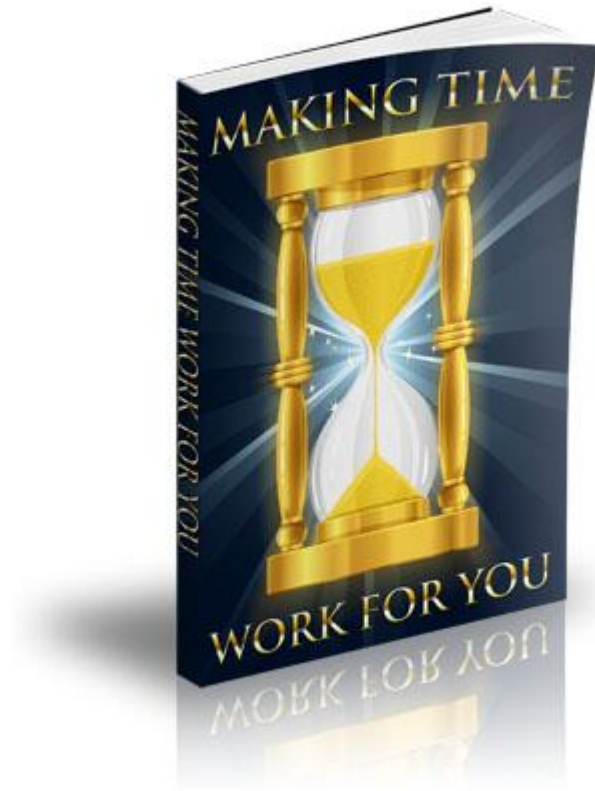


# Making Time Work With You

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## Making Time Work With You

Modern life was meant to be about time saving devices. We were meant to be surrounded with cool gadgets that did all those jobs we hate to do, and life was going to be about sitting around watching grass grow, or realizing with a cocktail by the pool.

Instead it's become more and more frenetic. With every new device created to make our lives simpler, the pace speeds up. Take away ten hours a week to hand wash all our clothes, replacing it with an hour tops to use a washing machine and dryer? We get some other work on our hands. Get a cool new gadget that let's you surf the net anywhere? Suddenly people want us to call them at all hours of the night and day, and our off time seems to disappear into a huge abyss.

Of course we all have the same amount of time in the day. But some people struggle to get even the simplest of tasks completed while others can work a weeks worth of jobs into one single day. Time can be our worst enemy or our closest friend.

If you are struggling to find the time to get everything in order, if you want to find a way to accomplish a few more dreams and release a few of those huge tasks that seem to be forever hanging over your head, then making time work for you is the key.

Time for a little honesty first. The problem with time isn't a problem with time at all. It's all about just how organized you are. The hours, days, months, years we have are the same our next door neighbours have too. It's about finding how to make time work for you.

Over the years you will have developed strategies to help you cope with time. Often we get caught in patterns of behavior that can



make things worse rather than better. Or you may have once had strategies that worked but life has changed around you and those old strategies just aren't working.

The more responsibility you have, the bigger your dreams, the more you need a handle on time. If you're unemployed, without children and don't have a lot of responsibility, then your time issues are likely to be far less than a person in a managerial role, opening their own business and running a family home as well.

To work out just where your time is going, we first need to work out just how organized you are.

## **How Organized Are You?**

Sometimes the way we see ourselves and time isn't not completely accurate. For this reason it can be a good idea to also ask people around you to help you evaluate just how much time you spend on things. Everyone has an area they don't notice (Often because it's something they secretly don't want to impact such as surfing the net, watching television or shopping).

To get the best result go through the following checklist yourself first, then ask someone you trust and respect to fill it out for you too.

Read through the following statements and circle the response that fits your answer best:

I work more than fifty hours a week  
NEVER    SOMETIMES    ALWAYS

I feel guilty when I go on holiday or take time off work  
NEVER    SOMETIMES    ALWAYS

I never have time to get everything done  
NEVER    SOMETIMES    ALWAYS  
I feel like I don't have any down time  
NEVER    SOMETIMES    ALWAYS

I don't take lunch breaks- I eat lunch at my desk  
I NEVER    SOMETIMES    ALWAYS

I complete tasks or assignments right on deadline  
NEVER    SOMETIMES    ALWAYS

I avoid difficult tasks and put them off till last  
NEVER    SOMETIMES    ALWAYS

I find it difficult to finish what I start  
NEVER    SOMETIMES    ALWAYS

I am late for appointments or meetings  
NEVER    SOMETIMES    ALWAYS

I blame other people when I don't get everything done.  
NEVER    SOMETIMES    ALWAYS

Now score your responses.

NEVER = no point, SOMETIMES = one and ALWAYS = two



The following will give you an indication of whether you do have a problem with managing time to provide you with the best results:

If your score was over 13 points: You probably feel your life is rather chaotic. You feel like if you were in a boxing ring with time and time would have got you in a headlock and was about to punch your lights out. However just remember there is time for a surprise punch before you get completely knocked out- and this report will help you get there.

If your score was between 6 and 12: Well sometimes you get it. Which is great? And then there are the times when you don't. Those times could do with a little help however and this book will help you get there. Just give us a little time to help you get there.

If your score was five or under that's great! On the whole you are managing your time pretty well. This book will be more about giving you some fine points to help you sort out one or two trouble spots. But well done so far!

Have another look at your list and circle the ones you have as ALWAYS a problem. These are the areas that need the most urgent attention. Being aware of the problem is the first step in fixing it. As the famous Chinese proverb says, "the journey of a thousand miles begins with just a single step"

## Are You Wasting Your Own Time?

One of the biggest growth areas in terms of addictions today is the addiction to social networking sites and internet communications. Some managers and business people are reposting spending more than seven hours a day JUST on social networking sites and all their related applications. That's a lot of time not being put to important tasks.

We all have something that we waste our time on. It often is an escape valve, something we use to unwind with. However we can become habitualised to it and not notice how much time it starts to eat up.

There are many important things that can waste our time too. Some people can get caught up in ensuring their house is spic and span at all times, leading them to tidy for very long periods of the day. However most time wasting comes down to some pretty central areas. Take a look at the following list and circle the ones that best apply to you:

- Chatting to people when you've got a long list of things to do
- Checking email several times an hour
- Doing something more than once as you want to perfect it
- Spend a long time coming to a decision, and um and ah over it.
- Spending more time than you need to over the jobs you enjoy doing.
- Taking phone calls, or having a conversation with someone in the middle of trying to complete a task.
- Rearranging furniture, or equipment on a regular basis (or getting stuck into extra house cleaning)

- Trying to focus on more than one task at a time, juggling several together.
- Saying yes to jobs that aren't your responsibility or part of your job because you want to retain the control of it, even though you don't need to
- Spending time fielding calls, emails and texts about things that don't really relate to your job, business or you
- Finding it difficult to say no to things
- Struggling with managing all your email
- Finding your life is just one steady stream of meetings.
- Becoming distracted when talking to someone and having to ask them to repeat what they were saying to you.

Now you've identified your problem spots, what's the solution? Each one has a different fix it point ...

## **Chatting when you've got loads to do**

Of course no one is saying you can't have friends or colleagues chatting to you. However if you're the agony aunt of the twelfth floor or you find it's impinging on work time it needs to be sorted. Often it's about them wanting to talk to you rather than the other way round. Come up with several escape clauses and use them as necessary. People can often be put out if we don't give them all the time they want, but the alternative is if we do; we are the ones who end up missing out.

## **Checking email several times an hour**

If you are a compulsive email checker it can eat up hours of your day. Have a think about why you are checking. If you are waiting for a specific email, then perhaps trying phoning the person instead for a more direct approach.



If the email checking is non specific you can try setting a timer between checks to limit your checking, or unplug the internet completely, disconnecting you from the source.

Wireless internet can be the bane of a compulsive internet checker. Also turn off automatic notifications from message board, face book, and forums. Do you REALLY need to know what Stacey said about Andrew's status update right now?

## **Doing something more than once**

Double handling anything takes up far more time. Redoing a large project, spending hours tweaking it, and reading over to check it again and again (unless it's a technical document and that's your job!) wastes time you can use for new ventures.

Trust yourself that once you've completed something and given it a read through, or check that it's fine. The best guideline is, before you rewrite it, does it already do what you need it to do? If it does then stop and move on. This also applies to small tasks like writing emails, and memos. These should be quick jobs, not ones we deliberate for hours over.

## **Spending a long time coming to a decision**

The gut instinct is nearly always the correct one. Often our umming and ahing is enough reason to say no. Learning how to make a decision can save you a lot of time, and plenty of frustration- and save other people from being frustrated too. Several rules of thumb are to say no unless you have a sudden yes about something needing a quick decision, and for other more complicated matters making a five minute pros and cons list. One technique some use is to sit quietly for one to two minutes, and consider each option carefully and then go with the one that makes you feel more at ease.

## **Spending more time doing jobs you enjoy**

It's not to take away your fun, but it is a timewaster. Human nature is drawn to the jobs we love to do. And we'll happily spend hours on them, and ignore all the others. One of the best solutions is to use the enjoyable tasks as a carrot you get at the end of a boring or unfulfilling task. The other alternative is to set yourself a time limit and enjoy it as much as possible during that time.

## **Taking phone calls, or having a conversation with someone in the middle of trying to complete a task**

While you don't need to squirrel yourself away all the time, if you are trying to get something done and it needs a concentrated effort, then don't check email and don't answer the phone. If you are in an office where you may be interrupted created a sign you can use to request you aren't disturbed.

Even in an open office there are simple tools to do this such as a red flag attached to your cubicle, or wearing large headphones (It might look weird but at least you'll be getting some peace and quiet!) If you get interrupted during a complicated task, research has shown it takes on average around fifteen minutes to go back to that same level of concentration.

If you get interrupted four times, that's an hours worth of time you've lost. Sometimes removing yourself away from the buzz, and going somewhere completely quiet can be the best idea. You'll be amazed how much you get done without distraction

## **Rearranging furniture, or equipment on a regular basis (or getting stuck into extra house cleaning)**

Got something to do and then you suddenly realise you might need to clean out the fridge or rearrange the furniture in the dining room? Just how many ways can you put the chairs around a table? If you are doing a task you are not particularly enjoying its human nature to want to find something else to do. Make those things a treat at the end of the task (though it may be a bit of a stretch to call scrubbing the back of the fridge a treat!)

## **Trying to focus on more than one task at a time, juggling several together**

Of course you can multitask, and of course some people can manage more than one thing at the same time. Good times to multitask are when you have a call that is essentially conversation or networking and you use that time to sort through something, tidy up or take a short walk (assuming it's on your cell phone!) However for the most part, trying to juggle more than one task at a time prevents you from working at top speed. It's best to do one thing at a time.

## **Saying yes to jobs that aren't your responsibility or part of your job because you want to retain the control of it, even though you don't need to**

One of the first steps is to work out exactly what your job or your responsibilities are, and what room there is to take on more. This applies whether you own your own business, work for someone else or are a stay at home parent. Often we take on other jobs

because we don't want to use the strongest two letter word known to man: NO.

If you are doing something because you know that it needs doing and no one else is doing it, put some effort first into training someone else up to do the job, and then let them at it. Keep focused on your core purpose and job.

Make a list of reasons why you can't say yes, and start it as an apology such as "I'd really like to do xxxx but unfortunately I can't because." When you get really good at it, just a "sorry I can't" will do the job.

## **Spending time fielding calls, emails and texts about things that don't really relate to your job, business or you**

If you are getting bugged to solve issues that really aren't your job, put the onus back on the person asking it. Ask them to find a solution and come back to you with it. This can even work with children! If they want it badly enough they'll find a way to solve it. If you are getting asked the same question over and over again by different people consider writing out your answers and providing people with a stock response.

## **Struggling with managing all your email**

This has to be one of the biggest issues of modern day life. We get so much email that it's easy to fall into email overload and get completely lost. Use the same idea as people use on handling paper- only handle emails once. Read through, make a note of any action points and then either move to the email to a folder, or delete. It saves you a lot of time and you only store the emails you actually need.

If you are a newsletter junkie, create a separate email account for the newsletters to go into and set aside time to take a peek at the collection anywhere from daily to weekly.

Keep only the emails you are currently working with in your inbox and file the others away where you can find them, under the appropriate group or network folder.

## **Finding your life is just one steady stream of meetings**

Set aside meeting times during your week times and keep to them. Set the length of the meeting before you go into it and always have an agenda. If you have people who go off track in your meetings, appoint someone to be a timekeeper or a get back on track person to steer the meeting back to a core discussion. If you work in an organization, and are asked to a lot of meetings, work out which ones relate to your core area and focus on those, avoiding the ones you can just read memos from. Using the excuse of work due can help with these.

Structure meetings off site by finding ones that are in the same city area- or make yourself comfortable in one café and have people come to you. You may need to drink a lot of tea and coffee, but at least you can call people, and work quietly between meetings.

## **Becoming distracted when talking to someone and having to ask them to repeat what they were saying to you**

Not listening to people, and missing instructions or not fully listening to their responses can waste time not only in the conversation, but later down the track- especially if it means you

get the wrong end of the stick and complete the wrong task or do something different to what was requested. You may think it's a good idea to talk on the phone while writing a memo, but it means both tasks aren't receiving your full focus. Teach yourself to stop, listen and note down any actions points. You may surprise yourself once you start listening!

## Make Your Body Work for You

After you've identified your problem spots and looked at some simple solutions to eliminating the problem areas, you can start to focus on new habits that help you remain time rich.

The first step is taking a good luck and your productivity cycle. We all have better times in the day or night to work. The key is capitalizing on that, working hard in these spots, and using the rest of the time as either your down time, or time for those time gobbling ventures such as playing on Face book, or sorting out your filing system.

Often we don't take our natural body clock into account when we are planning our day. However if you plan to do all your tasks that require a large amount of concentration just after lunch for example, a time of the day most people are lagging then you are not working to optimize your natural body clock.

Doing the right type of tasks for the correlating energy levels each day saves you time and helps you get over the hump of your work. Most people have a very similar pattern when looking at peak energy times. Take a look at what is provided then think about when your peak times are and note them down. If you are unsure, monitor it a little over the next day or so.

Times of high energy are generally between nine and twelve am, sometimes rising again after nine pm at night. We have medium energy levels around eight am, and between four and six pm. Our lowest energy levels are often before eight am in the morning, between 12 and two pm and between six and eight pm.

If we complete tasks best suited in each area, you'll not only save more time but feel like you are getting more done with your day.

In your high energy times, you need to focus on tasks that require the largest amount of concentration. These are the more complex parts of your work, such as analyzing, writing, and reporting.

In the low parts of your energy levels allocate this time to do more interactive tasks that will keep you relating and even more importantly awake. This is not a good time to attend lectures. Meetings or do boring repetitive tasks that are going to induce sleep.

Have a think about the tasks you have to do during the day and group them according the level of activity or input required. Make a note on which ones should be carried out during your high energy times, and the ones which are best carried out during your low spots.

If you work with others, or are part of a family, think about the tasks and activities you all do as a group and see if you can also put into place some guidelines to help you all work better with your body clocks.

A five to ten minute powernap in the afternoon can also help you regig and boost your energy. Use this time to let your mind wonder freely and relax form what ever it is that you have been working on. This is a skill you can learn over time if it doesn't come naturally. Learning some simple self hypnosis techniques here can also greatly help.

# Arranging Your Day to Day Life

For some the first thing to work out is whether you are remembering to turn up for all your meetings and appointments. This can be one of the biggest issues for people struggling to manage their time.

There are several different ways you can keep a track on where and when you should be somewhere.

## **1. Use a Weekly Planner**

A weekly plan can help you see if you have patterns or connections throughout the week you can use and make the most of. This so something you can create simply on a computer and print out, or there are good weekly planning diaries available.

At the beginning of each week place in all the meetings you already know about, and then place in your work chunks so you know these are times you are not available for other tasks. This is a good thing to take with you while you are away from your desk so you can know where and when you should be somewhere.

## **2. Use a Whiteboard**

If you find you and your family are here there and everywhere, or you work with a team of people who are often all over the place, a simple white board that can be updated every day with everyone's basic plans can work well. It's really like a timetable of your day that others can refer to.

### **3. Make your Diary available to your team.**

If you work in an office or if you work for home and have to juggle family needs as well, then create an open diary that everyone else can see. This gives you and the rest of the people involved an easy way to see if you are free when they want you to be. Don't get caught out however and forget to create breaks in your schedule.

Place time for you to focus on specific tasks as regular blocks through your week that isn't allowed to be for meetings or events. This time is just as important as meeting time, so put it in and then structure your time around it. Some people do this with gym visits and other R and R ideas as well including time with family or significant others.

There are some useful computer applications you can use to help you stay focused. Using a task program such as the one on outlook express or rememberthemilk.com help you to jot down jobs as they come up- even if the due date for the task is several months off. It just gives you a place to put all of those jobs that need doing, and helps you to structure your days, weeks and months.

The chunking system mentioned here is very important. It involves blocking out sections of your day to focus in a quiet spot on the task you need to complete. Changing your scenery can help greatly with this, including moving to a new room, another office, or even taking yourself to a quiet café to work. Whatever you find works best.

## Learning How to Prioritize

It seems like such a simple solution but you'd be surprised at how many people don't prioritize well. There are many different ways you can learn to work out the order of your tasks. The trick is to find the method that fits you and your personal style best.

The two following examples are two that work with more people. Before you choose the best option for you, consider what it is that you want to most achieve. You can't prioritize if you don't know what your big picture is! So first you need to work out where you are headed and what you are meant to be doing. Doing this helps you understand what your key focus should be, and this in itself can make working out your priority tasks a far simpler exercise.

You also need to work out a basic breakdown of how your time should be allocated. Some task can take up a lot of our time but are really not important in the larger scheme of things. Doing these tasks prevents us from using that time for tasks that fit in better with our key focus.

Once you've worked out what it is that you need to focus on you can work out how you are going to prioritize. You can either do this for everything today and now, or you can create a plan that takes you across your planning form a weekly, to a monthly or even yearly plan.

It's very simple. All you really need to do is to work out:

1. What you need to get done ASAP. These are those urgent tasks that you really can't put off. They might be in response to someone else (such as preparing for a meeting, making a call or replying to an email) or they may be tasks you are

initiating yourself (Such as training a new staff member or meeting a client.)

2. Important tasks that need to be scheduled in and have to be done. These may not be quick jobs but are important and have a deadline attached to them or directly relate to your larger goal. It might include writing a book or report, creating a training programme or developing a system to sort your papers or some related idea. These tasks take longer than the others so will need chunks of time allocated to them rather than trying to work on them when you have time.
3. Later tasks. This list is for all the other things you need to do that are not so urgent. For example you might want to design a logo or spend time brainstorming. This might be the time you want to put aside for learning new skills.

Once you've made your lists, take a look at them again. Place a tick next to the jobs you enjoy and like doing, and a x next to the ones you try to avoid, and don't enjoy. There is always going to be tasks you don't want to do floating around. The best way to deal with them is to first admit that you don't want to do them!

The trick is then to do the urgent jobs that you don't like doing first. You can reward yourself once you have completed them with a small break for a walk or a coffee. Alternatively set yourself a timer and race yourself to see if you can get those tasks accomplished within the time frame you allocated.

Be careful that you haven't slipped a non urgent task into your urgent pile simply because it's a personal favorite. This is easier said than done as we all want to spend the day on tasks we enjoy- even if these tasks may not be the most urgent. These tasks actually work best as rewards for all the other tasks you have to do, so use them to your best advantage.

To make it easy to read and sort through you can place the lists in a table format to make it easier to follow.

	URGENT	IMPORTANT	LATER
Enjoyable Task			
Non Enjoyable Task			

You need to get the urgent tasks that you don't enjoy done first otherwise they are never going to get done.

## **Another method**

If that method doesn't sit right with you, you could try a simpler one that works well for working out your day to day plan. Often we have a lot of thoughts and ideas running around in our heads that prevent us from doing any focused work. Part of the benefit of these techniques is by writing down what we need to do we get those thoughts out of our head and somewhere we can actually do something about them.

This time sit and make a list of all the things you need to do. Then work through the list and mark all the ones that you must do today with a big T.

Once you've done that, work out with ones need to be done within the next few days (L for later) and which ones are no urgent and can be done within the week (W). You may also find you've listed some tasks that are long term things, and they can just be asterisked and put to one side.

The key is not to put off all the things you really don't like until later on in the week. Try to move all the things you least enjoy up to the top of the list to get them done and over with.

Some people find the best method is to create this list every night ready for the next morning. This gives your mind time to plan and prepare for a fresh work day. However you can also start the day with creating a list- you just need to find the best method for you.

## Making it all Work Together

Once you've read all over this, it can feel like there is a lot of time and effort required into using less time! However it's all pretty simple, and once the new routines are set into place, harmless as well.

To recap, the first step is to spend time looking at how organized you are already. Identifying problem spots helps you to work out where to improve

Once you work out where you waste time, you can find ways to counteract them. This might include being a bit tougher on the amount of time you spend online, or learning to say no a bit more often.

Recognizing your body clock affects your productivity is an important part of effective time management. Make your natural body clock work for you, ensuring your high energy times are allocated for those more complex tasks.

The key to managing time best is to find a solution that fits your personality and current situation best. You can use priority lists, today lists and creating time chunks to focus on particular tasks to get them completed.

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Will Edwards is the founder of [White Dove Books](#) - the internet's leading website for Self Improvement and Personal Development. A graduate of the University of Birmingham, he develops and teaches Personal Development workshops and is a published author.

Within its first three years, White Dove Books was recognised as one of the internet's leading sites for self help and personal development; breaking into the top 100,000 sites on the internet at the end of 2005.

The INSPIRATION newsletter was started in 2005 as a way of providing helpful information including tips, articles and free inspirational eBooks to our visitors.

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