

## Chapter 1

# The Essence of Good Time Management: Organizing Yourself

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Understanding advance planning
  - ▶ Realizing 1,000 percent return
  - ▶ Assembling everything you need
  - ▶ Learning the three keys to personal organization
  - ▶ Stepping back to evaluate
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**T**ime management boils down to a mindset of focusing on your priorities, goals, and objectives for a specific time period — a week, a day, or even an hour. It's the awareness that you are the one who lays claim to your success with the allotment of time you have for today.

Time management is a set of skills that are learned over time. The skills taught in this book — for example, of time blocking, single handling, controlling interruptions, and others — don't provide you with overnight success, nor can you implement or perfect them quickly. They require patience to fail, adjust, proceed, and then repeat the process many times. But by sticking with it, you can accomplish what needs to be done without too much stress and panic, and maybe have a little extra time left over.

This book is about taking control of the time you have in each day. Effective time management requires a little introspection, some good habits and organizational skills, and a handful of logistical and tactical tools. So take some time and get ready to learn how to manage it successfully.

## *Planning in Advance*

The planning process for a project, your workday, or even a vacation is more vexing than the execution. Many people invest countless hours planning that perfect vacation to Hawaii. They research the different island options, review recreation activities, lodging, air travel, dining options, the list is endless. But few people plan their day or week with such zeal.

You have to fall in love with advance planning. You are likely faced each day with tasks you would rather not do, but frequently they seem to be high priorities. For example, most salespeople don't wake up each morning saying, "How exciting today; I get to call people I don't know and ask for their business!" Most moms don't get up and say in an excited tone, "I get to remind my seventh-grade son ten times to make sure he packs his homework before he goes to school!"

This is where advance planning brings big dividends to your life. Before your day begins — maybe the night before — plan to do the toughest but most important things first. Usually tough tasks become more challenging to complete throughout the day as more projects, deadlines, and emergency items crop up. So a good rule is to clear out the tough tasks first.

The sheer act of planning is the key to unlock your creativity, problem solving, mental strength, and clarity. It also increases your mental and physical energy because you see the pathway to a productive day.

The better you use planning strategies and techniques, the more you can avoid procrastinating away what you don't want to do. At its base level, planning is simply creating a list. You increase your productivity by more than 25 percent by simply writing down what you need to accomplish. The advantages of creating a list are as follows.

## *Achieving peace of mind*

Create your life as you wind down for the day so that you're ready to take on tomorrow. You likely are able to rest and relax more, knowing that your following day is planned. You sleep better when you don't have unresolved issues weighing heavy on your mind. You won't get that middle-of-the-night wake-up call of "Did I get that done?" You can achieve a deeper slumber by knowing you have your time and tasks under control.

## *Activating your subconscious mind*

You also trigger your subconscious mind while you sleep. Because you have created your list, your subconscious works on that list while you rest. Your subconscious mind turns the challenges and problems over and over like a rotisserie, and eventually it comes up with strategies and solutions. Have you ever gone to bed with a problem or challenge only to wake up with a couple of new ideas on how to solve them? Your subconscious mind created those ideas while you slept. Always give your subconscious something to do at night by . . . handing it a list.

## *The 1,000 percent return*

There is always a large payoff for planning. Many studies have indicated that for every minute of planning you save ten minutes in execution. That is a 1,000 percent return on your time with proper planning. Those numbers don't really illustrate a return of 1,000 percent; a monetary example can put the proper scope on it.

If you have \$10,000 and you got a 1,000 percent return in one year, at the end of the year you would have \$100,000. If you receive a 1,000 percent return the next year, you would have \$1,000,000. The initial investment went from \$10,000 to \$1,000,000 in less than two years. That's the type of return you can receive each day from planning properly.

Frequently the response I hear is, "I am too busy to plan." I have even tried to use that excuse myself. The truth is that even if you planned out everything in excruciating detail by forcing yourself to do it, you most likely would not invest more than a few minutes a day in the whole planning process. Strange as it may sound, sometimes you may need to slow down in order to speed up. Planning is the only pathway to greater productivity and quality of life.

The wasted time and mistakes you make are most likely related to a lack of planning. The most epic failures have commonality in lack of planning. My single most disastrous business failure came from lack of planning. I rushed into a decision without giving it the thought, planning, research, and care it deserved. It cost me a year of my life and hundreds of thousands of dollars in income. It was an expensive lesson on planning in time and treasure.

## *Assemble all that is needed*

After you have planned out your day, a project, or even dinner, you then need to gather your materials to start and complete the project. I frequently

cook with my kids, both Annabelle and Wesley. They get so excited that when we decide which recipe to make together they are instantly ready to crack the eggs and start mixing. I have to slow them down to read the recipe, gather all the ingredients, the measuring cups, pans to bake in, bowls, hand mixer, and so on. I want all of the tools on the counter in an organized fashion for a couple of reasons.

The kids and I might find a trip to the store is necessary for a missing ingredient before we start. That certainly will add time to the project. We could find something else to cook where we have all the ingredients, saving us a trip. We save time by not wandering around the kitchen from pantry to refrigerator to food preparation area. It saves time in cleanup because the mess is concentrated in one area rather than all over the kitchen. By assembling all that is needed, you save considerable time.

Before you start on anything, ask yourself these key questions:

- ✓ What data or information would make completing this quicker?
- ✓ Is there some information I don't have that would save me time for this project?
- ✓ Do I really have everything I need?

The cycle of planning, to gathering, to implementation is the cycle of success and efficiency. If you have to backtrack to gather resources after you've begun implementation, or go back to planning because your execution is stalled, and the waste of your time in the backtracking is a significant loss.

## *Handle everything — just once*

In today's technology world, you deal with less paper because of electronic documents; even with electronic documents you tend to handle and review them multiple times before acting on them. This review is as if you had paper stacked on your desk; it's just now in your computer and email inbox. The shuffling and reshuffling just happens inside your computer, so it seems far more efficient. The truth is you can just store more stuff easily so your productivity can really plummet.

If you're like me, at times you tend to hoard stuff. Because you can store so much in electronic files you tend to keep rather than purge. You can be more efficient with your time if you throw away documents, files, and paper that you don't need. Anything that is not relevant to your life, family, business, or goals, throw it out. Ask yourself, "Is there a negative consequence to throwing this out now?" If the answer is no, throw it out now.

If you need this information in the future, is there another place you could easily access it? The truth in our society is, information is becoming a commodity. Information is readily available, so keeping it because you might need it in the future only overloads you with files, documents, and stuff.

## *Grabbing the Three Keys to Personal Organization*

Your personal organization is one of the largest influences of your success and happiness in your life. Your personal organization skills and systems help you feel more fulfilled, productive, and achieve a mental state of well-being overall. There are three keys that you want to apply frequently to improve your personal organization. Take a look at the next three sections to key in on these skills.

### *Stepping back to evaluate*

Evaluating your key work areas can reveal a lot about the person working there. By stepping back from your desk or work area, you can ask the questions, “What type of person works at this desk? Are they organized or unorganized? Does it appear they have an effective system in getting work done? What changes should they make in their organization? Would I trust this person with an important task based on this work environment? What are the reasons I would or wouldn’t?”

You need to have an honest evaluation with yourself, as if you hired a third party or neutral authority to review your workspace. What do you see, and what would they see? Then repeat that process for your home office. Does it have the look from an outsider’s as a productive environment? What does your briefcase, computer files, car, purse, closet, house, yard, garage look like? Who is the person who would live this manner? Would you entrust this person with an important task to be completed?

### *Developing neatness habits*

For some of us, including myself, this one is really tough. I admit of all the concepts, systems, and strategies this one is my Achilles’ heel. I am better at this by following some of my own counsel, but I am clearly a work in progress. There is no question we can save time and increase productivity by

organizing or even cleaning up our workspace. We all need a sense of order and organization to feel calm, relaxed, and in control of our surroundings. Your actual work environment can create a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction or stress and frustration. By instituting order and neatness, you can increase your productivity.

When you create this ordered environment, your self-esteem increases. You're more self-confident in a successful outcome. That self-confidence emotion creates a willingness to be creative, innovate, try new things, and take risks. You feel more in control with more power.

All this neatness removes the roadblocks of frustration and generates more energy. The higher energy level taps into your resources and determination to accomplish the task at hand faster and more efficiently. Establishing neatness habits has far-reaching benefits, reducing your time while increasing your wellbeing and the results you achieve.

## *Refuse to excuse*

"Refuse to excuse" should be a life mantra and not applied only to time management. Too many people let themselves off the hook with excuses of why tasks and chores didn't get done or why these folks didn't accomplish their mission. People who are messy frequently make excuses to justify or cover up a mess. "That's just the way I am," or "I know where everything is," or "I work better this way."

When you review the time spent, messy people are deluding themselves into thinking they know where everything is located. Frequently a large part of their day is spent trying to find or remember where they put things, instead of being productive at the office or home.

Refuse to excuse a messy desk or work environment for this week. If you have to clear your desk to be able to start on a project, just do it. Take the one task or tool you need to work on, and clear the rest off your desk. If you have to put everything else in drawers, cabinets, closets, waste baskets, or even on the floor, do it. Test this on yourself. Unclutter your space. No excuses for a few days, and see how productive you become.