

Learn to manage your time effectively

How often have you said or heard someone say, "But I haven't got the time!"? The fact is, however, that you do have the time. You have as much time as you or anyone else will ever have. You have your whole life. To manage your time is to manage your life.

Time management really boils down to deciding what you really want to do, then doing it in the most effective way possible. You must decide for yourself that you control your time. You do this by deciding what your priorities are. If you let others decide for you, you will end up having time demands placed on you that are impossible to meet.

In one 24-hour day you cannot work for eight hours, put in three hours of housework, take four hours to go to a meeting, spend three hours with your children, take two hours to work on your favorite hobby, help a friend with a problem... plus eat and sleep a reasonable number of hours. You may decide for example to give your hobby a rest on the days you're working at the job and cut the meeting time down by an hour or two. Whatever the case, you must decide what is most important. Whatever is most important is where you put your time.

Have you ever felt that you got all the little, unimportant things done but didn't get around to the important things? This is because you didn't set your priorities, or if you did, you didn't do the important things first! Always be asking yourself: "Why am I doing this?" and "What should I be doing now?" The answer better have something to do with accomplishing your highest priority.

Once you know what your priorities are you can plan your time better. Schedule your time in large

chunks in order to get those important things done. If writing a letter is your high priority for Tuesday evening, don't leave it until after you have done all the other little chores. Plan to spend from 7 to 8 on the letter and then do what you like afterwards.

Don't schedule every minute. This won't work any more than a budget that doesn't give you room to buy an extra stick of gum. Be flexible and leave room for unexpected events. Remember also to plan to do difficult tasks when you work best.

To work effectively, make sure you are doing the right job. Stop doing those things which serve no purpose. Ask yourself, "What would happen if I didn't do this at all?" This will help you determine whether you are being truly effective or merely efficient.

Once you have concluded that you are doing the right job, it is time to ask if you are doing it in the best way possible. Here you might be asking yourself, "Is there a better way to do this?" You can find answers to this question by reading books, asking other people who do the same thing, and asking people who don't do this particular thing. Sometimes a stranger to a task can give you a fresh look at it.

You alternately may decide to do the job more quickly and not demand such a high standard from yourself. Not all tasks require the same effort. Put your effort where it counts and don't waste effort where there is little to be gained. Striving for absolute perfection in everything may mean never approaching perfection in anything. If something you do requires a top quality job, be prepared to invest some money as well as time. You might want to hire some help or buy some materials that will lend that

professional look to what you do.

Speaking of investment, you can make investments in time or money which end up saving you time. A new sewing machine or a power tool costs money in the first place but may pay dividends in time required for sewing or fixing things around the house. You can also invest time to save time. Take for example the time you are taking to read this article. Hopefully, it will pay off in the way you manage your time and your life. You will save time too if you take time to plan your day or plan your week. Managing time does take time but the payoff is worth it — you will end up feeling that you do have time!

One of the best ways to save time is to learn to do more than one thing at a time. The key word is "while". You can be practicing a speech while you are driving. You can be making dinner while the clothes are washing or drying. You can read while you are waiting for a doctor's appointment. Just make sure you don't try reading the newspaper while driving!

Saving time also means making one effort count more than once. If you are going shopping, try to buy as much at one time as is possible. The time taken to get to the store might as well be used for everything you can foresee needing. Otherwise, you will be wasting time as you go to the store again tomorrow and then again the next day. When you are making the trip to the store you might also do an errand in that direction or see a friend who lives in the area. Both activities cut down on additional travelling time. In writing this article I am making the effort count twice — to provide you with some thought-provoking ideas and also to get ideas straight in my mind for a course I put on.

You may say at this point, "All