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1

Introduction

This chapter provides the background to the need for effective time management. It covers why we never seem to have enough time and how we can begin to find it.

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Effective Time Management

Most of us have problems with time management and many of us, struggling to get our work done, end up working longer and longer hours. But these problems can be resolved. Time management is not about the time you spend working but about the *way* you spend your time working. Production line workers have very little choice about what they do but as managers and knowledge workers we can choose how to spend our time.



The Problem

Over the years the problems we face seem to have got worse rather than better. Pagers gave way to mobile phones and smart phones. Memos gave way to emails and texts. The telephone gave way to social networking and tweeting. Computers gave way to laptops and tablets. Diaries gave way to organizers and personal digital assistants. All of these new innovations seem to bring new challenges in effectively managing our time. There just seems to be too much to do and too little time in which to do it in.

Even home-working, the 'Holy Grail' for many people, turns out to bring as many additional problems as it solves. And of course with the concept of 'open door' management (even if you close the door) people will stick their heads round the door with just another quick question for you.

The Solution

The solution is of course not to work 'harder' but to work 'smarter' and manage your time more effectively. This book is called **Effective Time Management in easy steps:**

- Time Management: will show you how you really can manage your time
- Effective: by identifying the real priorities and doing the right things at the right time
- In Easy Steps: the topics in the book are set out in simple steps to show you how best to implement them

Efficiency is about doing things quickly and correctly and it should result in you being more productive. Effectiveness is about working smarter and it can produce the greatest rewards when it comes to managing time. Effectiveness can result in substantial benefits to you and your organization. While this book will identify some efficiency savings it will concentrate on effectiveness.

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Effective Time Management

This book is arranged as a series of topics, each of which will address one particular aspect of time management. Each of these is valuable in its own right but together they build into a system that will allow you to get the best out of your time, both at work and at leisure.

The approach of this book is to work through a series of detailed topics, in easy steps. In summary they are:

- 1 First you need to develop a clear understanding about what you choose to spend your time on now
- 2 Next you should identify (and document) your goals for what you want to achieve in life
- 3 Then you need to develop a plan for how you will go about achieving them. First by developing a long term plan, then a mid term plan and finally a daily plan
- 4 When you get down to the daily plan, you need to build in chunks of time to deal with the things which you know will happen and will require your time
- 5 Then prioritize what you will choose to do, so that you always work on the most important tasks first and schedule these into your day plan
- 6 At the end of each day you should review what you actually did during the day, learn any lessons from it and use it to plan the next day
- 7 Finally you need to review your progress at the strategic level from time to time in order to measure your progress towards achieving your overall goals

These are the seven steps to effective time management that will be developed and expanded through the rest of the book. They are also the seven steps to developing your potential and achieving your long term goals.

Hot tip



Work through the first three chapters as they set the guidelines for developing effective time management.

Why Time Management?

Why do we need time management, effective or otherwise? The best place to start is by looking at some of the challenges we face in our everyday life.

The Challenges

These are the typical problems that we face and have to deal with in our day-to-day working life:

- Changing priorities: no matter how carefully we try to control what we are working on, the demands of the business can mean a sudden change of priority over which we may have little control
- Crisis management: often referred to as fire-fighting and usually introduced with a cry of “drop everything and man the pumps!”
- Trying to do too much: we all like to help people and this often results in us trying to do more than we should (see also Chapter 6 Saying No)
- Telephone interruptions: the phone rings, we pick it up and reply and no matter how short the call, we then have to work our way back to what we were doing before
- Drop-in visitors: as for telephone interruptions, these have a much bigger impact than the time of the interruption
- Ineffective delegation: if we don't delegate effectively we are making a rod for our own backs and may still end up having to do the work ourselves
- Cluttered desk/losing things: if we don't keep our workspace organized we will waste precious time trying to find things
- Lack of self-discipline: we are our own worst enemies; we know what we should be doing but somehow end up doing something else
- Procrastination: again we choose to put things off until later at our peril
- An inability to say no: particularly to our friends or boss
- Endless meetings: rushing from one meeting to another is a sure sign that things are out of control

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So those are the sorts of challenges we face and the best way to deal with them is by developing better time awareness.

Time Awareness

This book will show you how to develop that better time awareness through a process of:

- 1 Understanding how (and perhaps more importantly why) you choose to spend your time as you do now
- 2 Identifying and eliminating any current time wasting activities that prevent you from doing the things that really matter
- 3 Planning to make the best possible use of the time that is available to you
- 4 Learning how to set achievable goals and developing the plans that will allow you to meet them
- 5 Learning how to delegate effectively and control the process of delegation for your own benefit and that of the people you delegate to
- 6 Learning techniques to manage interruptions, clear the clutter and get yourself organized
- 7 Making time available in your daily schedule to allow you to think creatively
- 8 Finding time to relax and enjoy life both at work and outside of it
- 9 Developing a personal action plan that will bring it all together and allow you to achieve your time management goals and life plans

Follow this process through the book to maximize your effective time management.

The Paradox of Time

Have you ever found yourself thinking something like:

"I'd like to be able to manage my time better but I can never seem to find the time to do it!"

Well, picking up this book is the first step in that process. This book will show you exactly how to do it in easy steps.

We Can't Manage Time

The first thing to say is that time management is not about managing time itself. No one can do that, even Albert Einstein could not manage time, just study it. Time management is about managing the way we spend the time that is available to us.

Poor Time Management

There's a real need for effective time management because poor time management can leave us feeling very frustrated at the end of the working day. Things don't get completed and we carry them forward on an ever-extending To Do list. Or worse still we end up taking them home with us to work on later but when we try to do it we find we can't concentrate.

The longer we work without adequate breaks to rest, relax and recharge our batteries, the poorer the quality of the work that we do becomes. Our effectiveness goes way down. The To Do list gets longer and longer and all of this produces stress. Does any of this sound familiar?

Symptoms

We looked at some of the challenges we face in the previous topic but some of these challenges are actually symptoms of things that are wrong. Things such as:

- Crisis Management - Rushing from one problem to the next and responding to the latest, most urgent crisis is a symptom of someone who is out of control of their time. It is not only stressful for them it is also stressful for everyone else around them.
- Being at Everyone's Beck and Call - The more we look after other people the more dependent on us they become. We try to help people but we can end up doing their work for them as well as trying to do our own work! This is a real lose-lose situation.

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- On a Treadmill - We can find ourselves on some sort of treadmill where we just keep on struggling uphill but seem to get nowhere. This situation not only causes frustration but becomes very stressful. The problem is we just keep on doing things out of a sense of responsibility or habit.

The Plan

We need to break the mould and decide how we can use our time most effectively for our organization and ourselves:

- 1 Start now: there is no time like the present and if you put it off until you are ready, you never will be (see the comments on procrastination on page 24)
- 2 Be fully committed: this exercise is going to change your life and if you go at it in a half-hearted manner it will never work out
- 3 Set your goal: if you don't have a clear objective you will never be able to achieve it
- 4 Make a plan: if you don't have a plan you will never get to achieve your goal
- 5 Watch yourself: if you start to identify any of the symptoms of poor time management, review where you are and reappraise what you are trying to achieve
- 6 See it through: you can pick and choose the topics that address your greatest needs but if you don't work right through your plan, you will never reach your goal
- 7 Include life outside work: we spend around one third of our life sleeping, one third working and one third relaxing and being with our loved ones. All three are equally important for a happy and successful life

Follow these steps and you will escape from the paradox of time and begin a happier and more successful life.

Beware



Do not neglect the other two thirds of your life as it is equally if not more important than work!

What is Time?

We know there are 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, 24 hours in a day, 365 days in a year (occasionally 366) and, with luck, 70+ years in a lifetime. There is absolutely no point in trying to change any of that. Time is fixed and we cannot change it. All we can do is try to use it more effectively.

Time Seems to Change

Interestingly time does seem to speed up and slow down:

- Remember when you were young how time seemed to go so slowly? The summers seemed to last forever but unfortunately so too did the school terms
- As we begin to get older time seems to speed up and the years just seem to fly past

But it's not just with age that the passage of time seems to change, consider also:

- When we are busy or enjoying ourselves, time just seems to fly past and suddenly it's time to go and we find ourselves wondering where all the time went
- Conversely when we are bored or waiting for something, time just seems to crawl by. After an eternity of waiting for a bus, train or plane we look at our watch and find only five minutes has elapsed

But time hasn't changed; it is still elapsing at the same rate. What has changed is our perception of the passage of time. So if we can somehow harness this perception to our advantage we can begin to make better use of our time.

Time Management

To make our use of time more effective, we need to consider two aspects of time management. First there are things that we want to do, given that we have the time necessary to do them. Second there are the things we would like to stop doing in order to give us some of that time.

What we Want to Do

The sort of things we want to do are:

- To use our time more effectively so that we can concentrate on doing the things that really matter

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- Given the finite amount of time available, we would like to get more done in that available time
- We would very much like to strike the right balance between work and ourselves, friends and loved ones. This is often referred to as “quality of life”
- We would also like to feel in more control of our time and life so that we can concentrate on doing the things that really matter to us
- And perhaps most of all, we want to feel more relaxed about our work and life

Things we Want to Stop Doing

On the other hand we want to stop:

- Any waste of time: as time is so precious and valuable any waste of it is a lost opportunity to do something more meaningful and important
- Forgetting important things that really matter to us; birthdays, anniversaries and any other important events
- Rushing to meet deadlines: particularly when those deadlines are sometimes meaningless to us and often almost impossible to achieve
- Being late for meetings: as we know that means we won't be properly prepared and still worse we may have kept other people, who were on time, waiting
- Feeling out of control: as we know that we are less effective when we are not fully in control
- Feeling stressed: as that not only leads to poor health but we are much more likely to make mistakes when we are in a highly stressed state

So we have two checklists of things we want to do more of and things we want to do less of or stop altogether. If you can do even some of these your time will be spent more effectively. The greater the pressure you are currently under, the greater the benefit of addressing this issue. It follows that effective time management will bring the greatest benefit to people who are busy.



The Cost of Time

We've all heard the business expression "Time is Money" but is it true? In some ways it is, as your time costs the business you work for money. This is true whether you work for an organization or work for yourself. It is certainly true in a production environment where stopping a production process and then having to restart it can be extremely costly in real money terms of lost production or lost customer goodwill.

But is it true in a business management or knowledge worker environment? Consider the following:

- You can always make some more money if you need it but you can't make or buy time; once it has gone it is gone forever
- So perhaps time is actually more valuable than money
- We try to save money in order to invest it wisely for our future benefit
- Perhaps what we need to do is to try and do the same for time and invest it wisely for our future benefit

Working Time Cost

But you can put a cost on your working time, whether you work for an organization or for yourself. In fact if you work for a large organization that uses cross-charging you may already know exactly what your time costs but if not, here is an easy way of calculating it:

- 1 Take your annual gross salary cost, before any deductions and including the average of any commission or bonus payments that you receive
- 2 Double it. The resultant figure equates to the cost of employing you in that it allows for the cost of premises, management, taxes and other costs that your employer (or yourself if you are self-employed) also pays to keep you functioning in the business
- 3 Divide it by 40. That's the average number of fully productive weeks you will work in an average year. This allows for holidays, vacations, sickness, training, attending company meetings and all the other things that eat into

Beware



Most people and their employers believe it's a much bigger number than this!

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your time. If you work for an organization that records employees' time for billing purposes and if employees fill in their time sheets honestly you should be able to verify it. The author has been recording his and other employees' time for many years and this is an honest average

- 4 Divide it by the number of hours you are contracted to work in a week, which should not be more than 40 and hopefully somewhat less in these enlightened times
- 5 The answer is the cost to your employer (or yourself if you work for yourself) for each hour you work, regardless of how productive you are in that working hour

Here is a worked example of a typical knowledge worker's costs to their employer:

Hourly Cost Calculation

Gross Annual Salary:	\$60,000
Cost of Employment Overheads:	\$60,000
Total Cost of Employment:	\$120,000
Cost of one week's work:	\$3,000
Cost of one hour's work:	\$75

So that's an example of the real cost to our employers of one hour of our time while we are at work. That is the cost whether we are working productively or not and whether or not what we are doing is bringing any real benefit to the business.

Work out your own real cost per hour and every time you wonder if you should do something or not ask yourself this question: Is what I am about to do worth \$75 (or whatever your cost works out to be) per hour to my employer? If the answer turns out to be no, should you be doing it?

Hot tip



Any time you get a salary increase re-work your costs, it will help you keep your feet on the ground!

Accepting Responsibility

If you are going to develop an effective approach to the way you manage your time, the very first thing you must do is to accept responsibility. You are the only person who can do anything about improving your time management. So ask yourself some questions about the way you use your time:

Who's in Control?

Who is really in control of your time? Is it your boss? Is it your subordinates? Is it your co-workers and colleagues?

The answer should be you and only you. Your boss, subordinates and co-workers can all ask you to do things for them and they can ask you to prioritize one piece of work over another but at the end of the day they are not in control of your time. Regardless of what other people may ask you to do, it is you who decides what to do next. So the real question to ask yourself is: are you in control of your time or is time in control of you?

Can you Change?

Having accepted that you are responsible for the way you use your time, the next question to ask yourself is: can you change your approach to the way you use time?

If you want to develop an effective approach to time management the answer has to be yes. If you stop doing the things that waste time and begin to choose the right things to do, you will start to free up your time immediately and be more effective.

Does it Make Sense?

The final question to ask yourself is: does this make sense for you and will it make sense for your organization?

If it does then you are ready to take the first step, which is to define your personal objectives using the form opposite. Be honest with yourself about what you really want to achieve both in terms of your work and your personal life.

SMART Objectives

Objectives should be SMART: Strategic, in that they should really matter; Measurable, so you can track your progress; Agreed with anyone else they impact on; Realistic, as there is no point aiming for something that is completely out of reach; and Timed, as if you don't have a target date they will never be completed.

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Personal Objectives

What is your ultimate aim in life?

What is your goal in improving your time management?

What benefits do you think this will bring in your working life?

What benefits do you think this will bring in your private life?

What are the things you want to do more of?

What are the things you want to do less of?

How this Book is Organized

The rest of this book is organized in such a way that you can work your way straight through it but it is also sectioned into chapters that deal with specific topics so you can pick out the areas of most benefit to you.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this first chapter we have introduced the subject and why we need time management. It has set out a few of the issues and some of the benefits of using more effective time management.

Chapter 2: Time Flies

In chapter two we will look at where all the time goes and some of the common problems we all face. It introduces the importance of developing a time log to record how you currently spend your time, how to analyze it and how you can begin to change the way you work.

Chapter 3: Priorities

Building on the time usage and analysis from the previous chapter we begin to explore the development of long term plans, medium term plans and daily plans. It then explains the most effective way of prioritizing what you actually spend your time on.

Chapter 4: More on Time

Not all time is the same and chapter four explores how you can establish your most productive time in order to use it to the best advantage. It also introduces some other techniques you can use to become more effective.

Chapter 5: Getting Organized

In chapter five we look at organizing your workspace and the way you communicate to make the most effective use of your time. We also look at some of the tools that can help you organize your time more effectively.

Chapter 6: Saying No

No one likes to say no but if you don't learn how to do it correctly you will never be fully effective in managing your time.

Chapter 7: Distractions

In chapter seven we look at the real cost of interruptions and other distractions and how you can minimize their impact by managing them effectively.

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Chapter 8: Effective Meetings

We all spend time in meetings and often far too much time. Chapter eight explores how you can make meetings more effective by preparation, controlling the meeting and the all-important follow up, so that everyone benefits.

Chapter 9: Effective Delegation

We can't do everything ourselves so we all need to delegate. We look in this chapter at some of the problems with delegation and how you can learn to delegate effectively.

Chapter 10: Home Working

More and more of us are working from home some of, or all of, the time. But rather than being a blessing this can sometimes introduce even more problems with your time management. Chapter ten looks at how you can deal with these problems and work effectively from home.

Chapter 11: Stress

Stress can make your life a misery and lead to serious illness. We look at the causes of stress, the outward signs of it and what you can do to reduce it.

Chapter 12: Life and Everything

Yes there is a life outside of work and it is vitally important if you are to live a happy and healthy life. In this chapter we look at why you should schedule these non-working activities into your life and how they will help you at work.

Chapter 13: Personal Action Plan

The final chapter outlines an approach to developing a personal action plan to take you on the next step of your journey through life. It ends with a helpful list of the top 20 tips for effective time management.

While you can 'cherry pick' any of the chapters or topics that interest you, it is worth working through the first three chapters as they set out the guidelines for developing effective time management.

If you utilize just a few of the techniques in this book you will be able to make substantial improvements in your time management. And the good news is, the more you use the better it gets.

Summary

- Time management is not about the time you spend working but about the *way* you spend your working time
- Rather than working longer and longer hours and working 'harder' we need to think about working 'smarter'
- Effective time management can result in substantial benefits to you and your organization
- Seven steps to effective time management: understand what you spend your time on now; identify what you want to achieve; develop a plan for achieving it; include time in your daily plan for things that will happen; prioritize the important tasks; review at the end of each day; and review progress at the strategic level
- We need time management to cope with the everyday challenges we face and increasing our time awareness will help us deal with them
- We can't manage time itself but we can manage the way we use the time that is available to us
- Rather than taking work home and ruining our personal time, effective time management will provide the solution
- Develop a plan to break out of the current situation and begin a happier and more successful life
- Time is difficult to define and we can't change it but it does seem to speed up when we are busy and slow down when we are not busy so we need to harness this to our advantage
- We need to identify the positive things we want to do more of and also the things we want to stop doing
- Time is not money, it is far more important than that and we should invest it wisely for our future benefit
- The first step towards effective time management is to recognise that you are the one person responsible for how you spend your time
- Once you have accepted that, you can start to define your personal objectives for what you want to get from life and what you want to get from effective time management