

Time Management Strategies

Presented by Ali LaForce

Where Does the Time Go?

One helpful step in managing your time better is finding out where it goes right now.

Time Study

Pick a set amount of time like a week or a month, and track your time. It will look something like this:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00	Project A	Filing	Phone calls	Email	Email
9:00		Email	Project A	Project C	Project A
10:00	Phone calls	Research for A			
11:00	Email	Phone calls			
12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1:00	Project B	Email	Meeting about A	Project C	Team meeting
2:00		Project C	Project A		Meeting about C
3:00	Meeting about B			Website updates	
4:00	Email			Project C	Email

Once you've completed your tracking, take a look at the big picture and find patterns.

- Which tasks require most energy? What days/times do you have the most energy? Are you doing tasks that require the most energy at times when you are most energetic?
- Which tasks are high value? Low value? How much time are you spending on high value tasks compared to low value tasks?
- What are your time eaters? What are your interruptions and distractions? Are you constantly checking email when checking it twice a day would suffice? What can you reduce or eliminate?

Based on the patterns you see in your time study, you will have better information for managing your time and ways of redistributing your efforts.

A "Got Done" List

This is related to a To Do list, but reflective instead of predictive. A Got Done list starts blank, then fills as you accomplish things. Anything productive goes on the list. It can help build momentum by showing what you're accomplishing. Or, it can also serve as an alternative to a time study by also showing which tasks you're spending time on.

Prioritizing

A Priority Matrix

This matrix is a simple tool for sorting pending tasks. Those that are both important and urgent will be the highest priority and those which are neither important nor urgent should be eliminated, if possible.

Important/Not Urgent	Important/Urgent
Not Important/Not Urgent	Not Important/Urgent

Get Supervisor Input

For work tasks, especially if it feels like everything you need to do is important and urgent, it is helpful to have a discussion with your supervisor to help clarify the top priorities. Lay out your to-do list, or use the priority matrix, and have a conversation with your supervisor. This is something many of us do not often do, but it can be very beneficial.

3 Questions

1. What projects will have negative consequences if we put them off?
2. What projects will give us the biggest return if we tackle them now?
3. What are the long-term projects that can be done slowly over time, and what are the short-term projects that require immediate attention?

Wearing Too Many Hats? Here's How to Tackle Multiple Priorities at Work, by Kimberly Maul

Organizing

Delegation

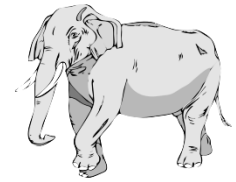
If you have help, *use it*

- Direct reports
- Colleagues (if appropriate)
- Student workers
- Technology Tools

The set up may take a bit of time, but the long term payoffs are worth it.

How Do You Eat an Elephant?

One approach is Big List/Little List



Big List: This list is the elephant

- Updated infrequently (weekly/monthly/quarterly)
- Big picture
- Long-term projects



What is a big project that you need to do?

Little List: This list is one bite

- Updated frequently (daily)
- Details
- Only one day's worth of tasks



What are the next 5 small steps of that project?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Schedule Tasks

Treat priority work the same as you would a meeting or appointment. Time for that work is blocked off on your calendar and nothing short of an emergency is allowed to interfere.

Finishing Fridays (or Wednesday afternoons, or Mondays from 9:00-10:00 a.m.)

Round up a bunch of small tasks and do them in a batch. It's a nice way to clear out a lot of little things that have been hanging over your head and it can be nice to cross a lot of things off of your To Do list (or add a lot of things to your Got Done list) all at once.



What other strategies help you prioritize and organize?

Managing Motivation

“When self-regulation fails, it's often because short-term emotional repair takes precedence over our long-term goals. For example, a task at hand makes us feel anxious or overwhelmed, so we ‘give in to feel good,’ seeking immediate emotional relief, and we walk away, leaving the task for tomorrow.”

Ending Procrastination-Right Now, Timothy Pychyl



What is something you're procrastinating?

You're procrastinating because _____

It's overwhelming	No one cares
It's tedious	I don't care
It's boring	It's not my job
I need help	It's low priority
I haven't been trained	Others will just criticize my work

Getting Past Procrastination

“If it's your job to eat a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first.”

Mark Twain

Eat That Frog!

A philosophy from Mark Twain that was popularized by Brian Tracy in his book *Eat That Frog!* The main idea is if you “eat a frog” first thing in the morning, everything you do afterward will be comparatively easy. Therefore, you should do your most unpleasant task first to build momentum for the day. This is an approach that can work well for people who like challenge.



If you were going to start your day off with a “frog” tomorrow, what would it be?



Zeigarnik Effect

“Starting is hard, but if you can get over that hump you’ll not only have some degree of momentum, but your brain is more likely to pester you to keep working on the task. Why? It’s down to a psychological phenomenon called the Zeigarnik effect, which says that unfinished tasks are more likely to get stuck in your memory. (This is also why to-do list items continually pop up in your head until you write them down -- a to-do list calms the Zeigarnik effect.)”

5 Scientifically Proven Ways to Beat Procrastination, Jessica Stillman

This approach is the counterpoint to eating frogs. The idea is that any progress is good progress and, once you’ve taken the first step toward something, it’s that much easier to take the next step. This is an approach that can work well for people who need to get warmed up before tackling a big challenge.

Get Moving

Physical movement helps stimulate the brain and provides an energy boost. Taking a short walk or any other type of exercise can help clear your mind and improve your mood so you have more energy to work on something you’ve put off.

Pomodoro Technique

Commit to working on that unpleasant task, but you only have to do it for 25 minutes. Set a timer and spend 25 minutes focused solely on that task.

Accountability

“I will _____ by _____”

Tell your supervisor, a colleague, or a friend – whoever will hold you to your goal. You should give them specifics about what you plan to do, and you should also give them a specific deadline by which you will have it done.

Bribery

Reserve your favorite snack or music for while you work on an unpleasant task. Or, set up a reward for after you’ve completed it, such as going to dinner at one of your favorite restaurants.



What other strategies help motivate you to tackle unpleasant tasks?

Resources

5 Scientifically Proven Ways to Beat Procrastination

<http://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/5-scientificallly-proven-ways-to-beat-procrastination.html>

10 Must-Have Tools for Time Management

<http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/outside-voices-careers/2012/04/10/10-must-have-tools-for-time-management->

Ending Procrastination—Right Now!

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200909/ending-procrastination-right-now>

How to Make Yourself Work When You Just Don't Want To

<https://hbr.org/2014/02/how-to-make-yourself-work-when-you-just-dont-want-to/>

How to Manage Time with 10 Tips That Work

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/219553>

Manage Procrastination with the Pomodoro Technique

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/intrinsic-motivation-and-magical-unicorns/201307/manage-procrastination-the-pomodoro-technique>

Wearing Too Many Hats? Here's How to Tackle Multiple Priorities at Work

<http://idealisticareers.org/how-to-tackle-multiple-priorities/>