

Time Management: Practical Tips

Time management in effect refers to management of what we do about what is important to us. It is about achieving our goals in less time and with less effort. Time management skills are essential for increased productivity and success in both personal and professional life.

This article aims to provide you with some practical tips which will help you to manage your time better and increases your productivity.

Pareto Principle

Most people are already familiar with Pareto and his famous 80/20 rule. 20% of our actions help us achieve 80% of our objectives or as the famous saying goes “80% of your sales comes from 20% of your clients”. The idea is simple but very effective in action. By identifying and focusing on those important 20%, you avoid spending valuable time and energy chasing unimportant tasks.

Parkinson Law

Parkinson Law is usually stated as *“Work expands to fill the gap available to it”*. We see this time and time again that if we assign longer durations to activities, those activities take just as much time to finish. We tend to pace ourselves based on the allocated time available to us rather than based on the complexity of the task. In effect, this means to get things done faster you need to pace yourself faster. It’s a very simple rule, but not many people follow it.

1. Beat Procrastination

Everyone procrastinates to some degree and uncontrolled procrastination is the number one enemy of productivity and time management. There are many advices on how to overcome procrastination. The following three techniques have proven helpful in beating procrastination:

- **Make a case.** List all the benefits and problems of doing a task that you’ve been putting off. Ask yourself, “What are the long term implications of not taking any action?”
- **Use a timer.** Set your timer for 45 minutes or 1 hour and don’t stop working until it goes off.
- **Treat yourself.** Have a break in between each working slot and treat yourself to something you truly enjoy. For some it is eating a snack and for others is reading a blog.

2. Log It

Logging time is a wakeup call for many people new to time management. Recording the amount of time spent on different activities allows you to see where you spend your time and more importantly notice how much time you have allocated to unnecessary and unimportant tasks each day. The logged information enables you to examine how you spend your time, and plan your time better in order to avoid distractions, stress and pressure. While you can log your time using paper, there are dedicated timesheet software that have been designed specifically for this purpose. If you don't have access to these software consider using Microsoft Excel sheets. Computer-based approaches save you time in creating dynamic reports and it's much easier to monitor where you have spent your time on a regular basis.

3. Minimize Your To-Do List

While having a To-Do list has proven effective in time management and getting things done, we tend to get carried away when entering tasks into our lists. Electronic devices such as Outlook and PDAs also made it easier to enter a large number of tasks into every day task lists. We often overestimate our time and energy when compiling our list of actions. Most people with a long list of actions end up achieving the first few and spend the rest of the time feeling worried or guilty for not covering every task in their list.

Follow the classic two-minute rules to minimize the number of items in your task list. If it takes less than 2 minutes to do, then do it. The overhead of keeping the task in the system is not worth the effort. Just get it over and done with. If you are not using this rule, you will see a significant improvement in your productivity if you employ it from this minute!

4. Contingency

Having a "Plan B" or a contingency plan not only allows you to deal with unexpected but also reduces the stress of taking important actions. Allocating some extra time helps you in unforeseen situations and enables you to deal with things in a calm and stress-free manner. Remember, contingency is for *unforeseen circumstances* and by definition these are situations which you cannot anticipate or plan for.