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Blue Papers



Managing Time

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In ancient Greek mythology there is a story about a king tortured by a never-ending task. As punishment for his earthly crimes, King Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to roll a huge boulder up a steep hill. But before he could ever reach the top of the hill, the boulder would always roll back down forcing him to start again.

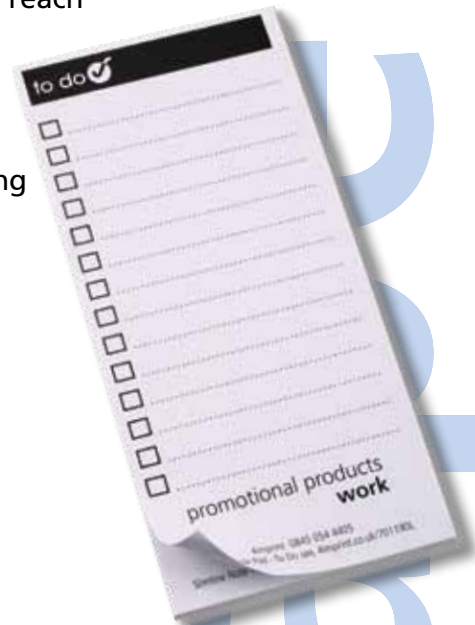
Today, the term 'Sisyphean' is sometimes used to describe endless, unavailing work or to-do lists that go on for miles with items that rarely get crossed off. We've all fallen victim to the Sisyphean task list at one point or another: The day begins with energy and focus and maybe a sticky note that outlines priorities for the day. It doesn't take long, however, for urgent requests from colleagues, supervisors and clients by phone, e-mail or text message to hijack these lists and our time.

There's no denying the irony of the fact that the very technologies created to make life and business easier have actually made it much more difficult for many of us to manage our time and focus on accomplishing work. Instead of helping us work, these technologies distract us from it.

According to a recent study, 60% of employees said technology increases productivity yet 35% said it also increases distractions throughout the working day. And those distractions are estimated to cost \$650 billion per year in the U.S. alone.¹

Time is a finite resource. There is a limited amount of "workable" hours in each day and time cannot be made up. To add another obstacle to the equation of time, we are forced to balance these workable hours with "livable" hours—hours spent with friends, family or alone, hours that ultimately make work worth the effort and the time. In order to protect this time, businesses and professionals need to actively guard against the Sisyphean trap. In other words, we must practice effective time management.

In this Blue Paper, learn how effective time management reduces stress and frustration and increases productivity and confidence. We'll explore how to get back on the track by managing priorities through goal setting, prioritising and rethinking to-do lists.



¹ "The Cash Drain That's Costing Firms' \$650 Billion per Year | CFODailyNews.com | No-nonsense Finance News and Insights to Grow Your Bottom Line." *Business and Small Business Finance and Accounting*. 12 Oct. 2010. Web. 20 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.cfodailynews.com/the-cash-drain-thats-costing-firms-650-billion-per-year/>>.

Conduct a situation analysis

Like many bad habits in life, the first step to better management of time is admitting that there is an issue to begin with. The symptoms of poor time management aren't always as obvious as a never-ending "To-Do" list. Procrastination, lack of work-life balance, missed deadlines, the inability to multitask—these are just some of the other warning signs that perhaps there's a better way to approach your day.

Some time management experts, like career coach Lyndsay Swinton, suggest starting with a simple exercise. Grab a pen and a piece of paper and write down how you would spend your ideal day and break it down into percentages. Time spent sleeping, eating, exercising, working, yes. But also things like reading, hobbies, family time, relaxing ... things you really want to do with your time each day.²

Then, spend a few moments breaking down an actual day. The purpose here is to separate perception from reality and to inspire a new approach by highlighting areas that take up too much time in comparison to other areas that you'd like to spend more time on, but currently aren't.

Next up, break your working day down the same way—in an ideal day, how would your time be divided? E-mails, meetings, commuting, creating, selling? Then, break down your actual work day to identify areas that you can cut back on or shift in order to make room for the other activities in your ideal day.

This discovery and bigger picture dreaming will be your starting point for better time management.

Set goals and approach every task with a plan

Time management goals should be established on two levels: Broad and specific. The broad goals should address not only how your day is ideally scheduled, but also where you're looking to go as a professional. These kinds of goals can help you connect the dots between the daily tasks and the bigger picture. The specific goals, on the other hand, should outline what you hope to accomplish from each task and during the course of a day.

Goals are as important to effective time management as in other areas of business. When goals and objectives are established the task is better achieved and success more easily identified and measured. Additionally, goals will help to



² Swinton, Lyndsay. "Personal Time Management Chart and Exercise: 4 Steps to Better Work-life Balance." *Business Management Skills, Tips, Training & Games*. Web. 21 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.mftrou.com/time-management-chart.html>>.

keep the things most important to us, both professionally and personally, at the forefront of our mind.

With your goals established, address each new project or task with these questions before prioritising within your larger to-do list:

- What do you have to do? How many steps are involved?
- Is there a deadline? Are there other deadlines involved that include other people whose schedules need to be taken into consideration as well?
- Is it possible to delegate this task, either fully or in part?
- How much time will it take to complete all your tasks?

Now, on to everyone's (least) favourite part ...

Start prioritising

Perhaps the most important aspect of successful time management, the efficient prioritisation of tasks, allows professionals to plow through work, sidestepping distraction and meeting deadlines by beginning with the most urgent or important tasks first. Many people struggle with prioritisation because of conflicting internal and external needs. A consultant, for example, may have multiple clients with similar deadlines all needing to be treated as the most important thing in the world. The secret of time management isn't in being everything to everyone all the time. Instead, it's about taking the time to plan ahead and prioritise over a period of time to meet all your deadlines without stressing yourself out or sacrificing the quality of the finished project.

When it comes to time management, there are three very popular methods of prioritising:

1. Separating the urgent from the important
2. Examining the "Six Ds"
3. Following the Pareto Principle



1. Urgent vs. Important

In the managerial classic, "The Seven Habits of the Highly Effective People," Franklin Covey proposes an efficient approach to deciding where to begin your work.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crises• Pressing problems• Deadline-driven projects, meetings, reports <p>I</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparation• Prevention• Planning• Relationship building• Re-creation• Values clarification <p>II</p>
Not Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Needless interruptions• Unnecessary reports• Unimportant meetings, phone calls, mail, e-mail• Other people's minor issues <p>III</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trivia, busywork• Irrelevant phone calls, mail, e-mail• Time wasters• Excessive TV, Internet, relaxation <p>IV</p>

Figure 1³

Covey points out that many of us spend too much time on tasks that are urgent and important (quadrant I) – in other words, keeping emergencies at bay by frantically working to solve problems or responding to the demands of others at short notice.⁴

Sometimes this is unavoidable so Covey proposes that you focus on the prioritisation of tasks that fall into quadrant II—important, but not urgent. Though challenging, Covey maintains that it is the only way to ensure you are making progress towards your own goals and dreams, instead of simply reacting to the requests of others all day long. In theory, and over time, the more you are dealing with important things before they become urgent, the fewer quadrant I tasks you will encounter.⁵

³ Ulacia, Dave. "Are You Working on the Wrong Things?" Franklin Covey. 28 Apr. 2009. Web. 28 Oct. 2010. <<http://getorganized.franklinplanner.com/content/are-you-working-wrong-things>>.

⁴ Covey, Stephen R. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic*. New York: Fireside Book, 1990. Print.

⁵ Covey, Stephen R. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic*. New York: Fireside Book, 1990. Print.

2. The Six Ds⁶

“When was the last time you didn’t have a high-priority phone call, an urgent email or a stressed-out colleague begging for attention?” asks Tom Gegax, author of “By the Seat of Your Pants: The No-Nonsense Business Management Guide” in a recent interview with Monster.com. “Getting pulled off-course is in every leader’s job description. That’s why enlightened managers must have a strategy for dealing with daily interruptions.”⁷

Gegax bases his time management principles on the “Six D’s”:

1. Don’t do it
2. Delay it
3. Deflect it
4. Delegate it
5. Do it imperfectly
6. Do it

“When something pops up, rather than robotically just doing it, I think about my possible actions,” Gegax says. “If the first option won’t work, I move on to the second. I keep cruising down the list until I reach the appropriate action.”

As an example, some seemingly urgent tasks disappear if you don’t do them immediately or delay them, he says, leaving you more time and energy to focus on the tasks that matter.

And while some flare-ups need immediate attention, your involvement isn’t always required. Carefully consider whether to deflect the situation to another department or delegate it to a subordinate, Gegax advises.

If you do opt to tackle the problem yourself, Gegax cautions against automatically shifting into “perfectionist mode.”

“A large number of my projects could hardly be described as perfect, yet were successful nevertheless,” he says.

Finally, reserve the “Do it” for tasks that correlate directly with your goals and that will keep you on the path to meeting them.

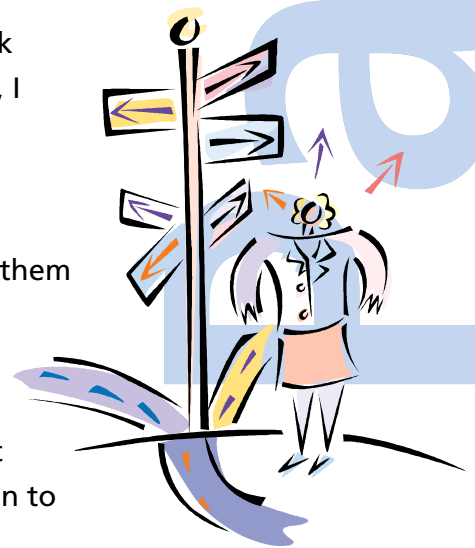
3. The Pareto Principle or 80/20 Rule

⁶ Krumwie, Matt. “Time Management for Managers.” *Career Advice, Interview Questions, Salary Comparisons, and Resume Tips from Monster*. Web. 28 Oct. 2010.

<http://career-advice.monster.com/in-the-office/workplace-issues/time-management-for-managers/article.aspx>.

⁷ Krumwie, Matt. “Time Management for Managers.” *Career Advice, Interview Questions, Salary Comparisons, and Resume Tips from Monster*. Web. 28 Oct. 2010.

<http://career-advice.monster.com/in-the-office/workplace-issues/time-management-for-managers/article.aspx>.



Another method of prioritisation follows the Pareto Principle. Established by economist Vilfredo Pareto, his well-known, and sometimes disputed principle, demonstrates that 80 percent of the income in society is produced and owned by 20 percent of the population.

Timothy Ferriss, author of “The 4-Hour Work Week” was one of the first to apply Pareto’s principle to time management. Using his own business as the subject to test this theory, Ferris shifted his focus from his entire client base to the top 20% sources of revenue and prioritised them above others.⁸

The 80/20 Rule means that in anything a few (20 percent) are vital and many (80 percent) are trivial. Project Managers know that 20 percent of the work (the first 10 percent and the last 10 percent) consume 80 percent of your time and resources.

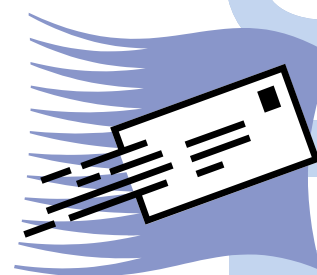
The value of the Pareto Principle for an efficient time manager is that it reminds us to focus on the 20 percent that matters. Those 20 percent produce 80 percent of your results. Identify and focus on those things. When your task list gets high-jacked, remind yourself of the 20 percent you need to focus on. If something in the schedule has to slip, if something isn’t going to get done, make sure it’s not part of that 20 percent.⁹

Minimise distractions

“There are two main types of distractions you face at work –those distractions driven by you and those driven by your workplace,” says Carrie Greene, organising expert and writer for U.S. based website OnlineOrganizing.com.¹⁰

Self-driven distractions:

- Something you see going on outside your work area or window
- Something you hear or don’t hear
- Distracting discomfort due to poor working conditions, an uncomfortable workspace, temperature change and other factors
- Getting sidetracked when you go online
- Getting lost in your e-mail each time a notifier pops up to let you know something just landed in your inbox
- Small talk and water cooler gossip with co-workers



⁸ Ferriss, By Timothy. “Time Management Techniques for a 4-hour Work Week - May. 7, 2007.” *Business, Financial, Personal Finance News - CNNMoney.com*. 07 May 2007. Web. 01 Nov. 2010. <http://money.cnn.com/2007/05/04/magazines/fsb/4_hour_week.fsb/index.htm>.

⁹ “Pareto’s Principle - The 80-20 Rule.” *About Management - Business Management - People Management - and More*. Web. 01 Nov. 2010. <<http://management.about.com/cs/generalmanagement/a/Pareto081202.htm>>.

¹⁰ Greene, Carrie. “Minimizing Workplace Distractions.” *OnlineOrganizing.com*. May 2008. Web. 22 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.onlineorganizing.com/NewslettersArticle.asp?article=738&newsletter=go>>.

- Personal calls in the middle of the working day
- Anxiety over personal issues

Greene suggests overcoming these obstacles by recognising them and working to avoid them.

“You can try turning your chair away from the window or away from your office door. Turn off your e-mail notification or have the system alert you to new e-mail once an hour,” suggests Greene. “Set a timer before you venture online. Put in ear phones. Grab a blanket. Get a new chair. Get your desk more organised. Keep the things you need frequently close at hand and projects you are working on together.”¹¹

All in all, stay disciplined. Keep the day’s goals at the top of your mind, along with what motivates you—your spouse or children, exercise, holiday time, commission—to forge ahead with your work and avoid interruptions that can lead you astray from meeting deadlines.

Once you’ve conquered your own worst enemy—yourself—it’ll be much easier to work on the distractions caused by your environment.

“Distractions driven by your workplace are things like those never ending work-related e-mails, phone calls, meetings and colleagues stopping by your desk for a quick consultation on something because they know that you are always available to them,” explains Greene. “The best way to control these types of distractions is to step back and analyse your day.”¹²

- When does your phone ring the most?
- When do people usually seek you out?
- When do you get the most e-mail?
- When are most meetings scheduled?
- When are you generally left alone?

Create a schedule for yourself based on what you have learned. Greene says to set aside time to answer e-mails and return phone calls. Determine your ideal meeting time. Ask your colleagues to come back and talk to you when you can give them a block of time and



¹¹ Greene, Carrie. “Minimizing Workplace Distractions.” *OnlineOrganizing.com*. May 2008. Web. 22 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.onlineorganizing.com/NewslettersArticle.asp?article=738&newsletter=go>>.

¹² Greene, Carrie. “Minimizing Workplace Distractions.” *OnlineOrganizing.com*. May 2008. Web. 22 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.onlineorganizing.com/NewslettersArticle.asp?article=738&newsletter=go>>.

your full attention.¹³

Re-think the 9 to 5

Once upon a time, a working week was limited to 40 hours and the working day ran from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. But the workplace has changed. The Internet and social media have turned the world into a 24-hour news cycle and blurred the lines between personal and professional time.

“We bring our personal lives into the workplace and our work into our personal lives thanks to smart phones, access to the internet everywhere and teams spread across time zones,” says AdAge’s Darryl Ohrt. “We openly encourage employees to spend time on personal social networks while at work, and they’re answering e-mails from home at night. This is the modern workplace.”¹⁴

So, asks Ohrt, if we’re all working at all hours, and playing at all hours, why do most firms still maintain an office schedule around nine to five?

Allowing employees to pursue flexible work hours or to work remotely from the location that they find most conducive to working can increase productivity and lead to better time management. Do you work better in the morning? Come in earlier and leave earlier. Not a morning person? Get an extra hour of sleep and stay an extra hour longer at the end of the day.

In Europe we are often said to have a higher rate of workforce productivity despite fewer work hours and more holiday time, and we have long known the benefit of flexible work time. In fact, a recent study by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions found that 61% of the workers in the European Union (EU) reported “a higher degree of job satisfaction” among the establishment’s employees. 54% reported that flexible arrangements have contributed to a “better adaptation of working hours to the workload.” Lower levels of absenteeism and a reduction in paid overtime are also reported.¹⁵

Work the hours you want, when most effective for you and everyone seemingly benefits.

Build a time management arsenal

¹³ Greene, Carrie. “Minimizing Workplace Distractions.” *OnlineOrganizing.com*. May 2008. Web. 22 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.onlineorganizing.com/NewslettersArticle.asp?article=738&newsletter=go>>.

¹⁴ Ohrt, Darryl. “Advertising Agencies Should Try Flexible Schedules - Small Agency Diary - Advertising Age.” *Advertising Age - Ad & Marketing Industry News*. 19 Aug. 2009. Web. 25 Oct. 2010. <http://adage.com/smallagency/post?article_id=138545>.

¹⁵ “Flexible Hours Make Workforce Happy | EurActiv.” *EurActiv | European Union Information Website (EU and Europe)*. 18 May 2006. Web. 27 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.euractiv.com/en/innovation/flexible-hours-workforce-happy/article-155420>>.



We're not alone in our struggle to effectively manage time. In fact, there are a wide array of tools available that aim to help businesses and professionals better manage time in order to be more successful in business and in life. The key to time management tools that actually work is seeking out tools that are easy to use and complement habits that you already have in place as doing so means we're more likely to use these tools.

Calendars

The oldest time management tool in the book, calendars help to schedule appointments and block time to complete important tasks. But these tools are only good if you use them. In this day and age, a paper datebook is just not going to cut it. Calendars that integrate with e-mail and synchronise with mobile devices and the calendars of co-workers, family members and friends are the way to go. You get bonus points for setting reminders for important tasks or meetings that require travel time or preparation!

List keepers

Ideally, task lists for work are developed ahead of time and updated on a daily basis according to changing priorities and the needs of co-workers and clients. However, these lists often don't account for the distractions that come to mind in the middle of a project: Things like reminding yourself to stop at the dry cleaners, making a mental note to pick up something at the supermarket on your way home or requests from others that simply don't take much precedence over the priorities at hand. Taking a few seconds to jot these things down in a central location will not only put your mind at ease so you can continue focusing on your work, but can save time in the long run by reminding you to get to them.

Tools like virtual sticky notes, voice notes recorded on mobile phones, iPhone apps like "DoThisNow" and websites like [Remember the Milk](#)™ are all great ways to stay on top of that "other" category of to-do items. Remember the Milk isn't just a to-do list, however, as it synchronises with your calendar, locates and maps errands to be most efficient and is updateable from practically anywhere by sending e-mails, text messages or updates through social networks like Twitter®. If sticky notes won't cut it, consider a more powerful tool like this to incorporate into your daily routine.

Project management software

Powerful software exists to help entire offices manage time along with internal and external projects. Most allow for a central location of project calendars and deadlines, important tasks, files, contact lists, marketing and business plans and more. Most also incorporate a way to easily communicate with others working on



the same project to minimise miscommunication.

As cloud computing and software as a service (SaaS) continue to gain in office acceptance, more and more businesses are turning to online project management software like Teamwork Project Manager™. Depending on the scope of the project, the number of projects and the size of an office and its administrative budget, there is software available that can meet the needs of any team.

The website, [TopTenReviews™](#), has compiled a great starting point for those researching software for their office—a matrix that compares the Web's most popular time management software.

Desktop apps

In addition to the wide array of project management software available, there are also many desktop apps aimed at helping to manage time and distractions while working on the computer. One such app, [RescueTime™](#) tracks the time spent within certain windows on your desktop as well as time spent online. For example, there are categories for "Microsoft Word®," "Google™," and "E-mail." It allows users to set goals and limits on specific tasks and websites and elicits warning pop-ups when these goals or limits are about to be reached.

Use other desktop apps like instant messaging services or Yammer™ to keep in-office distractions to a minimum—use Yammer to update staff on what project you are working on and when you are available for interruption. Use it to pose non-urgent questions to other staff without intruding on their time. Use instant messenger services to post "away messages" or quickly and unobtrusively ask if a co-worker has a minute to talk or answer a quick question.

Time management tips and tricks

Finally, time management consultant and speaker, Steve McClatchy has a few tips and tricks to keep in mind in order to become an efficient time manager¹⁶:

1. Learn to say "no"

Accepting new tasks when we are short on time, making promises we aren't sure we can keep and opening ourselves up to distraction from top priorities are sure ways to be set up for time management failure. Although saying "no" is difficult, McClatchy recommends asking, "Is this the best use of my time right now?" If you cannot respond positively to



¹⁶ McClatchy, Steve. "Productivity, Seven Time Management Tips." *Effective Meetings, Your Meeting Resource Center*. Web. 20 Oct. 2010.

<http://www.effectivemeetings.com/productivity/timemanagement/tipsandtricks.asp>.

that question, say no to the opportunity.

2. **Under promise and over deliver**

McClatchy swears that this is one of the greatest productivity secrets of all time, yet so often we tend to do the opposite. This one skill alone can reduce tremendous amounts of stress in your life and significantly strengthen your relationships.

3. **Build gaps into your schedule**

In other words, prepare for the unexpected. By setting aside an hour or two a day for work that takes longer than expected, last minute meetings or unavoidable interruptions, you're more likely to stay on top of the day's to-do list. What's more, if you don't end up needing this time you've built an extra hour into your day to get a head start on tomorrow—or to spend as you wish.

4. **Centralise your time management**

There is no greater cause of stress than not delivering on a commitment. Have a system that schedules your commitments without all the worry. Part of the secret of effective time management is developing a centralised system for scheduling and tasks lists; it's much easier to keep track of priorities this way.

5. **Find a mentor or a coach**

Mentors or professional coaches are a great way to stay motivated about your work while staying focused. They are there to not only cheer you on, but to remind you of what you can aspire to be and what you can become if you succeed in successfully managing your time well.

6. **Get organised**

Documentation is one thing. Documentation retrieval is another. Establish a place for everything, and then put everything in its place. You lose, on average, an hour a day looking for things. If you want more time, spend less of it looking for what you need. A streamlined file folder structure on your desktop, reminders associated with task lists, a robust contacts list, a place for everything in your office—anything that helps to keep what you need at your fingertips.

7. **Become motivated**

Use your goals—personal and professional to become motivated to



better manage your time. Then work to further develop motivation by staying positive—when you're in a good mood, you get more done.

8. **Make appointments**

Keep in mind the difference of priorities. McClatchy points out that there is a major difference between a to-do and an appointment—to-dos are often discretionary, appointments are time specific. "We defend appointments, but we tend to forget about tasks. To take your time-management skills to the next level, take your priority items off your To Do list and put them on your appointment schedule," recommends McClatchy.

9. **Become computer efficient**

Take typing classes, spend some time at the library learning how to efficiently research using the Internet, stay abreast of new tools and apps that can help you to save or manage time, and know how to turn off e-mail notifiers or disable wi-fi and more. These tactics will all help in order to minimise distraction and optimise time spent on your computer and online.

The bottom line is: When we put in the effort to successfully manage time and stay on task with priorities, we lead less stressful lives that begin to balance what we must do with what we want to do. End the Sisyphian cycle, stop allowing your task lists to be high-jacked by the poor planning of others and own your own time. After all, it's a finite resource ... once lost it cannot be regained and frankly, life is too short.



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