



Making the Most of Your Time

by Kristi Royse

If you are like most people, you struggle to find enough time to complete everything on your daily or weekly to-do list. In recent years, the entire working environment seems to have sped up. But someone forgot to add more hours to the day as they added all of the additional responsibilities you have taken on. In today's streamlined, fast-moving workplace, it's more important than ever to make the most of every day. And getting control of your time *is* possible.

Time management is difficult, and it's a flawed concept: you can't really manage time. It is finite. What we all know and talk about is, in fact, how we can manage *ourselves* better. So, if you want to manage your time better, you have no choice but to learn to manage yourself better.

This article contains a sampling of the many techniques I have learned, from my own experience in guiding organizations, which can help 1) break through the over-commitment and chaos, and 2) gain the benefit of doing the work rather than dealing with obstacles to getting work done. You may even end up with "free time" to enjoy some fun!

Give Reality a Hug

Most people think they know more about how they spend their time than they actually do. We really believe our memories are good enough for an accurate account of the hours and minutes we spend on a given task. Here's the truth: no one can really master their time until they know how they spend their time now.

If time seems to always be getting away from you, the Time Mastery Profile from Inscape Publishing can help you understand how you manage your time; these insights can help you see where your time goes and then adjust your time management skills to give you more of what you want and need. This tool does more than just tell you how you manage your time, it helps you develop a plan that you can implement to control the time around you.

If you are interested in this online profile, contact me at Kristi@klrconsulting.com for help getting started on improving your productivity and efficiency.

How to Organize Your Day and Week More Effectively

One of the worst parts about being too busy is the feeling of being overwhelmed. Feeling overwhelmed happens to me most frequently when I do not have a clear written list of the work that needs to get done. This results in "thought attacks," where task after task comes into my mind and builds up a mountain of responsibility that seems impossible to manage.

I have found that simply writing down everything that needs to get done makes the overwhelmed feeling go away--even though the work doesn't. A "master list" will get everything out of your head, whereas a "to-do list" only includes tasks you need to complete.

A master list is updated at the end of each day. Fifteen minutes before you leave work, stop responding to emails, phone calls, and other requests. This is *your* time. With your calendar open and your master list in front of you, let your mind wander. Brainstorm and document whatever pops into your head.

I am sure you are thinking, "Yeah right, and how am I going to find an extra fifteen minutes in my day, let alone private time?" As you improve your efficiency and become more organized it will become easy. You could begin by closing your door or placing a "gone fishing!" sign outside your cubical. Maybe by the end of the month, your example will have everyone on your team using this valuable planning time.



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Set aside time each Friday afternoon to use your master list to plan your schedule for the following week. You can review the current week while your activities are all still fresh in your mind. Assess what you accomplished and what remains to be moved to next week and on what day. This will allow you to enjoy your weekend more and leave work at work! When you plan for the next week—particularly Monday—you don't have to spend the weekend worrying about work.

"Let our advance worrying become advance thinking and planning."

- Winston Churchill

Managing Email

Managing email is one of the most commonly cited frustrations when the discussion turns to how we stay sane in the workplace. Email is the most abused form of communication in the workplace today—and may be the biggest factor in the sorry state of communication in corporate America. It is the reason that a number of companies are experimenting with banning email usage once a week.

Email is one of the biggest interruptions in today's workplace. If your computer automatically notifies you when you receive email, turn that function off—especially during your "veggie" time. Instead, set up times to check email three times a day, or once per hour. This method is one of the fastest ways to improve productivity.

A client of mine was in the habit of checking his email throughout the day--each time he heard a ping. Then he created a new system of checking it three times a day, at 10:15, 2:30 and 5:30. Whereas he previously could not keep up with his messages, with his new approach he discovered he could clear his In Box each time he opened it--the reward for fully focusing his attention on email for 45 minutes at a time. He also reset the expectations of all the people he regularly communicates with by email, advising them that he could be reached for an immediate response to urgent matters by phone.

Kristi's top tips for improved email management:

- Do it now and/or delete it now. Act on and respond to your messages the first time that you read them.
- Don't use your In Box as a "to-do list"; it's the electronic equivalent of having piles on your desk. The average person wastes 30 minutes each day looking for old email messages.
- Use folders & subfolders. The rule is never to have more than one screen of email messages in your In Box.
- Spam can come in different forms. Don't open suspected spam email and delete it immediately. If you open spam email, it will tell the sender they've reached a "live" email address.
- Create rules to automatically move your incoming messages into the correct file. This will save time when sorting your messages. Rules can also block unwanted messages.



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Not Delegating Is Not a Choice

One of the most common complaints I hear from managers is, "I try to delegate but when the assignment comes back, it's wrong or it's not good enough. So I end up having to do it myself." When delegated tasks turn out wrong, you must resist the temptation to do it yourself. Doing the work yourself is not good for you or the organization.

Steps for effective delegation:

- Think and plan first
- Clarify the responsibility and results intended
- Select the right person
- Decide on the authority level
- Decide on controls and checkpoints
- Create a motivating environment
- Hold them accountable

With effective delegation, you not only save yourself time, you expand the capability of your team and organization.

Taking the First Step

These are a few of the many ways you can more effectively manage your time. Now you need to do something with this knowledge and take the first step.

Identify the habit you want to change. The more you know about what, when and why you do something, the easier it is to identify habits that are detrimental. When you analyze unwanted behaviors and the situations where they occur, you can pinpoint the precise behaviors you wish to change. You should also examine your assumptions to see if any of them are holding you back from achieving the change you desire.

Begin the new behavior as purposefully as possible. Once you've identified the new habit you want to develop, tell people about it so you're not tempted to fall back into old behaviors. Establish new routines associated with the habit, put up signs to remind you of the new desired behaviors, and do what you can to change your environment so the new habit has a chance to take root and grow.

Try not to deviate from the behavior until the new habit is firmly established. Although you'll often be tempted to do things the old way, resist these temptations. It's tempting to think, "Just this once won't matter"; but the truth is that every deviation matters a great deal. Every time we deviate, we must start over again. Just think of the number of times people try to lose weight or quit smoking.

Ask other people to help you change. Few of us make significant changes without the support of others. Think carefully about who might be able to help you. How could they best help you? What will you ask them to do? If you build a strong support team around you, new habits are much easier to master.

Time management can help you increase your productivity on the job and at home, help you enhance the quality of your work with less stress, and give you a sense of personal satisfaction and accomplishment. You never know, you might just find the time to reward yourself and do something you have never had the time for!