

## **Time Management for Right Brained People** **(Or-What to do if to-do lists are not your style)**

Ask some people about managing time and a dreaded image appears in their minds. They see a person with a 50-item to-do list clutching a calendar that's chock full of appointments. They imagine a robot that values cold efficiency, compulsively accounts for every minute, and is too rushed to develop actual relationships. Often this image is what's behind the comment, "Yeah, there are some good ideas in those time management books, but I'll never get around to using them. Too much work."

The stereotypes about time management present us with a kernel of truth. Sometimes people who pride themselves on efficiency are merely busy. In their rush to check items off their to-do lists, they might be fussing over things that don't need doing - tasks that create little or no value in the first place. If this is one of your fears, relax. The point of managing time is not to load ourselves down with extra obligations. Instead, the aim is to get the important things done and still be human. An effective time manager is the person who's productive and relaxed at the same time.

Personal style enters the picture too. Many time management suggestions appeal to "left-brained" people - those who thrive on making lists, scheduling events, and handling the details first. They may not work for people who like to see wholes and think visually. There are as many different styles for managing time as there are people. The trick is to discover what suits you. Do give the strategies a fair trial. Some may work for you with a few modifications. Instead of writing a conventional to-do list, for instance, you can plot your day on a mind map. Or write to-do's one per 3x5 card, in any order that tasks occur to you. Later you can edit, sort, and rank those cards, choosing which ones to act on. Strictly speaking, time cannot be managed. Time is a mystery, an abstract concept that cannot be captured in words. The minutes,

hours, days, and years march on whether we manage anything or not. What we can do is manage ourselves in respect to time. A few basic principles can do that as well as a truckload of cold-blooded techniques. Among those principles are the following.

### **Know your values**

Begin managing time from a bigger picture. Instead of thinking in minutes or hours, view your life as a whole. Consider what that expanse of time is all about. Write a short mission statement for your life - a paragraph that describes your values and the kind of life you want to lead. Periodically during the day, stop to ask if what you're doing is contributing to that life.

### **Do Less**

Managing time is as much about dropping worthless activities as adding new ones. The idea is to weed out activities that deliver little reward. One tool for purging your schedule is a "not-to-do" list. On this list include the notorious time-wasters in your life tasks that are just as well left undone. Examples are activities motivated only by obligation, such as compulsively keeping up with the latest fashions or television shows. Decide right now to eliminate activities with a low payoff. When you add a new activity of your schedule, consider dropping a current one.

### **Slow Down**

Sometimes it's useful to hurry, such as when you're late for a meeting or about to miss a bus. At other times, haste is a choice that serves no real purpose. If you're speeding through the day like a launched missile, consider what would happen if you got to your next destination a little later than planned. Gaining a few minutes might not be worth the added strain.

### **Remember People**

Few people on their deathbeds ever say, "I wish I'd spent more time at the office." They're more likely to say, "I wish I'd spent more time with my family and friends." The pace of daily life can lead us to neglect the people we cherish. Efficiency is a concept that applies to things - not people. When it comes to relationships, we can often benefit from loosening up our schedules. We can allow extra time for spontaneous visits, free-ranging conversation, and conflict resolution.

### **Focus on Outcomes**

You might feel guilty if you spend two hours napping or watching soap operas. But if you're regularly meeting your goals and leading a fulfilled life, there's probably no harm done. When managing time, it's the overall goal of personal effectiveness that counts - more than the means we use to get there. There are many methods for planning your time. Some people prefer a written action plan that carefully details each step leading to a long-range goal. Others just note the "due date" for accomplishing the goal and assess their progress as the date approaches.

Either strategy can work. Visualizing the desired outcome can be as important as a detailed action plan. Here's an experiment. Write a list of your goals for the next six months. Then create a vivid mental picture of yourself attaining them. Do this several times in the next few weeks. File the list away, making a note on the calendar to review it in six months. At that time, note how many of your goals you have actually accomplished.

### **Handle it Now!**

A backlog of unfinished tasks can result from postponing decisions or procrastinating. An alternative is to handle the task or decision immediately - to answer that letter now or make that phone call as soon as it occurs to you. You can also save time by graciously saying no to projects that you don't want to take on. Saying "I'll think about doing that and get back to you

later" may only mean that you'll take more time to say no later.

### **Buy Less**

Before you purchase an item, ask how much time and money it will take to locate, assemble, use, repair, and maintain. You might be able to free up hours by doing without. If the product comes with a 400-page manual or 20 hours of training, beware. Remember that inexpensive, "low-tech" tools can actually save time. Keeping track of your appointments and to-do lists on a computer might actually take more time than using a pencil, paper, and the old-fashioned appointment book. Before rushing to the store to add another possession to your life, see if you can use or adapt something you already own.

### **Forget About Time**

Schedule "down time" every day - a period when you're accountable to no one and have nothing to accomplish. This is time to do nothing, free of guilt. Even a few minutes spent this way can yield a sense of renewal. Also, experiment with decreasing your awareness of time. Leave your watch off for a few hours each day. Spend time in an area that's free of clocks. Notice how often you glance at your watch and make a conscious effort to do that less. If you still want some sense of time then use alternatives to the almighty, unforgiving clock. Measure your day with a sundial, hourglass, or egg timer. Or synchronize your activities with the rhythms of nature - for example, rising at dawn and going to bed at sundown. You can also plan activities to harmonize with the rhythms of your body. Schedule your most demanding tasks for the times when you're normally most alert. Eat when you're hungry, not according to the clock. Scrap schedules when it's appropriate. Sometimes the vest-laid plans are best laid to rest. In summary, take time to retreat from time. Create a sanctuary, a haven, a safe place in your life that's free from any hint of schedules, lists, or accomplishments. One of the most effective ways to manage time is periodically to forget about it.