

Time Management Tips

ORGANIZE Your Mind, Your Work & Your Life—or AGONIZE!

by Christine Corelli

Time management? You've got to be kidding!

The actual concept originated in the 50's. Back then, time management gurus taught people methods and techniques to maximize their personal productivity. Today, much of what they taught us is outdated. In our highly competitive and downsized business world, much more is expected of you. Whatever job position you hold, you are probably working well over 110% capacity, feeling the pressure to perform.

To survive in today's fast-paced world, you need to *accept* the fact that you have too much to do and too little. You'd probably like to take life a little easier and work at a slower pace. You'd like to have a little more time to do the things you enjoy. The reality is that right now *all* your available time is already taken up with business and personal responsibilities—customer meetings, employee issues, appointments, kids' schedules, and more. You don't seem to have a minute to spare.

How do you "steal" back a little time for yourself? You have to get *organized*. Your alternative is to *agonize* over the fact that there's never enough time in a day to do all you want to do. Highly productive and successful people are well-organized, handle details without letting anything slip through the cracks. If you want to improve your personal productivity you need to take control of three areas: your mind, your work, and your life. Below are a few simple tips that might make a difference for you.

Take Control of Your Mind

- Right now, make it a personal commitment to yourself that you will be *disciplined* to do the right things that will help improve your personal productivity. Develop good habits and rituals that will help you manage your time and reduce stress.
- Always take time for quiet contemplation, and creative thinking. It's necessary for self-renewal and it's critical to your personal and professional success.
- Write things down or enter information in your Palm Pilot or computer the moment the thought interrupts your mind, or you become aware of a "to-do." This will help you to reduce "mind traffic." All the "I gotta do this, I gotta do that, gotta call him, I gotta call her" will interrupt your thoughts and clutter your mind. This must be a *habit*.
- Master the art of staying focused. When working on projects/tasks that require concentration, block out other thoughts. Some people have this ability naturally; but some have to work at it.
- Avoid unnecessary worry and fretting over all you have to do. If you feel overwhelmed, remember that there is a "rhythm" to productivity. The way for the rhythm to begin is to roll up your sleeves, and get started.
- Develop "emotional toughness." Successful people think in black and white, and don't allow their emotions to come into play when living and working in today's tough business world.
- Make those tough decisions on your own time. Many executives say they make their best decisions when they're on the golf course. Why? Their mind is relaxed, but their subconscious mind is working on the problem. Often the best decisions are made by taking a long walk, a bike ride, anything that will help put the problem aside to let your subconscious mind work on it. When you least expect it, the solution will come to you. OR, put the problem aside and tell yourself you will make the decision on a certain day. You'll be surprised how the answer or solution will come to you. Of course there are times you must think on your feet, when you do, make the best decision, and don't look backwards.

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Take Control of Your Work

- Love what you do. If you don't have a position or a job that you love, LEARN to love it. It may not be easy, but if you can learn to love what you do, you will be more creative, more productive and make things better for everyone around you.
- Return or make urgent calls in the morning, and those that are less important in the afternoon or at the end of the day.
- Skim your E-mail in the morning and respond only to critical communication. Delete as you read it. Check it only three times a day. Resist the temptation to keep checking it every ten minutes.
- *Prioritize.* For most busy professionals, this is a no-brainer, but it's tough to do. Just ask yourself this question. "What's the most critical task or highest value activity, I need to tackle right now?" Your answer will be your guide. And, needless to say, as your day goes on, your priorities will shift, and you will have to take care of urgent customer needs, or a fire you have to put out immediately. Prioritize your daily activities by doing the most important things first, but learn to distinguish between low-payoff activities and high- payoff activities. This is especially true if you are in sales. Low pay-offs involve any time spent doing things that will not result in sales.
- If you get side tracked with interruptions from phone calls, as we all do, again, regain your focus. Develop the *habit* of asking yourself this question, "What's the most important thing I need to do and what can I accomplish in the block of time I have?" Then readjust and take control. Do strive to control interruptions as much as you can. That's what "gatekeepers," voice mail, Caller-ID and E-mail are for.
- Don't procrastinate. Big projects and large tasks can overwhelm you. Envision a project/task done before you start. Break big tasks into small tasks, and do them in increments. If you think you work best under pressure, and need to have "adrenalin rush" to motivate you, set an earlier deadline and discipline yourself to meet it. Write the deadline on your calendar so it's looking at you. Reward yourself when you complete a task that is difficult or that you don't like doing.
- Maximize your peak productivity time. Work late if that's your best time. Go to bed early and get up early to accomplish tasks more efficiently.
- Practice effective listening and communication skills. Misunderstandings can waste a lot of time. Make sure people have facts, details, and clear information. Learn to deal with difficult "people" asap. Problems that are not handled rarely go away. They fester.
- Record all activities, follow-ups, errands, or projects on a **daily** to-do list. Keep the calendar and your to-do list in the same binder—better yet a Palm Pilot or electronic organizer. Bring it with you everywhere. Review your schedule and list whenever you have the time. At the end of each day, make a new list for the next day's goals - rolling over whatever you didn't accomplish on the previous day.
- Record time-management tips in your computer in a "Productivity" document and keep it in your computer.. Also record new things as you discover they work for you. Review it Look at it often to make sure you're on track.
- Delegate effectively. Make sure the person has a clear picture of the purpose of any delegated work, when you need it, and what results you expect. Ask them if they are clear and if they'll need any help. Set a realistic deadline that's agreeable and workable for both of you. If it's a big project, check frequently on the status. Remember, if you're in a leadership position, it's up to you to sustain the motivation. Only when the person proves he/she can deliver, and deliver on time, can you relax. If you feel the job is being done poorly or incorrectly, ask how you can help and give the person a second chance. When the project has been completed, give praise and credit for a job well done.

Take Control of Your Life

- Establish priorities. What is really important to you in life? For people who want to live their lives to their fullest potential, their priorities are health, family, relationships, fun, financial stability, spirituality, continuous education, personal growth, and professional success. If you don't have all of these in balance, your life will not be in balance.
- Avoid procrastinating in your personal life. What is it that you want to do, learn, go, start, or finish that will bring you a sense of happiness and accomplishment in your personal life? Leroy Brownlow states, *"Procrastination is the art of putting off what you should get done. Today is the golden opportunity, tomorrow the silvery chance, and the next day the brazen improbability, and the day beyond that the iron impossibility. All such put-off days quickly turn into yesterdays, while immobile people stand on feet of clay that soon turn to dust."*
- Plan leisure time in advance to avoid job-burnout. Plan time to take care of your physical well-being—exercise, walk, go to the health club. Develop rituals in these areas as well. Studies have proven that people who are physically active are more productive on the job. I know an executive of a Fortune 50 company who often has people meet him at the health club in the early morning hours to discuss business issues while he's on the treadmill. In my book, "Wake Up and Smell the Competition" I write of busy business professional who takes his kids on the golf course, let's them drive the cart, and talks to them about their week. Remember, for every problem, there's a solution. Find yours.
- Weed your garden. Eliminate spending time with people who do not add real value to your life. Sometimes we spend our valuable time and energy with people whose interests have grown apart from ours. Spend time with people who give you energy, ideas and reaffirm your efforts. Eliminate relationships with negative people - they are toxic to you. Seek to develop and build relationships with positive people who reinforce you.
- Accept the things you can't change. Learn to deal with the difficult people in your personal life who drain your energy. If you can't change the person, change yourself. Learn to deal with difficult situations. If you can't change them, change your approach to them.
- "Just say no" to volunteer activities or social functions if you already have too much on your plate. Do not let others manipulate you through flattery, guilt, or obligation. Learn to say no to activities that steal your energy, but do not help your business or family life.
- Give yourself permission to be a couch potato when you need to recharge your batteries. Rent movies and "veg!" You'll be twice as productive the next day. Another way to recharge your batteries is when you have a day off, get out and go somewhere or do something you've never done before. Go hiking, visit an auction, or rollerblade!
- Empower yourself with education. Make time to read. Clip articles, and save them to read later. Use your car as a learning vehicle. Listen to educational or motivational tapes while you drive.
- Plan family time. Set up an "End Time" for social functions before you get together with friends or family. Be clear about what you need from your family. Delegate and reward good behavior from your children.
- Be organized in your personal life. Keep dry cleaning and things to be repaired in your car. Keep personal files well organized. Keep your pantry well stocked. Shop at non-peak hours. Shop doubles, if you can afford to do so, to prevent running out of important food items. Be proactive by taking good care of your car and appliances so that they don't break down - same with you! Throw or give away things you don't need. Clean out those closets and drawers too! Do one a day. You'll feel great when you do.
- Take the time to think about what's really important to you: Then, live your life to it's fullest potential. TAKE TIME TO DREAM, TO RELAX, TO LIVE ONE - DAY - AT - A - TIME. And remember, balancing business life and personal life can be a tightrope act. Don't assume that you can achieve perfect balance in everything. With a healthy attitude, you can become more well rounded and find greater fulfillment in everything you do. Make a commitment to yourself to develop good habits that will help you manage your time more effectively so you can find more balance in your life.

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Food For Thought--Who am I?

You may know me.
I'm your constant companion.
I'm your greatest helper.
I'm your heaviest burden.

I will push you onward or drag you down to failure.
I am at your command.
Half the tasks you do can be turned over to me.
I'm able to do them quickly, and
I'm able to do them the same every time.

I'm easily managed... all you have to do is to be firm, with me.
Show me exactly how you want it done-
after a few lessons, I'll do it automatically.

I am the servant of all great men and women,
And, of course, servant of all the failures as well.
I've made all the great individuals who have ever been great.
And I've made all the losers, too.
I work with all the precision of a computer
and the intelligence of a human being.
You may run me for profit, or you may run me to ruin.
It makes no difference to me.

Make me a strong part of your life.
Be easy with me and I will destroy you.
Be firm with me and I'll put the world at your feet.

Who am I? I am HABIT.

(Author unknown)

Time Management Tip: Too busy? Make it a HABIT to spend at 20 minutes each day doing the following...

- Reading
- Learning a new skill
- Read to your children, talk to your children
- Fast walk
- Work out
- Talk with your employees / associates / customers
- Pray
- Plan your day
- Take quiet time for creative thinking
- Yoga
- Work on a project
- Study your industry / product / territory

What can you add to this list that will make a difference in your life? Write it down.
Make them habits

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