



20 Ways to Save Time

Time seems to be in such short supply, that many people don't even have time to attend a seminar or read a book on time management. For those time-crunched people who are looking for some quick suggestions for making the most of their time, here are 20 keys to effective time management:

1. Don't rush - People who don't have the time to do something right always seem to have the time to do it over again. Mistakes occur more frequently when a job is done in a hurry. Take the time to do it right in the first place. If you can't get everything done, at least get the most important things done right.

2. If in doubt, ask - Inadequate communications is a sinkhole for time. Don't bluff, ask. Get your pride from a job well done, not from being able to guess what's required. Asking is faster than trying to piece together fractured communications. You are respected for your accomplishments, not your silence.

3. Write it down - Writing things down does not mean you are circumventing your memory -- you are simply helping it to do its job. We all need reminders to prevent a myriad of essential tasks from dying of neglect. The pen is mightier than the sword - and it writes better.

4. Organize your work area - An organized desk is not the sign of a sick mind; it is the sign of an organized mind. People do better on exams when neatly dressed, excel in sales when well-prepared, and are more productive at work when their materials are arranged in an orderly way. Keep your in-basket off your desk to minimize interruptions and distractions. If possible, have your desk face the wall.

5. Plan your day - If you have no objectives for the day you will likely have a matching set of results. Plans are the handrails that guide you through the day's distractions and keep you on course. Plan what you will do at the start, evaluate progress during the day, and measure results at the finish.

6. Schedule your tasks - Listing jobs on a "to do" list shows your intention to work on them; but scheduling important tasks in your planner reveals a commitment to get them done. Make appointments with yourself at specific times to work on your priority tasks. And try to keep those appointments.

7. Keep files organized and clean - The more you have, the harder it is to find anything. Don't keep documents that are available somewhere else. File temporarily, not permanently, by marking a "throw out" date on paper you think you may need in the future. When in doubt, throw it out. Purge all files on a regular basis.

8. Give deadlines with assignments - Never assign anything to others without indicating when it is to be completed. Note that date in the follow up section of your planner. Never use "ASAP" or "rush"; be specific. If it's a long term assignment, follow up at predetermined intervals.

9. Don't be a perfectionist - If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well. But "well" does not mean perfectly; it means it is sufficient to fulfill the purpose intended. Don't spend inappropriate amounts of time on tasks that don't require that degree of accuracy or completeness.

10. Have a daily "quiet hour" - It doesn't have to be perfectly quiet, nor does it have to be an hour. But everyone needs time for themselves to think through a pressing problem, complete a difficult task, or allow their creativity to blossom. If the environment doesn't allow it, change the environment for an hour or so. It could be more aptly called a "focus hour".

11. Respect the time of others - If everyone treated others as they themselves would like to be treated, there wouldn't be the unnecessary personal interruptions, telephone calls, electronic messages and correspondence that most people are experiencing. Accumulate your questions, concerns and assignments and interrupt others less frequently.

12. Handle paper only once - When possible, that is. Don't even look at your mail until you have 30 to 60 minutes available to review it. As you pick up each piece of paper, scrap it, delegate it, do it, file it, or schedule a time to do it later. The same thing applies to e-mail.

13. Use a follow up file - When reviewing your mail, don't throw things back into the in basket. Instead, mark the date you intend to work on it in your planner and place the paperwork in that corresponding date in your follow up file. If it is a priority, and will take a half-hour or more to complete, actually block off the time in your planner.

14. Don't procrastinate - Procrastination is putting off until later what is best done now. If it's too large a task to complete at one sitting, break it into chunks and do a little at a time. If it's distasteful, do it now and get it over with. Putting things off wastes time, causes stress and helps make life unpleasant for yourself and others.

15. Say "No" more often - Some people say "Yes" to others simply because they're available or don't want to offend. Make sure the request is compatible with your goals before you agree. Have as much respect for your time as you have for other peoples' time. Remember, every time you say "yes" to something, you are saying "no" to something else that could be done instead.

16. Record your telephone calls - Don't rely on your memory. Make notes in a telephone log booklet or steno pad while you are on the line. Indicate any action required on your part by jotting a note on the right hand side of the page. Cross it off when it's completed. You are less likely to be interrupted if you're writing, concentration will improve, and you won't forget to follow up. You will also have an accurate record of what was discussed.

17. Have only one planner or calendar - Use the same planner for scheduling both work and family activities. You only have one life to share, so keep only one planner or you will soon have conflicting priorities. Avoid the necessity of "double entry bookkeeping." Take the planner with you when you go to meetings, seminars, on trips, or home.

18. Avoid stress - Recognize you can't do everything or be all things to all people. Be organized, effective and efficient; but don't go on a guilt trip just because you can't do the impossible. It's not the stressful environment, but your reaction to it, that does the damage. Your health should be your number one priority. Without it you're of little use to anyone.

19. Practice Pareto's Principle - This 80-20 rule suggests that 80% of your results are achieved by 20% of the things you do. Focus on the priorities, and if everything doesn't get done, let it be the less important tasks.

20. Use the technology available to you - For example, use GroupWise for your calendar and e-mail, and Oregon ACCESS to integrate your cases (this way you are not doubling your work).