi-task.
10. Review your day at the end of your day.

Summary

1. **Make a task list.** - This stops you from feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work you must do. It stops you from missing deadlines or forgetting something important. Always spend 30 minutes at the end of the day organizing tasks on your list for the next day.
2. **Use for small projects.** - Task lists can help you get and stay on top of important projects and piles of tasks or decisions. When working on a project, there are many tasks to do and many people to do them - staying on top of this can seem daunting.
3. **Create a daily schedule—and stick with it.** - You'll find that the time you spend creating a clear plan is nothing compared to the time you'll lose jumping between tasks when you lack such a plan.

Management Guide

4. **Prioritize wisely.** - As you organize your task list, prioritization is critical for successful time management at work. Start by eliminating tasks that you shouldn't be performing in the first place. Then identify the three or four most important tasks and do those first.
5. **Group similar tasks together.** - Save yourself time and mental energy by completing all of one type of task before moving on to the next.
6. **Multi-task a maximum of three tasks.** - When working alone, aim to focus on the task at hand and no more than two other tasks or projects simultaneously.
7. **Learn to say no.** - You cannot manage your work if you can't say No. Only you know how much work you must do and how much time you have available. Declining a request to focus on more important tasks is exactly what you should be doing.

You know that one client is keen on your product and is ready to buy, so you prioritize them with a "High" – this is a prospect that's worth focusing on. Conversely, you know that another prospect is playing you off against several competitors, meaning that you'll make less profit, and that there's a reasonable chance that you won't get the business. You prioritize this person with a "Low". You should focus most of your attention on better prospects.

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