

Where Did All The Time Go? - Time Management Tips

By Rose Smith

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WHERE DID ALL THE TIME GO? - TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS

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1. Identify the tasks that need to be done.

Plan your day out. List the tasks that you need to accomplish.

You can either put them in order of either most important to least important or place the least desirable task first, then work your way down the list, leaving the easy light, tasks for last. The reasoning behind the second option is that it's always harder to "get around to doing" the tasks we don't like. So get them out of the way first, and your day will be brighter and seem to go faster.

2. Schedule your tasks into a calendar.

Estimate how long you think each task will take and schedule them into a day calendar. This helps to keep you on track. Don't worry if one task seems to take longer than planned. More than likely another task will take less time than planned, so it all balances out in the end.

3. Divide large jobs into smaller steps.

If you have a large project, divide it into smaller tasks that you can do over a few days. Smaller bits of work are easier to handle and won't seem overwhelming.

4. Do one thing at a time.

Don't try to handle several tasks at once, especially if they

are very important. Concentrate at the task at hand and get it completed before moving onto the next one. You'll feel a sense of accomplishment.

5. Make note of unfinished tasks.

If you don't have time to finish up the current task, make notes of where you left off and schedule what you need to finish into your next day's list.

6. Make your priority list at the end of the day.

Another good trick is to make your priority task list at the end of the day for the next day. What you need to accomplish is fresh in your mind, so you won't forget things. And it saves time in the morning when you're trying to get organized.

7. Group similar activities together.

If you have several tasks that are similar in nature, group them together into one time slot. For example, if you have to make several phone calls, don't keep stopping your work to make a call here and there. Set a certain part of the day aside when you're sure you can reach most of the people you need to call, and do the calls all at once. Mornings, before 9 am are usually the best time to catch someone in their office.

8. When making calls, take notes.

Keep a notepad nearby when making calls. Jot the person's name and phone number down on the pad and make notes while talking to them. This will help you remember what was said and any follow-up actions that need to be taken.

9. Sort mail and prioritize it.

When mail comes in, sort it into specific groups. For those that require immediate action (place them into an "action" folder); for those that can wait until a quieter time of the day (place these into a "reading" file); and for junk mail (put these directly into the "circular file" - the garbage). Any magazines that you subscribe too can be read while you're on the bus, waiting for a meeting or any other time of the day when you have "dead time" when you are waiting for someone and can't really do anything else.

10. Draft replies to inquiries as soon as you open the letter.

If you have letters that require that you reply to, draft that reply quickly (perhaps on the back of the letter) or on scrap paper. Clip the draft to the letter so it will be easier to reference your information when you're ready to send back a formal reply.

11. Stock supplies for your office once a week.

Like any office, you'll need to replace the supplies that you use on a regular basis. Keep a running list nearby and restock once a week. This will help prevent you from suddenly running out a certain item when you need it most. It also saves you time, so you don't have to keep running out to the office supply store.

12. Give complete instructions to your assistants.

Plan out what you need your assistants to do each day and give them their instructions all at once. This will save interruptions in work time throughout the day.

13. Make checklists.

If things come up during the day that you need to remember to do later on, keep a small notebook handy and keep a running checklist. This way, you don't need to try to keep a million and one things in your head. Like most humans, you're likely to forget something important. By writing it down, you don't have to worry about remembering it. Once the task is accomplished, cross it off.

14. Write appointments down immediately.

If you set up a meeting or have a doctor's appointment, etc., write it down in a daytime calendar immediately. Again, it helps you remember things and doesn't clutter your mind with trying to remember where you should be at what time.

15. Prepare outgoing mail throughout the day.

As you finish up correspondence or other items that need to be mailed out, put it into the envelope, address it and then put it aside until you're ready to go out. Take all the mail at once to the mailbox, don't make several trips.

16. Schedule appointments for a certain time of the day.

Schedule meetings and appointments either for early morning or late afternoon (or perhaps arrange luncheon meetings). This will give you uninterrupted hours in which you can concentrate on your tasks during the day.

17. Keep often used supplies near at hand.

Store additional pens, pencils, paperclips, notepads, etc. in a nearby drawer for quick and easy access when needed.

18. Let the answering machine pick up when you're busy.

When you need to concentrate to get an assignment done, let your answering machine/voice mail take the message for you.

Then call the person back during the times that you've scheduled to make group phone calls. Unless it's an urgent matter, it can wait an hour or two.

19. Schedule a time for answering emails.

In today's high-tech world, emails may just be worst than phone calls in the "time-stealing" category. Schedule a quiet time of day when you can read through your emails uninterrupted. Reply to the most urgent ones first and immediately delete the ones that are trash. Create folders in your email program, so you can easily sort (and later find) important emails.

20. Create folders for your bookmarks.

When surfing the Internet, create category folders so you can easily find bookmarks that you make of important pages. They will be easier to find when you're looking for them at a later date.

21. Clip any magazine or newspaper articles immediately.

When reading an article that you find interesting and want to keep, clip it immediately from the publication and file it in a "article" folder. At the end of the week, sort through this folder and categorize the articles into folders of that particular subject.

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