

Chapter 1

Replacing Bad Time Habits with Good Ones

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Recognising the value of time management
 - ▶ Reviewing how you currently manage your time
 - ▶ Knowing your future goals
 - ▶ Looking at how you can make better use of time
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Everyone has the same 24 hours in the day – you, me, the Queen, Sir Alan Sugar, and the person in your local shop. However, what you get out of those 24 hours depends entirely on how you spend them. Highly successful people use their time highly successfully. Now, you may not be aiming for ‘highly successful’ but, given that you’re reading this book, you probably want to be more efficient and productive with your time.

‘There simply isn’t enough time in the day to get everything done,’ I hear you cry. Contrary to popular belief, there is enough time. Most people’s problem is that they try to do too much in the time available, or they don’t organise and plan effectively, so they constantly waste time.

If your desk looks like a tip and you can never find anything, if you only ever get a piece of work done when a deadline is looming, and if you guzzle caffeine so that you can burn the midnight oil, then perhaps you need to look at how your current habits affect the way in which you manage your time – and then change some of those habits.

Understanding the Importance of Time Management

Because you have only 24 hours in each and every day, making the best use of these hours makes good sense. Once those hours have gone you can't get them back, and you can't make more of them if you lose or waste them. They're a finite resource, which means that spending a little time brushing up your time management skills can transform your life in various ways.

Increasing productivity

It's all too easy to get to the end of the day and wonder what you've actually achieved, even though you feel as though you haven't stopped all day. Many a time I've known people who say 'I've been really busy all day but what did I do?' I've done it myself. You're busy but not necessarily productive.

Managing your time means you're more effective. You get more done in less time, you focus on the important things and so your overall productivity increases.

For example, by managing your time better, you may be able to carve out an extra half-hour a day. Spend that half-hour on your most important project every day for a week and you'll be astonished at how you chip away at the work. Good time management now has a great long-term effect.

Reducing stress

If I were to wave a magic wand and give you an extra hour in every day, what would you do? Usually when I ask this question, the most common responses are – sleep and exercise, or just time to relax. These responses go to show what kind of activities tend to get pushed to one side when time is short or when people try to cram too much into what's available and what's physically possible.



Poor time management leads to overload, frustration, lack of motivation, and poor self-esteem. The longer your poor time management continues, the more stressed, tired, and ill you become.

You get caught in a vicious circle. You never get time to catch up or get on top of things. You just keep doing things the same way because you don't know how to do them any differently, or you feel that you just don't have the time. Eventually, something has to give and too often it's your physical and emotional health that suffers.

Developing better time management skills can reduce your stress levels. You're then able to manage your workload better and take control of your life rather than feel your life is controlling you all the time.

Achieving a happy work–life balance

The point of better time management is that you're able to do the things that are important to you and create balance in *all* areas of your life, not just at work. Many people who are overworked, with too much work to do in those 24 hours, spend too much time doing just that – working.



Life isn't just about work. Work is a means to an end. Work provides you with the income to enable you to live the lifestyle you choose. Head to Chapter 14 for more information about how you can be more time-savvy when it comes to work and money.

As working hours increase and people work longer and longer, getting some balance between your work life and your personal life becomes very important. If you didn't have work, you'd still have your family, friends, and your health. Developing better time management skills means you stop neglecting yourself and your loved ones because you're 'too busy at work'. Chapters 15 and 16 have heaps of tips about taking time out for yourself and for your friends and family.

Managing your time effectively means you focus on what's important in the time you have available, so you make time for the essential things in life.

The chapters in Part V give you advice on how to keep things in perspective and maintain a better balance.

Identifying How You Prefer to Work

Only you know how you work best, and whether your time habits are a hindrance or a help. One person's chaos is another person's order.

There's no right or wrong way of working:

- ✓ Some people like a lot of detail and create charts and lists to monitor their progress; others prefer to work with big ideas and leave the detail to others.
- ✓ Some people like writing lists; others hate them.
- ✓ Some people like working with pen and paper; others think the more technical gadgets they can have the better.
- ✓ Some people are naturally neat and tidy and love having a clear desk; others aren't and like to have everything out where they can see it.

Are you a left- or right-brained person? Well, obviously you're both but people have preferences for using one side of their brain than the other. The left side of the brain is more logical and analytical; the right side is more creative. A style of working that suits a more left-brained person won't always suit a more right-brained person. Both can be trained but it makes sense to work with your natural preferences. In this book I provide a variety of methods that you can pick and choose from to suit the way your brain works.



Although you can read all the time management books you like, you need to find and adapt what works best for you. Many people get put off because they read something that says they should work in a certain way or lay their desk out according to a particular plan or number all their files in a certain way. They throw their hands up in horror because that method just isn't them.

Whatever your natural style and preference, use your strength and natural abilities to organise and manage your time in a way that works best for you, otherwise you end up constantly paddling upstream or just getting frustrated.

Becoming an expert in an hour a day

Just think what you could do if you set aside an hour in each and every day. Scientists discovered that to become a world-class expert takes 10,000 hours – so in only 10,000 days you could be an expert in something. Okay, it'll take you 27 years, but you're only spending an hour a day.

Even the most talented musician or artist began knowing nothing but they

got to the peak of their field with practice. Set aside 5–10 hours a week and you can become at least pretty competent in your chosen field. Why not start to play an instrument, take up painting, or get stuck into a sport? Do something for yourself in those hours, and then enjoy the long-term rewards.

Setting Goals to Focus On

Before you begin to look at ways to manage your time better, you need to know where you're going and why. You're more likely to be successful if you've created some specific goals to work towards.

If you don't know where you're going, how are you going to know when you get there? You wouldn't set out on a journey without looking at a map. If you're managing your time but you find that your time and effort isn't getting you closer to your goals, then what are you doing?

Ask yourself:

- ✓ What gets you out of bed in the morning?
- ✓ What is your big goal or dream?
- ✓ What do you want more of?
- ✓ What do you want less of?
- ✓ Where would you like to be in a year, two years, five years, ten years?



Make sure that your goals are your own and not someone else's goals or expectations (such as those of your parents).

You need to make your goals SMART, a useful acronym that means making them really clear and specific.

- ✓ **Specific:** Don't set a goal to 'do more exercise'. If you want to find time to get fit, set a goal to walk or run a specific distance, or exercise for thirty minutes, three times a week – complete a sponsored walk, or run a 10 kilometres race.
- ✓ **Measurable:** Make sure that you can measure your progress and know when you've achieved your goal. To exercise three times a week for thirty minutes is a measurable amount and you can track your progress each week.
- ✓ **Achievable:** Don't decide to run a marathon if it's *way* beyond your current skills and ability – you're just setting yourself up for failure. Think about the time, resources and skills available.
- ✓ **Relevant/Realistic:** Make sure that your goals fit with your bigger vision for your life or business. Stretch yourself but be realistic, otherwise you won't commit to it and you'll be easily de-motivated.
- ✓ **Time-bound:** Set an end-date for achieving your goal. This stops it drifting off into something indefinite and gives you a target to aim for.

Create a solid, underlying reason for achieving your goals. What benefits and impact is achieving them going to have on your life? Get really clear about what these goals mean to you and you're more likely to achieve them. Anything is possible.



Write down a few specific goals or your one BIG goal. Pin them up where you'll see them every day.



If you don't tell someone about your goal, you're answerable to no one but yourself and it's too easy to let yourself off the hook. Telling someone else about your goal helps to keep you motivated. Share goals so that you can keep each other on track. Find a partner, friend, colleague, mentor, or a coach to work with.

Creating New Time Habits

The previous sections of this chapter help you understand how you use your time and set goals for what you want to

achieve. Moving forward, though, involves letting go of some bad habits that are making you less efficient and productive.



Breaking a habit takes time. You've taken years to adopt the habits you have, but be aware that you can *un*-adopt them, especially if they're habits that don't serve you. Be prepared to give yourself time to develop new habits and don't expect to get the process right first time. Research shows you can change a habit in around thirty days (or about thirty occurrences), so stick with it.

Improving your planning

How do you know what you're going to do today, this week, this month? Planning is a fundamental part of time management. Remember the saying, 'If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.'

Planning is critical if you're busy and even when you're not. Plan your year, your month, your week, and your day in advance. Don't just plan time for work – book time for yourself as well. Use the time management tools I explore in Chapter 3, and the action lists I explain in Chapter 4. Your plan isn't written in stone – it's adaptable and flexible; review your plans regularly to keep them relevant and up to date.



Always keep your goals in mind when planning (see the earlier section 'Setting Goals to Focus On' for more). You still have many tasks you need to complete each day but now you need to focus on the important ones. You can ignore any actions that are likely to lead you off in the wrong direction or distract you. These actions won't get you where you want to be any quicker or more easily. You'll just waste your time and energy on them.



Spending just a few minutes planning each day really saves you time in the big picture. You won't waste time wondering what to do next, letting important tasks fall by the wayside, or feeling pressured by deadlines and a workload that threatens to swamp you. Plan your time and see what a difference it makes.

Managing your workload

Sometimes, your workload can feel like a huge, unscalable mountain looming over you. But with a little organisation, you

can break that mountain down to just a few gentle hills you need to get over or gradual steps to take you to the top.

Chapter 2 helps you get over the hurdles that prevent you from getting on with your work, and shows you how to split tasks into simple steps. Then Chapter 4 shows you how to prioritise your tasks so that you can tick them off steadily. And Part III offers a range of tips and ideas on how to handle specific elements of your work – from meetings and paperwork, to emails and phone calls.

Organising your time

So you've planned out what you need to do, you've sorted the tasks or arranged them in some form of order, and now you need to actually organise your time to get them done. You need to take control of your own time and space and find a way of working with time and within time, in a way that works for you.

This book contains a wealth of ideas to help you better organise your time. For example, in Chapter 4, I discuss structuring your time effectively – from breaking it into manageable blocks, to introducing variety into your day. And, to help you stay focused, in Chapter 10 I look at handling and minimising distractions and interruptions.



A little organisation goes a long way. You need to get everything in place so that you can be a smooth time manager, a super efficient, highly organised person, a king or queen of productivity . . . (okay, maybe not, but it doesn't hurt to aim high!)



Sometimes doing nothing is the right thing to do. Part of the problem with time management is that you're expected to make use of every waking minute of every hour of every day and . . . well, you don't! It's perfectly okay to stop and just relax sometimes. Chapter 15 gives you more tips about freeing up your day for some me-time.

Find out which area of your life needs attention and focus on that area first and see how great your life can be.

One way to assess how you're doing and how balanced your life really is right now, is to try this exercise.

Draw a large circle on a piece of paper and divide it into eight sections. Label each section with the following titles or use your own to define all the different areas of your life (you may have more than eight).

- ✓ Money
- ✓ Career/Business
- ✓ Health
- ✓ Personal Growth
- ✓ Fun/Social Life
- ✓ Friends/Family
- ✓ Partner/Relationship
- ✓ Physical Environment

Now score each of the eight areas on a scale of one to ten. Ten means your life in this area is complete and can't possibly be improved. Zero means things can't be any worse.

If zero is the centre of the circle and ten is the outer edge, draw a line on each section to represent your score, as shown in Figure 1-1.

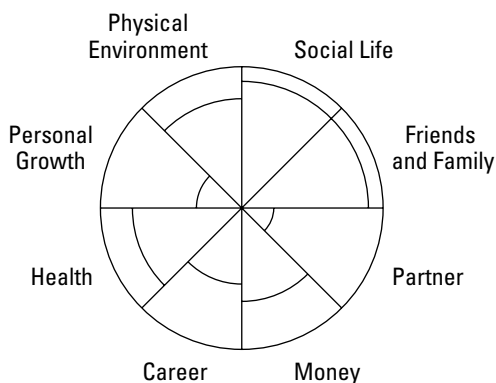


Figure 1-1: A filled-out wheel of life.

Most people find that their areas score between 4 and 8 with one or two areas scoring high (8 or more) and one or two scoring low (5 or less).

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If any of these sections is seriously out of balance – 3 or less, you’re probably tired, stressed, and unhappy with your life. Imagine this is the wheel on a bicycle. How bumpy would your ride be with an unbalanced wheel with bits missing?

The chapters in Part V show you ways to find time to improve these sections of your life to create a better balance.