

# Time Management

*Learning how to manage your time effectively is one of the most important skills you can master in running a successful business.*

Most small business people spend far too much time doing things that don't have to be done or can be done by somebody else. They major in minor things. You must learn to prioritise the tasks at hand and then, allocate the available time accordingly.

Small business owners are often criticized for not taking time out to do courses and training and while this is true to a certain extent, the criticism often comes from people who have never operated a business of their own and don't really understand the problem. Most small business owners, particularly in their formative years, survive by crisis management. No sooner do you put out one bushfire than another one springs up in another area.

So, how do you find enough time in the day to do all the things that need to be done? Many overcome the problem by working longer hours but the secret lies in prioritizing the available time.

Here are a few tips that will help lighten the load.

## To do List:

Write down the most important things you have to do tomorrow. Then, number them in the order of their true importance. First thing tomorrow morning, start working on the first item and stay with it until it is completed.

Then tackle item number two the same way. Then number three and so on. Don't worry if you don't complete everything on schedule. At least you will have completed the most important tasks first.

At the end of the day, the list has to be reviewed and those items not carried out are to be transferred to the following day's list. The list should have no more than six to eight items on it and any item that stayed on the list for more than a week is to be deleted on the grounds that you were not serious about the task.

Another way of maximizing your effectiveness is to start a log book of how you spend your time. Write down each task performed during a given day and the time allocated to it. Review the results at the end of the day and decide which category each task falls into, then prioritise them as follows:

1. Has to be done
2. Needs to be done at some stage.
3. Nice to be done if there is enough time but not essential.

## Paper work and desk items:

Use the 4D System and file anything that you are not working on. Put pens and pencils, phone books, diary, in and out trays, anything you don't need behind you out of sight. Working from a cluttered desk can cause mental anguish and fatigue.

## THE FOUR D'S

### Dump it.

If it is not important, throw it in the rubbish bin and forget about it. Don't put it in your in your 'IN' tray and shuffle it around.

### Delegate it.

If it's at all possible, get somebody else to do it.

### Do it.

If it's a short job, can be done quickly and it has to be done, do it now and get it out of the way.

### Decide when to do it.

Set aside a time to do it, write it in your diary and then – file it until it comes time to deal with it. Always remove any unnecessary paperwork from your files.

Work from a clean uncluttered desk. Don't have your desk piled high with papers and things to do. If you do, chances are you will find yourself sorting through these things over and over again, which is in itself very time wasting.

Don't go home with a desk full of papers. Clear the desk before you leave the office and write down your list of things to do for tomorrow. Transfer the items you didn't get done from today's list to tomorrow's list

Set aside a time each day for reading and filing, take it out at the allocated time and read it, then file it.



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### Keeping a diary:

Here's another simple tip: Only keep one diary and write in it everything you have to do, both your business and social appointments. Get one that's small enough to carry around easily in your briefcase but large enough to record all your appointments and keep it handy at all times.

Get a diary that opens on one full week at a time. This way you can see your whole week, Monday to Sunday, laid out in front of you. Plan your whole seven days, including your after hours and weekend leisure time. Sit down with your family regularly and set aside time for leisure and family events, as well as your business appointments. Allocate a set time each day for the important jobs. Don't start the day by walking into your office or workplace and thinking – what will I do first? Plan your work and work your plan.

### Electronic diaries and other devices:

Computers also have calendars. If you use Microsoft products, your Microsoft Office will use Outlook. These are great tools to keep you organized. They have calendars, your contacts and tasks all in one place. You can also mark emails for later follow up and file them away.

Most people these days have a Smart Phone. Smart phones have calendars so you can schedule your appointments straight in. You can also record any useful contacts – phone, email and address. If you are using a Smart Phone make sure that it's synched to your usual electronic calendar. This way, as one is updated with an appointment or event, the other will be updated automatically.

So – paper or electronic? This is purely a personal choice. Are you more comfortable using electronic equipment or are you old-school and prefer your paper diary? Remember, you want one system or the other – not both.

### Summary:

Make sure that every job you do maximizes your best abilities and skills. If jobs like going to the post office, doing the banking or picking up the dry cleaning, etc., can possibly be done by someone else, then make sure you delegate those jobs.

Remember your categories and work to them:

- Must do
- Needs to be done at some stage
- Nice to be done if there is enough time but not essential

Don't double up – have one system and stick to it. Don't use a paper diary and an electronic diary – one or the other, otherwise you need to do "double entries" to make sure both are current. This is a waste of your time.

Ensure that the bulk of your time is spent doing the things that are going to provide the best possible dollar return to your business.

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