

# Have you got a minute?

## Managing time to really make a difference

**What could you be, do and have if you had the time? Research shows that most people believe they would be able to fulfil their potential, live happier lives and be much more productive – if only they had the time.**

How we use our time is one of life's great differentiators. After all, we all have the same amount of it, but the gulf between those who actively manage their time to achieve their goals and those who use it as an excuse for why they're never able to, is huge.

### Establishing where the problem lies

If you feel that lack of time prevents you from achieving maximum performance, you might like to take a few minutes to consider where the problem lies. Perhaps you share some of these extremely common attitudes?

- We believe that time controls us, when ultimately it is always under our control
- We act as if we haven't any choices in the way we use our time
- We use 'lack of time' as a *reason* when really it is an excuse
- We use 'too busy' as a comfort blanket to avoid tackling change
- We treat everything that comes our way as something which *must be done* without prioritising where it stands in terms of *urgency* and *importance*. Many things are neither, and if left long enough, won't need doing at all! On the other hand, things which are urgent, important, or both – for example your bookkeeping and tax return, can create a whole lot more work and trouble if left untended.

In addition, a number of other factors are strongly influential, for example:

- Personality – whether from nature or nurture, everyone has different behavioural

approaches towards time; for example, we all know people who are slowed down by an obsession with detail, or who are overly-controlling and unable to delegate.

- Habit – most of us, out of familiarity and a sense of routine, 'always do what we've always done' in the way we've always done it, unless there is a powerful reason to change.
- Image - especially in working life, it's easy to use 'being busy' as a way of underlining our importance, regardless of the quality or validity of the contribution we make.
- Security – some of us secretly suspect that if we stopped 'being busy' we may have to tackle some uncomfortable issues and make decisions that we would rather defer.

### Look for – and deal with – the cause

In the workplace, people generally pay lip service to 'time management'. If we, or others, feel we're not managing our time as effectively and efficiently as we might, then the usual response is to seek some training. Unfortunately this means we often end up treating the symptoms rather than the cause.

If you have retired or taken redundancy, time management issues can still be a huge issue – you may find that where once you managed to fit a full time job into your day, you now have difficulty getting on top of even the most basic tasks. Okay if there's nothing much else you want to do, but if your plan is to launch a business or develop new interests, then poor control of time could seriously sabotage your plans.

Time management training is great for giving you the theory and practice of 'how' to change your use of time, but often ignores the fundamental issues. In order to apply time management principles effectively you first have to:

- Accept that time management is your personal responsibility – no one else can do it for you.

- Have a strong and motivating vision of what your ideal life would be like if you were in better control of your time.
- Have clear and specific goals relating to what you want to achieve.
- Devise a strategy and tactics in order to make this happen – and stick to your plan.
- Realise that you (and probably other people) will have to *change the way you do things*, often dramatically.

If these issues are not dealt with, then very quickly the good time management practices received through training will fade away and you will revert to your original bad habits. The reason is simple – you can have all the training in the world, but none of it is effective unless you have taken on board the number one rule of time management – *you passionately have to want to change*.

### Start to change your habits

Once you've decided that you do want to commit to doing things differently, that's the time for time management training. If you'd like to start right now, you can use these tips as a framework:

1. Use the Pareto Principle (the 80/20 rule) to analyse your activities. What exactly is the 20% of what you do that generates 80% of your results?
2. Take a long hard look at your working life and personal life. Where exactly can you start to make changes to move towards your vision? Remember, these needn't necessarily be huge changes, even the smallest changes can free up significant amounts of time.
3. Make time to create time – consciously stop for as often and as long as you need to analyse what you are doing and why, rather than mindlessly slogging on.
4. Constantly prioritise everything you have to do in terms of its *Urgency* and *Importance*. If it's neither urgent nor important, why are you doing it?
5. Plan your use of time and don't get derailed unless it's absolutely necessary. For example, if you are working from home, other people may treat you as if you are always available for a coffee or a chat. Without being impolite, you need to dissuade them of this idea and keep business hours.
6. Curtail your knee-jerk reactions to what others do and want. Try as much as possible to stick to your own agenda -

concentrate on your own productivity and what's best for you.

7. Delegate or share what needs doing – just because you *could* do it all, doesn't mean you have to. Now's the time of life where you may want to look at reassessing who does what at home – what may have worked for your domestic set-up twenty years ago, may now have changed. It may be worth - with your spouse, partner or children – having a considered investigation into who does – and who could do what - in the life you share *now*.
8. Realise that good enough can be good enough – things don't always have to be perfect. One of the dangers of having more time if you are working fewer hours, or working from home, is that what you once previously would have ignored, now becomes important. But no, you don't have to attend to trivial domestic details, visit the supermarket every day, or rearrange the furniture endlessly – *there are more important things to do!*
9. Enlist the help and support of others as you make changes – friends, colleagues and even a coach or mentor can help support you in your new habits. If necessary ask your partner, spouse, friends, or neighbours to point out to you when you're wasting time. Even if you don't agree with them, at least it will draw your attention to the fact that other people think you could do things differently.
10. Don't try and change everything all at once – take one step at a time and reward yourself for every small success. Keep a diary or log of what you do every day with the time you've saved. And make a deliberate effort to do something for you with that time – even if it's only consciously relaxing and reading the newspaper – don't just fritter it away.

Finally, remember Mr Micawber's principle when it comes to managing your time. If you commit to tasks or commitments that take more time than you've actually got then you're going to end up stressed, miserable, and on a slippery downward slope.

On the other hand, if you manage your time wisely to achieve those things which are most valuable to other people and most enjoyable for you, you will feel fulfilled, productive and in control. You will be happier, calmer and more effective. When you achieve this state you truly will be managing your time to make a difference. Congratulations!