



Topic Overview

If management is the art of getting the right things done, time management is perhaps the single most critical management skill.

This topic helps you learn how to prioritize your tasks-what to concentrate on, and for how long, as well as what to set aside.

Core Concepts

Click here to learn about how you spend your time, as well as about using goals as guideposts, scheduling your time, controlling time wasters, and putting your schedule into action.

Steps

Click here for step-by-step advice about how to control your schedule.

Tips

Click here for brief reminders about sticking to your schedule and controlling time wasters.

Tools

Click here for worksheets that can help you track how you spend your time, break down goals into tasks, make a "to-do" list, eliminate time wasters, and evaluate your schedule.

Test Yourself

Click here to gauge how much you've learned about managing your time.

To Learn More

Click here for recommended resources that can help you get more accomplished in less time.

Summary

This topic contains relevant information on how to

- analyze how you currently spend your time and pinpoint opportunities for improvement
- identify which tasks are most critical to achieving your

- long term goals
- plan your time efficiently using scheduling tools
- control time wasters
- put your schedule into action, evaluate it along the way, and modify it as needed.

Topic Outline

Core Concepts

The Purpose of Managing Your Time
Understanding How You Spend Your Time
Goals as Guideposts
Scheduling Your Time
Controlling Time Wasters
Putting Your Schedule into Action
Frequently Asked Questions

Steps

Steps for Managing Your Time

Tips

Tips for Scheduling Time
Tips for Sticking to Your Schedule
Tips for Controlling Time Wasters

Tools

Daily Time Log Chart
Time Waster/Solutions Chart
To-Do List
Checklist: Evaluating Your Schedule
Breaking Goals Into Tasks Worksheet

Test Yourself

To Learn More

Notes and Articles
Books
Harvard Online Article
Other Information Sources

About the Mentors

David Stauffer has served as publications director for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. He has written articles about management for the *Wall Street Journal*, the American Management Association, and the *Harvard Management Update* newsletter. As president of Stauffer Bury, Inc., he provides information about trends and techniques for

improved business and personal management. For the past 12 years he has served as writer/editor of the Executive Memo, a newsletter about managing people.

Nick Morgan has served as a speechwriter to political, corporate, and educational leaders; consulted to corporations and universities in the area of effective communication; and, with a Ph.D. in Rhetoric, taught public speaking at Lehigh and Princeton Universities. He has published articles in regional and national publications including *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Fast Company* magazine. He is currently president of Public Words and an editor for the *Harvard Communications Update* newsletter.

During her ten years of field work, **Linda A. Hill** has helped managers create the conditions for effective management in today's flatter and increasingly diverse organizations. She is a Professor at Harvard Business School, the author of the best-selling *Becoming a Manager* (Harvard Business School Press), and the content expert for *High Performance Management* and *Coaching*, two award-winning interactive development programs from Harvard Business School Publishing.

What Would YOU Do?

The Fun-House

Daniel was giddy after his promotion. He knew his new responsibilities would be challenging, but he hadn't expected to lose control completely. Buffeted about the company by others, dragged in and out of meetings by his boss, his peers, and his direct reports, Daniel's head was spinning. The pile on his desk grew and grew. And every time he'd pull something out of the pile to work on it, someone would need him to do something ASAP, or the phone would start ringing, or an e-mail would pop up on his screen, or another meeting would start.

One evening, he was alone in his office. No people. No phone. No e-mails. Just Daniel and the big pile. He didn't even know where to begin. At the top? That stuff might be the most important. At the bottom? That stuff had been around the longest. Daniel sighed. How had he come to this? He'd been a terrific worker, gotten everything done efficiently and on time, really enjoyed his work. Why was he so out of control as a manager? How could he figure out where to focus his energy? How could he regain control over his own day?

What would YOU do?

Knock, Knock, Who's There?

Paul wearily turned to his spreadsheets when Carol left. He really hadn't meant to spend the last half hour talking about the company's dental insurance plan, but he was committed to his open door policy. And it was working. Morale was up. Roland, Paul's predecessor, had been so inaccessible, you'd have to make an appointment with him to tell him that the building was burning down. What a relief it was when Roland was promoted to Vice President. But Paul's accessibility had its drawbacks. He spent all day talking to people, and all night doing the work he should have been doing during the day. He couldn't keep running this chat room. He was becoming exhausted. How could

he remain available to his employees and get his work done too?

What would YOU do?

Running in Place

Marisol went through her pile of "to-do" lists, checking off item after item. Done, done, done, done, done. With each flick of the felt tip, one more task was lifted from her shoulders. Then she copied the tasks that remained on to a new list.

To Do

- Write report for next week.
- Hire new person to replace Tom.
- Meet with Mark to come up with budget for Lawrence bid.

She paused in dismay. These were all the most critical priorities! What had she been doing when she should have been completing these tasks? She glanced at her schedule. Yesterday there was that meeting with Tony that she really didn't have to go to. Then she and Shelly spent the rest of the morning discussing the office supply situation. She had a meeting with Lisa to help her with the sales reports. That took the better part of the afternoon. She had done everything she was supposed to use her time better—made schedules and "to-do" lists, screened her calls and returned them all at once—and now everyone else was going home, and she hadn't even really started! What was the point of all her careful time management when she still was overworked and frenzied?

What would YOU do?

Managers must learn to use their time wisely and efficiently. They need to prioritize the things that must be accomplished, break big jobs down into smaller tasks, schedule carefully, and avoid time wasting interruptions. But it's not easy.

In *Managing Your Time*, you'll learn to identify the jobs that are most important—and least important—and you'll discover how you can focus your time on the most critical tasks. You'll learn how to avoid time wasters and how to evaluate your efforts. Soon, you'll be making the most of your time.

**"Dost thou love life? Then do
not squander time, for that's the stuff
life is made of."**

-Benjamin Franklin

The Purpose of Managing Your Time

What is time management?

Time management is the process of controlling your life through your use of time. Everyone has the same 168 hours a week. When you manage your time proactively, you

determine what you value in your professional and personal life, and you direct your efforts accordingly.

When you master time management, you learn to balance the many pressures on your time and still achieve your goals. This helps you avoid burnout and stress, and allows you to be more effective. Keep in mind that time management is a personal process: only you can judge whether you are using your time wisely.

Phases of time management

The time management process has three phases. Initially, you will follow the phases in sequence, but you will then revisit phases that you need to work on. The three phases are as follows:

- **Analysis.** Find out where your time goes now, paying particular attention to what drives your use of time. In some cases, you will discover interruptions that you can manage with specific strategies. In other cases, time factors are less controllable but may have patterns that you can learn to work within.
- **Planning.** Review your goals, outline the tasks required to achieve them, and determine how much time you will allocate to each task. It is equally important to identify tasks that do not support your goals, and assign a low priority to them. Once you understand your key tasks, you can schedule your time using a calendar or daily planner. You can also develop strategies for dealing with time wasters like frequent meetings. If your work is affected by factors beyond your control, like the stock market, develop contingency plans in advance so you are prepared for the unexpected.
- **Follow-up and evaluation.** After you have followed your plan for a reasonable period of time, step back and reflect. Did you achieve your goals? How well did your schedule work? What could be done better next time? Using your analysis, modify your scheduling strategies for the future. Then, begin the planning process again.

Understanding How You Spend Your Time

Where does your time go?

Do you really know where your time goes? Often people wish there were more hours in the day when the answer lies in spending the time they have more wisely.

With an accurate picture of where your time goes, you can see whether it is spent effectively or is wasted on activities that do not further your goals. Most people significantly underestimate how long things really take. For example, you might discover that you spend 15 minutes rather than five minutes per day on "quick" phone calls.

People also have different daily rhythms, times of day when they are most effective. The time from 2:00 PM–4:00 PM is notorious for being a hard time to stay focused. Understanding when you are at your peak can help you schedule your time more effectively.

To examine your time usage, try logging your activities for at least a day, preferably for an entire week. Be as vigilant as you can in recording how much time you spend on each activity. When you have completed your log, tally your activities into categories:

- telephone calls
- scheduled appointments
- drop-in/ad hoc appointments
- meetings
- administrative work
- report writing and analysis

Finding the patterns

Once you have logged your activities into categories, examine the time log to identify general patterns of time usage. Perhaps you spend a lot of time Monday mornings on the telephone, or you tend to have unexpected visitors after lunch. Perhaps you will see that your energy level tends to dip toward the end of the afternoon. Look at the following:

- Does your time usage match your key responsibilities? Spending most of your day on telephone calls may be fine if you're in sales, but not if you're in accounting.
- How's the payoff? You don't want to spend 50% of your time on activities with minimal payoff.
- What can be delegated? Remember, your role as a manager is to direct your team.

Think about whether each activity you pursued supported your goals and priorities or whether it was a time waster. Then, you can develop ways to avoid the time wasters.

Goals as Guideposts

Goals are critical to effective time management; they drive how you should be spending your time. With set goals, you know what is most important to accomplish on a daily and weekly basis. Otherwise, you may end up spending your day performing urgent tasks that do not help you achieve your top goals.

To truly plan and manage your time, you need review your long-term goals and priorities: organizational goals, departmental goals, and personal goals (for more, see the "Setting Goals" section). These goals guide your time usage in two ways:

- They allow you to identify the specific tasks that you need to pursue.
- They help you to determine which tasks you should not be pursuing. Ask yourself, *"Does this activity help me achieve any of my long-term goals?"* If the answer is no, the activity does not belong on your schedule.

Attempting too much

We all have too much to do. It is important to acknowledge that you may not be able to achieve it all, even your top priority goals. Trying to do too much has a negative impact on

"The whole point of getting things done is knowing what to leave undone."

-Ladu Stella Reardinn

all areas of your life. The following guidelines can help you avoid falling into this trap:

- Know your key responsibilities, and focus on your top priority goals and tasks.
- Ask for feedback from your boss and direct reports.
- Learn to delegate.
- Try to avoid pursuing low priority goals altogether; they have limited value and little importance.
- Resist the urge to step in and take over because others are not doing their job or not doing it to your standards.
- Don't assume everything has to get done.

Scheduling Your Time

Why do I need to schedule my time?

A schedule is a written commitment to accomplish your tasks in a specific time frame. It also gives you a chance to visualize your days. If your schedule becomes overbooked, you might want to revisit your priorities. You should keep only top priority tasks and activities on the schedule.

Why do I need to schedule my time?

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**"Yesterday is *not* ours
to recover, but tomorrow
is ours to win or lose."**
-Lyndon B. Johnson

Tools for scheduling

Scheduling tools help you easily organize your tasks and activities into a map. They allow you to see whether you can afford to handle any unplanned requests. They also provide you with a list of reasons why you are not available. Some scheduling tools are:

- "to-do" lists.
- appointment calendars.
- daily and weekly planning guides.
- daily management software and hardware (for example, computer calendars and personal assistants).
- wall calendars.

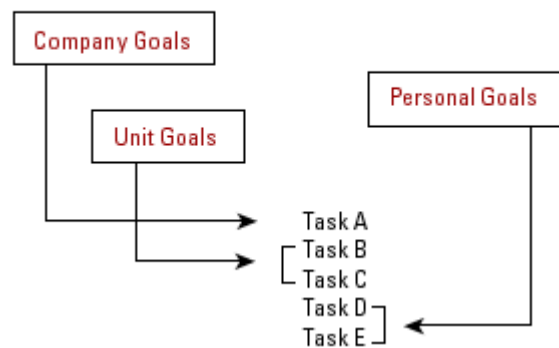
Your company may have standard scheduling tools. Take advantage of them if you can. But keep in mind that scheduling is personal; if the tools available at your firm do not fit your personal style, seek others that do.

Breaking goals into manageable tasks

The first step in managing your time is to break your goals down into manageable tasks.

Start by reviewing each of your goals individually, and list all of the key tasks required to achieve each goal. Put them in sequential order.

Goals vs. Tasks



Next, estimate how much of your time each task or activity will require. If you have completed a similar task before, you can often use that as a basis for a time estimate. If an activity is new to you, you can consult with colleagues, your manager, or others who know the process for help in estimating times. Remember to add a 10–20% cushion to your time estimates to allow for other events.

You should also establish a deadline for the completion of each task or activity. For more complex activities, set up milestones along the way to track your progress.

Once you are satisfied that your list of tasks is complete, assign priorities to each one. The priorities you assign should reflect the priority of the goal that each task supports:

- **Priority A.** Those goals and tasks having high value and primary concern.
- **Priority B.** Those goals and tasks having medium value and secondary importance.
- **Priority C.** Those goals and tasks having little value and little importance.

As you examine your tasks, you will notice that some of them need to be completed in a sequence, with each being more or less completed before the next task can begin. Other activities are not dependent on completion of any other particular tasks, or may be done at any time before or after a particular stage is reached. Make a note of these relationships and keep them in mind as you create your schedule. [See also Project Management: Core Concepts.](#)

Creating your schedule

To build your schedule, take your top priority tasks and block them into time slots over several weeks or months, using a scheduling tool that allows you to take a daily, weekly, and monthly perspective.

- Keep in mind what you have learned about the times during the day when your energy is at its peak. Important work or activities that need creativity and intelligence should be scheduled for the time when you are most alert. Routine or mundane tasks should be carried out during the periods of low energy.
- Schedule only part of your day, leaving time to deal with crises and the

- unexpected.
- Combine tasks, where possible. You might be able to open mail while you're booting up your PC.
 - Consolidate similar activities, such as returning phone calls, appointments, paperwork, and meetings, to one block of time. For example, make all your phone calls at one scheduled time during the day.
 - Identify tasks to work on when you have unexpected free time.
 - Try scheduling backward. Determine what time you have to leave that day and then work backward. Put in the most important things first.
 - As the week progresses, move uncompleted priority tasks to the days still left in the week. When your schedule changes, be sure to record what really occurred. If you begin to see a trend, rework future portions of your schedule to reflect what you have learned.

Once you have created your schedule, keep it easily accessible. A wall or desk calendar should always be in view; a computer-based calendar should always be open on your desktop. Check on your progress throughout the day to see if you are on target.

Working with "to-do" lists

A "to-do" list is one of the simplest, and most commonly used, scheduling tools. It captures all of the tasks that you need to carry out on a given day. Many people use to-do lists in combination with a weekly or monthly schedule, and many planners and computer calendars have to-do lists built in. The lists allow you to break down the tasks on your schedule as specifically as you require. For example, where your schedule might direct you to "return phone calls" at a certain time on Tuesday, your daily to-do list would likely detail each person you need to call.

An effective to-do list includes the following:

- tasks in priority order
- meetings you are scheduled to attend
- decisions you need to make
- information you are waiting for
- calls you need to make or expect to receive
- memos, letters, and e-mails you need to write
- any unfinished business.

Find a point in the day, possibly at the end of the day or first thing in the morning, to write down your to-do list. Periodically review your list as the issues of the day arise.

Here are some strategies for creating and using your list:

- Be realistic about how many things you can do. A rule of thumb is to include half the number of things you think you should be able to do.
- Include time required and completion date for each task.
- Don't worry about putting items on the list in a particular order.
- Cross off each item as you complete it.
- Save old lists in a box or drawer. You'll enjoy seeing how much you've accomplished.

If you are not a list person, experiment with different ways of recording daily activities. For example, you might use a software graphics program or Post-It notes on a big piece of paper to create a mind map of your key tasks.



Controlling Time Wasters

What is a time waster?

A time waster is anything that keeps you from doing things that have more value and importance to you. Time wasters are different for everyone. For some, a chat with a colleague might be a time waster; for others, it's a chance to manage the stress of the day.

Identify your time wasters, and then develop strategies for dealing with them. For example, instead of personally handling certain emergencies, set procedures in place for others to handle them or to prevent them in the future.

For each time waster, brainstorm strategies that match your personal style. That means, don't commit yourself to making 10-minute call backs if you enjoy making personal contact in a relaxed manner. Instead, spend your energy on organizing your thoughts before a call, so you complete all your business in one call and don't need to make additional ones.

Experiment with the strategies you develop and keep the ones that are effective. And, let your colleagues and direct reports know that you are working on managing time wasters. Enlist their support and ask for feedback. Remember, though, that only you can determine whether you are using your time wisely.

Some common time wasters include

- interruptions
- unexpected visitors
- telephone calls

- paperwork
- procrastination
- meetings
- traveltravel

How to handle interruptions

As a manager, you often are presented with interruptions that must be addressed immediately (for example, binders for your important meeting did not arrive).

You can often delegate the handling of the interruption. But in the cases where you are the only one who can address the interruption, handle it quickly, so you can return to your priority tasks. Even when handling the interruption takes half the day, focus your energy on the time in the day you have left.

Review the types of interruptions that tend to occur, and try to develop contingency plans. Then authorize others to deal with the problems if they happen again.

How to handle unexpected visitors

You do not always need to be open for visitors. In some cases, you may find it appropriate to refuse to see a visitor without an appointment.

- Determine whether your unexpected visitor has an immediate crisis or an issue that has to be dealt with quickly.
- Schedule another time to meet with the visitor, if possible. (For example, *"I think I can help you, but right now I'm in the middle of something. Can we meet after lunch about this?"*)
- Refer the unexpected visitor to another appropriate person, if possible. (For example, *"I can't pull away right now, but check with Bob and see if he can help. Let me know what the two of you work out."*)

If you must with meet someone, make a note of where you are before you break away from your work. Quickly return to that task after the interruption.

Manage your phone calls—don't let them manage you

Phone calls can be extremely distracting. You spend time not only in taking the call, but also in taking follow-up action, and then in recapturing your mental position before the interruption.

Some strategies for managing phone calls include the following:

- screening telephone calls, using either an assistant or voice mail
- referring the caller to someone else, where possible
- keeping the call brief and focused if you must take it (determine the amount of time you want to spend in advance, and do not exceed it).
- improving your phone skills to reduce the length of time you need to spend on the phone
- carving out a block of time in the day when you take phone calls and letting

- everyone know the schedule
- working in a room without a phone
- using e-mail instead of phone calls as much as possible

How to deal with paperwork

Try to handle paper only once. Respond to it, file it, pass it along, or toss it out.

- For quick responses, communicate in person, by e-mail, or on the telephone. You can also respond directly on the memo you received.
- Avoid sending back a paper with the comment "let's discuss." Instead, set up a specific time to meet.

Fight procrastination

Procrastination keeps you from completing high priority activities and jeopardizes your long-term goals as well. It can take a number of forms:

" Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work."

-Peter Drucker

- **Overplanning:** you may prolong a planning process to avoid beginning the work.
- **Perfectionism:** tasks are never fully completed and keep you from moving on to the next activity.
- **Boredom:** the tasks seem unpleasant or uninteresting, so you delay.
- **"The Deadline High":** Working against a tight deadline can be stimulating for some people. When you delay work to get this rush of adrenaline, projects may fail due to lack of time.

To fight procrastination, assess when and why you tend to put things off. Ask yourself: *"Can someone else do these things? Can I break projects into smaller units with a deadline for each unit?"*

If you're having trouble starting, set an arbitrary start and go from there. If the task is unpleasant or tedious, create some motivation for yourself: plan a reward to give yourself upon successful completion.

How to handle meetings

A few simple strategies can help you maximize the time you spend in meetings.

- Before you attend any meeting, decide whether you are the best representative. If you do decide its worth it to attend, make sure that the meeting has clear objectives and proposed outcomes.
- If you have not received an agenda for the meeting, request to see it in advance. Let others know you cannot send the best person until you know more about the purpose of the meeting.
- Arrange to attend only the part of the meeting that is relevant to you.
- If you are running the meeting, send out the agenda and points to consider before the meeting. This ensures that you maximize all the participants' time and keep the meeting on track. [See also Running a Meeting: Core Concepts.](#)

Make travel time productive

When you are planning to travel for meetings, make sure that it is truly necessary to hold the meetings face-to-face rather than via conference call. Then, make sure that you are the best person to make the trip. If not, send someone else.

When you do travel, try to make waiting and in-transit time as productive as possible.

- Organize your materials before the trip, reviewing all background information you may need on the road.
- Take a well-organized briefcase with you.
- Consider using a cell phone to keep in contact.
- Consider using a portable laptop computer to catch up on correspondence and outgoing e-mail while in transit. Bring a replacement battery and all accessories you need for communication and hookup.

You may find that if you upgrade your plane ticket, you get a more effective working environment. The extra work that you get done may be worth the extra cost.

Putting Your Schedule into Action

Implement your schedule

Once you have analyzed your time, scheduled your time, and examined time wasters, you are ready to implement your schedule. Some strategies follow:

- Review your schedule the night or afternoon before.
- Adhere as closely to your schedule as possible. Handle unexpected tasks quickly and return to your priority tasks.
- As changes to your schedule occur, modify your weekly schedule to compensate.
- Remember, new habits, like adhering to a schedule, are hard to adopt at first. The more you do it, the more automatic it becomes.

Monitor and evaluate your schedule

Check your progress against your schedule at least once a day.

- Are you completing the tasks you set for the week?
- Are you making progress on achieving your goals? If not, perhaps you are scheduling too many activities. Review the activities on your schedule, and eliminate any that do not support your top priority goals.
- Do you feel better prepared and focused?
- What was the impact of not doing some tasks?
- Are you avoiding time wasters? If not, look for other solutions by asking colleagues how they deal with this issue. Maybe your initial strategies were unrealistic but can be modified. For example, reducing e-mail responses to five minutes proves impossible, so try for 10 minutes.
- Is this a schedule you can keep up?

Ask your manager and direct reports for feedback. Use their observations and the results of your own analysis to continuously improve your scheduling efforts.

The investment you make now in monitoring and evaluating will pay off down the road. The more you can learn about what works and doesn't work for you, the more skilled you will become at creating accurate, realistic schedules—and sticking to them.

[See also Steps.](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

How can I take advantage of unexpected free time?

Unexpected free time can appear due to many factors: travel delays, cancelled meetings, appointments that begin late. This is time that is often wasted. Make a habit of having tasks available to fill these spare moments.

Suggested Tasks to Fill Free Time

5-Minute Blocks	10-Minute Blocks	30-Minute Blocks
Schedule an appointment	Make a brief phone call	Skim journals, magazines, newspapers
Write a quick note	Outline an agenda for a meeting	Plan your weekly schedule
Update your schedule	Read and respond to e-mail	Outline notes for a report
	Plan an upcoming trip	Fill out an expense report

How can delegating help me manage my time?

Delegating allows you to expand the work you can accomplish within the time that you have. Closely examine the tasks you wish to delegate and choose the right person for the job. If you do not have direct reports, perhaps you can trade the task with a colleague.

When you delegate, make sure that you explain your expectations and your level of involvement. Give the person the authority he or she needs to complete the task. [See also Delegating: Core Concepts.](#)

Does it ever make sense to delay important tasks?

It is often best not to work on jobs that require sensitivity and clarity of thought when you are upset, angry, or tired. It also may make sense to delay until you have the information or skills required to do a job properly. Delaying in these cases gives you time to find a better solution.

How do I learn to say "no"?

- First, you need to be clear about why you are saying "no." This will help you stand by your decision and avoid guilt. If the request is unreasonable, but you still

- want to say "yes," perhaps you can offer a reasonable alternative.
- Try to commit only to those tasks that support your goals. While you may be tempted to commit to a task outside of your stated goals to be a team player, you should only do so if it does not jeopardize your other work. If you do not have the time required to devote to it, you are not helping anybody by committing to it.
 - Learn to say "no" to nonpriority projects, even when they are presented by management. List the projects you are currently working on and ask the requester to decide on priorities when he or she adds new projects to your responsibilities.

Steps for Managing Your Time

1. Analyze how you currently spend your time.

- For at least one day and preferably a week, use a time log to record the things you do. Note each activity and how long it takes.
- Tally your activities into one of six categories:
 - telephone calls
 - scheduled appointments
 - drop-in/ad hoc appointments
 - meetings
 - administrative work
 - report writing and analysis
- Take each category and total the number of minutes spent on it each day. Divide the result by the total number of minutes in your day. (An 8-hour day has 480 minutes.) This tells you the percentage of time that you spend working on that activity.
- Determine whether the time you spend in each category matches your key responsibilities.
- Evaluate your time usage in terms of payoff.

2. Review your goals.

- Review your organizational, departmental, and personal goals.
- Consider the priorities that you have assigned to each goal, and ask yourself whether you are attempting too much. If the answer is yes, try adjusting your priorities.

3. Break your goals into manageable tasks.

- Review each of your goals individually, and list all of the key tasks required to achieve each goal.
- Put the tasks in sequential order.
- Estimate how much of your time each task or activity will require. Remember to add a 10–20% cushion to your time estimates to allow for the unexpected.
- Establish a deadline for the completion of each task or activity. For more complex activities, set up milestones along the way to track your progress.
- Assign priorities to each task, based on the priority of the goal that each task supports.

- Note which tasks need to be completed in a sequence, and which may be done at any time before or after a particular stage is reached.

4. Schedule your time.

Take your top priority tasks and block them into time slots over several weeks or months, using a scheduling tool that allows you to take a daily, weekly, and monthly perspective. Bear in mind the resources you have available, and allow some slack time for hold-ups, over-runs, failures in delivery, etc.

- Schedule important work or activities that need creativity and intelligence during your peak energy period.
- Schedule only part of your day, leaving time to deal with crises and the unexpected.
- Combine tasks and consolidate similar activities, where possible.
- Identify tasks to work on when you have unexpected free time.
- Use to-do lists to break daily tasks into further detail.

Keep your schedule easily accessible. Check on your progress throughout the day to see if you are on target.

5. Identify your time wasters and outline strategies to deal with them.

- Review your time log and identify the types of things that prevent you from keeping to your schedule.
- Work with one time waster at a time.
- For each time waster, brainstorm strategies that match your personal style.
- Experiment with the strategies you develop and keep the ones that are realistic.
- Make sure to add those time wasters you cannot control back into your schedule.

6. Implement your schedule.

Once you have analyzed your time and time wasters, and scheduled your time, you are ready to implement your schedule.

- Carry your to-do list with you during the day. Consult it when needed to make sure that you at least complete your top priority tasks during the course of the day.
- Review your schedule at the end of the day. Reward yourself for tasks completed on schedule and make any adjustments needed during the rest of the week.
- Handle unexpected tasks quickly and return to your priority tasks.
- As changes occur, modify your weekly schedule to compensate.
- Remember, new habits, like adhering to a schedule, are hard to adopt at first. The more you do it, the more automatic it becomes.

7. Evaluate your schedule and make adjustments.

After you have been using scheduling tools for about one month, monitor the implementation and results of your schedule. Ask yourself the following:

- Are you completing the tasks you set for the week?

- Are you making progress on achieving your goals? Do you feel better prepared and focused?
- What was the impact of not doing some tasks?
- Are you avoiding time wasters?
- Is this a schedule you can keep up?

If you have had a problem completing activities on time, ask your manager or direct reports for feedback. Incorporate their observations into your continuous improvements. Modify your schedule based on your analysis.

Tips for Scheduling Time

- Take both a long-term and a short-term perspective: schedule tasks for each day, and schedule several weeks or even months at a time.
- When your schedule changes, mark what really occurred in your day for future reference.
- Learn when your "high-energy" and "low-energy" times occur and schedule your day accordingly.
- Balance your activities—schedule time to allow yourself to unwind. Include time for physical exercise, recreation, and social activities.
- Remember Parkinson's Law: Work tends to expand to fill the time allotted.

Managing Your Time Tools

Harvard ManageMentor — MANAGING YOUR TIME TOOLS					
<i>Time Waster/Solutions Chart</i>					
Use the following chart to identify your time wasters, what you perceive as the cause, and possible solutions. After you have tried your solution, assess how well it worked.					
Time Waster	Cause	Solution	How Well Your Solution Worked		
			Not Effective	Effective	Very Effective

Harvard ManageMentor — MANAGING YOUR TIME TOOLS			
<i>To-Do List</i>			
<i>Use the following form to track your everyday tasks. Remember to cross off completed tasks as they are completed.</i>			
Date	Task	Time Required (hours)	Completion Date
12/2	Make survey telephone calls	2.5	12/5

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Harvard Manage Mentor — MANAGING YOUR TIME TOOLS		
<i>Checklist: Evaluating Your Schedule</i>		
<i>Check your progress against your schedule at least once a day.</i>		
Question	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/> Are you completing the tasks you set for the week? <i>If no, action strategies to implement:</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Are you making progress on achieving your goals? <i>If no, perhaps you are scheduling too many activities. Review the activities on your schedule and eliminate any that do not support your top priority goals. Activities to eliminate:</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you feel better prepared and focused? <i>If no, action strategies to implement:</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Was there an impact for not doing some tasks? <i>If yes, action strategies to implement next time:</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Are you avoiding time wasters? <i>If no, look for other solutions by asking colleagues how they deal with this issue. Maybe your initial strategies were unrealistic, but can be modified. Other solutions:</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Is this a schedule you can keep up? <i>If no, action strategies to implement:</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> What sources of support (including peer or supervisory support) can you enlist to help manage your schedule?		

Harvard Manage Mentor — MANAGING YOUR TIME TOOLS	
Breaking Goals Into Tasks Worksheet	
Use this worksheet to break goals down into manageable tasks and activities. Review each goal; list all the key tasks and activities required to achieve the goal. Determine the sequential order, then estimate how much of your time each task or activity will require. Reminder: Add a 10-20% cushion to allow for other events.	
Goal: _____	
Task/Activity # _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete _____
Task/Activity # _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete _____
Task/Activity # _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete _____
Task/Activity # _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete _____
Task/Activity # _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete _____
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Task/Activity # _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete _____
Task/Activity # _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete _____
Task/Activity # _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete _____

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Test Yourself

- Q** The time management process in this topic has three phases: analysis, planning and follow up, and evaluation. In the first phase, analysis, the key task is to understand how you spend your time. To what aspect of your time usage should you pay particular attention?

A In the analysis phase, you should pay particular attention to what *drives* how you spend your time.

You may discover that in some instances, you can manage the drivers with specific strategies. In other cases, the drivers are less in your control. Knowing which is which can begin to give you a sense of the patterns you need to learn to live with.

See also [Managing Your Time: Core Concepts](#), **The Purpose of Managing Your Time**.

2. Q What is a suggested strategy for dealing with factors that are beyond your control (like fluctuations in the stock market or customer calls)?

A To develop contingency plans for these factors in advance so you can be better prepared for the times when the factors you cannot control take over, this helps ensure that your critical tasks still get done.

For example, if you recognize that you may need to work late one evening per week if customer interactions exceed a certain amount of time, you'll be ready when it happens. And you'll have planned the time, which may make the extra hours less stressful.

See also [Managing Your Time: Core Concepts](#), **The Purpose of Managing Your Time, Planning**.

3. Q What's a straightforward tip for the best way to turn paperwork into a productive activity?

A Try to handle any paper document only once.

It can be overwhelming when papers pile up. Suggested actions for paperwork include:

- forward it to another colleague for follow up
- respond right away via phone, memo, e-mail
- file it
- discard it.

See also [Managing Your Time: Core Concepts](#), **Controlling Time Wasters**.

4. Q Once you have logged your activities into categories, you can begin the process of analyzing the log. To best evaluate your time usage, the text suggests that you need to match "what" with "what"?

A Match how you use your time with key responsibilities.

Comparing how you currently spend your time, according to the log, and your key responsibilities, can help you identify time wasters. And, once time wasters emerge, you can begin to develop strategies to avoid them.

Remember, the bottom line is to evaluate your time in terms of payoff—you don't want to spend 50% of your time on activities that have minimal payoff.

See also [Managing Your Time: Core Concepts](#), **Understanding How You Spend Your Time**.

5. Q Controlling time wasters is a key strategy to use to manage your time more effectively. How would you describe a "time waster"?

A A time waster is anything that keeps you from doing things that have more value and importance to you.

Remember: time wasters are different for everyone. What is a time waster for some may be time well spent for others.

See also [Managing Your Time: Core Concepts](#), **Controlling Time Wasters**.

6. Q When you are in the process of developing and trying strategies to deal with time wasters you've identified, what's recommended? Tell your colleagues and direct reports what you are trying, or experiment first and keep it to yourself?

A Let your colleagues and direct reports know that you are working on managing time wasters.

Enlist their support and ask for feedback. Eliminating time wasters can be contagious-"good contagion" is worth working on together.

See also [Managing Your Time: Core Concepts](#), **Controlling Time Wasters**.

7. Q Goals are critical to effective time management; they drive how you should be spending your time. To truly plan and manage your time, you need to keep in mind three sets of goals. Name them.

A Organizational goals, department goals, and personal goals.

To truly plan and manage your time, you need to review your long-term goals and priorities: organizational goals, departmental goals, and personal goals.

These goals guide your time usage by allowing you to identify the specific tasks that you need to pursue, and they help you determine which tasks you should not be pursuing.

See also [Managing Your Time: Core Concepts](#), **Goals as Guideposts**.

8. Q Once you have identified your goals, what is the next critical task in managing your time?

A After identifying your goals, the suggested next step is to break your goals down into manageable tasks. Start by reviewing each of your goals individually, and list all of the key tasks required to achieve each goal. Put them in sequential order.

Next, estimate how much of your time each task or activity will require. Remember to add a 10-20% cushion to your time estimates to allow for unexpected results.

See also [Managing Your Time: Core Concepts](#), **Scheduling Your Time, Breaking goals into manageable tasks.**

9. Q One of the acknowledged toughest tasks in managing time effectively is learning when and how to say "no" to non-priority tasks, especially when the request comes from your management. What's the suggested way to say "no" when your manager asks you to work on a non-priority project?

A List the projects you are currently working on and ask the requester to decide on the priority of the new project relative to your current ones.

It's possible your manager may not be aware of how the request would impact what you are doing, or he or she may decide that the request is more important and be willing to change the priority of existing projects.

By asking your manager to help determine priorities, you are keeping your own time well managed and still being a team player ready to meet urgent tasks.

See also [Managing Your Time: Core Concepts](#), **Frequently Asked Questions; How do I learn to say no?**

10. Q One tip for sticking to your schedule suggests: "Don't strive for perfection. If you achieve ---% of your target for the day, you have been successful." What is that percent?

A 90%.

If you achieve 90 percent of your target for the day, you have been successful.

See also [Managing Your Time: Tips](#), **Tips For Sticking to Your Schedule.**

Hal Lancaster. "Time Management Takes Planning in the Real World." *The Wall Street Journal*, August 19, 1997.

This article examines why traditional time management systems have failed. The author describes how many traditional systems do not take into consideration real-world obstacles. He compiles his own list of obstacles and possible solutions.

David Stauffer. "Making Sense of Your Time Bind, and Escaping It." *Harvard Management Update*, August 1997.

The author focuses on ways to manage the time bind. Using current research, he identifies specific tips for approaching time, setting goals, and scheduling time.

Books

Merrill E. Douglass and Donna N. Douglass. *Time Management for Teams*. New York, NY: AMACOM, 1992.

This book tackles time management for teams, which are the basic structural unit of more and more work places.

Jack D. Ferner. *Successful Time Management: A Self-Teaching Guide*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995.

This book provides a broad overview of the principles of time management. The author maintains that time management is a management process that involves analysis, planning, and commitment. He includes exercises and references that can be incorporated into everyday professional and personal situations to manage your time successfully.

Alex MacKenzie. *The Time Trap*. New York: AMACOM, 1997.

This book looks at how to manage time for improved productivity, stress prevention, balance between work and personal life, and progress toward goals. In Part One, the author examines the problems of managing time and learning new habits. In Part Two, he addresses the top 20 time wasters and explores solutions. Part Three profiles people successfully managing their time. Throughout each section there are exercises designed to develop an action plan.

James T. Mccay. *The Management of Time*. New York: Prentice Hall Trade, 1995.

The author explores how understanding and controlling personal energy allow you to increase your leadership skills, cope with rapid change, and increase your personal power. The author combines ideas from such diverse fields as psychology and physics to demonstrate how to create a "time investment portfolio" and work on creative problem solving.

Ann McGee-Cooper. *Time Management for Unmanageable People*. New York: Bantam, 1994.

The premise of this book is that traditional time management principles do not work for some people. Specifically, the author looks at how people who tend to be right-brained dominant can develop their own creative organizing systems. She provides concrete solutions for organizing and prioritizing schedules that can be put directly into action.

Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill. *First Things First: To Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

The authors emphasize analyzing balance to achieve more in your personal and professional life. With a series of scenarios and exercises, the book explores how to define true goals and achieve them by looking at what motivates you.

Robert A. Moskowitz (revised by Garry Mitchell). *Total Time Management*. New York: American Management Association, 1983.

Designed to be used as a self-study course, this workbook is full of checklists and exercises that cover how to analyze, plan, and schedule time.

William Oncken. *Managing Management Time: Who's Got the Monkey?* New York: Prentice Hall Trade, 1987.

This book examines the unique challenges of time management for managers. Working between upper management and direct reports, you can often spend your time satisfying diverse audiences and not on meeting substantial goals. The author describes various situations where time usage is in conflict and provides a model for dealing with it.

Jim Temme. *Productivity Power: 250 Great Ideas for Being More Productive*. Mission,

KS: SkillPath Publications, Inc., 1993.

This book provides a hands-on approach to increasing productivity. The author emphasizes developing an action plan and working on ways to deal with obstacles to achieving important goals. The book is designed to be used sequentially or as a direct reference for specific topics. Each topic has tips and worksheets to help you practice your new skills.

Stephanie Winston. *The Organized Executive: A Program for Productivity*. New York: Warner Books, 1994.

This book addresses the specifics of controlling paperwork, filing systems, computer systems, and managing a schedule to be more efficient. Each chapter considers a specific organizational issue and provides concise how-to steps to follow. The book also has checklists and worksheets to work through the strategies listed.

William N. Yeomans. *7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World*. New York: A Dutton Book, The Penguin Group, 1996.

The author lists essentials to success on the job that you can practice after reading the appropriate section and completing the exercises. For example, Chapter 5—"So Much to Do, So Little Time"—deals with identifying the tasks you need to do to achieve a goal and the corresponding brainpower associated with completing each task.



Harvard Management Update, February 1997

Fairly Timeless Insights on How to Manage Your Time

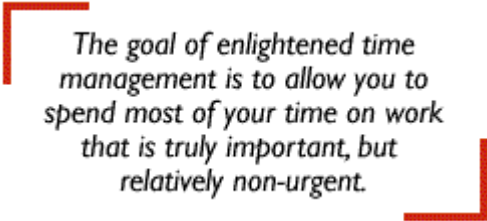
by Jim Billington

The beginning of a new year is, for obvious reasons, prime selling time for the makers of desktop calendars, personal planners, and electronic organizers. But how much of an investment do you need to make in such technology? Maybe less than you think, say the experts. The best thinking on time management suggests that while you may not want to throw out these nifty devices, they certainly shouldn't be your main concern on this front. Using your time well involves priorities more than planners, focus more than frenetic activity.

Books on how to manage your time are a hardy perennial, and the latest author to garden his way onto the bestseller list is Stephen Covey, with *First Things First*. To summarize his philosophy, which recapitulates some of the classic learning on the subject: "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." One hears echoes of what Peter Drucker wrote 30 years ago in *The Effective Executive*: "Doing the right thing is more important than doing things right."

Despite such wisdom, there's still too much literature on time management that puts the stress on how you can do more things faster—essentially how to manage a to-do list. This strain of thinking feeds sales of planners and organizers, often resulting in expensive paperweights and exhausted managers. There must be a better way—and, in fact, there is. We've surveyed the recent literature on the subject and even attended a Covey seminar, and, in the interest of saving you, well, you know what, have distilled what seem to us a few critical insights:

Begin on the balcony. When launching any important piece of work, visualize the end result. Conceive in as much detail as possible the desired outcome of your individual effort, or that of your team. If it helps, think in terms of what Ronald Heifetz, co-author of "The Work of Leadership" in the latest issue of *Harvard Business Review*, calls "getting on the balcony"—seeing the whole field of play and where your undertaking should fit in. You almost certainly want to consult others as you do such imagining, particularly the people to whom you report. If you and your boss are looking for different outcomes, no amount of efficiency on your part will make up for this confusion; indeed, you might just end up digging yourself into a hole faster.



The goal of enlightened time management is to allow you to spend most of your time on work that is truly important, but relatively non-urgent.

Mission statements have a somewhat checkered reputation these days. But they can help keep your short- and medium-term projects in line with your long-range goals. Covey recommends creating personal and professional mission statements and then checking what you do every week against them. In crafting such statements, use the familiar principle of the tombstone: Set goals that you would like to see memorialized at the end of your life, as a summary of your professional and personal existence.

If the work is not necessary to do, it's necessary to not do it. It's a chestnut, but true:

Your time is precious. Moreover, your talents are too important to waste on work that does not directly contribute to the mission of your organization or your personal life. In *7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World*, William Yeomans suggests that the most helpful way of sorting out what's necessary is to think through all your decisions and actions in terms of what effect they will have upon your customers. And take a broad view of who your customers are—not just the people you sell to, your colleagues, or your boss, but your loved ones and friends as well.

Overcome the addiction to urgency. Most people spend most of their time at work doing things that are urgent but relatively unimportant. Fighting fires, fielding calls, firing off memos, attending irrelevant meetings—all can consume a manager's day but add little lasting value. These activities have an appealing urgency but lack importance. The addiction to busyness comes in part from a lack of self-esteem, the experts say—if I'm this overscheduled, I must be important—and in part from the popular, industrial-age misconception that work must be frenetic to be effective. (Did you ever see Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*?)

An engineer will tell you that work is defined as directed force times motion. All the motion in the world will not produce work if it is not coupled with direction. So it is with our professional lives. The goal of enlightened time management is to allow you to spend most of your time on work that is truly important, but relatively non-urgent.

One of the very practical ways of focusing on key work is to appropriate some time each day in which you are off-limits to phones and other interruptions. During this time, work on your top priority task. Move into another office if necessary. But do not leave unless you are needed in a genuine emergency. Try to schedule this "appointment with yourself" at a time in the day that corresponds to your biological "prime time"—whether you're a morning person or a night owl, give yourself an hour during your peak energy period to work on your most important activity.

You will also diminish the urgency addiction by underscheduling yourself. Our authors agree that only about half of one's time ought to be scheduled. The other half ought to remain open to the needs of the day and allow for interruptions of scheduled time to attend to these needs.

Balance the different sectors of your life Time management is not about work alone. As with work, much leisure time is wasted—devoted to activities that don't help you fulfill your personal mission. For example, watching television might be an antidote to the pressures of the office, but may do little to further your goal of being a good spouse and parent. Apply the same exercises that you use to improve the way you spend time at work to your personal life as well—a weekly check on "How am I doing against my personal statement?" The Web site we recommend at the end of this article has the right idea: "If we learn to balance excellence in work with excellence in relaxation, our lives become healthier and a great deal more creative."

Lest you fear that we're veering into the philosophical ozone, we conclude with six handy, if not altogether unfamiliar, tips gleaned from our readings on how you can boost your efficiency once you have chosen the work that's important for you to do:

1. Don't interrupt your work when the mail comes.

2. If a piece of paper calls for action, act then—don't deal with the same piece of paper twice.
3. Screen your phone calls.
4. Consolidate call-backs and visitor time.
5. At the end of the week, throw out the "FYIs" you've collected.
6. Avoid meetings with more than 12 participants. Nothing will be accomplished.

And keep in mind another question to ask yourself daily: "What one thing can I do today that will make my life better tomorrow?"

If you want to learn more. . .

First Things First by Stephen R. Covey (1994, Simon and Schuster, 373 pp., \$14.00, Tel. 800-223-2348 or 212-698-7000)

The Organized Executive: A Program for Productivity by Stephanie Winston (1994, Warner Books, 383 pp., \$12.99, Tel. 212-522-7200)

"Salvaging Sales Scrap Time" by Rebecca Morgan (*American Salesman*, October 1996, National Research Bureau, Information Access Co.)

7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World by William N. Yeomans (1996, A Dutton Book, The Penguin Group, 343 pp., \$24.95, Tel. 800-526-0275 or 212-366-2000)

Time Management for Dummies by Jeffrey J. Mayer (1995, IDG Books, 273 pp., \$16.99, Tel. 800-762-2974)

"The Work of Leadership" by Ronald Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie (*Harvard Business Review*, January & February 1997, Tel. 800-988-0886 or 617-496-1449)

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Other Information Sources

High Performance Management. The Interactive Manager™ Series. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 1995.

An interactive multimedia CD-ROM designed to help all managers develop and enhance their decision-making and "people management" skills. Based on the field research of Harvard Business School Professor Linda Hill, author of the best-selling book, *Becoming a Manager*. Over the past decade, Hill has researched the experiences of managers as they master new job assignments and consulted with organizations about the selection and development of managerial talent. The program covers twenty key management topics, such as managing change, delegating, and leadership, which are linked to a database of 50 relevant *Harvard*

Business Review articles. The unique Personal Trainer creates a customized learning map to match each manager's experience and skill set. Managers can also select their preferred learning style: interactive case studies, audio commentary, and text-based questions and answers. Includes 13 interactive case studies.