Time Management Success
Do What Matters

Newsletter Article Selection Collection

www.time-management-success.com

Contents:

Introduction

This short 'taster' ebook has been put together to give you an idea of the type of articles you can expect to receive in the Time Management Success newsletter.

I've selected twelve previous articles covering a range of time management related topics, all which which will, hopefully, be of interest and, more importantly, of use to you.

Sign up, and you'll get time management ideas, articles, tips and offers delivered to your inbox on the first Tuesday of every month (you can unsubscribe at any time).

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The Power of Choice

How often do you find yourself saying that you 'need to' do this or that you've 'got to' do that?

Here's a tip that may change the way you look at things:

Change from saying '*I have to*, *'I've got to'* or *'I need to'* with...

'I want to'.

Why?

Well, actually, we don't have to do anything. It's simply that we'd prefer not to face the consequences of the alternative.

For instance, if you choose not to go to work, you'll either not get paid, possibly feel guilty if you took a sick day, or even lose your job.

So you make a *choice* to go to work, and if you choose to go, even if you don't feel like it, you can say that you want to.

This actually applies to pretty much everything in life.

So, what are the benefits in using 'want to' rather than the other overused alternatives?

Here are three reasons:

- By recognizing we have a choice in everything we then control the task rather than allowing it to control us.

- Thinking or saying that you 'want to' will help you adopt a more positive attitude to the task ahead, however unpleasant it may appear to be, because it's a reminder that you've chosen to do it.

- Realizing that we have the power to choose virtually everything can create a real sense of freedom; imagine realizing that you never *have* to do anything again! It sounds ridiculous, but it's possible. It's just a mindset.

Don't worry if you keep churning out the 'have to' comments. Make a conscious effort to keep replacing them with 'want to' until you've ingrained the habit. Put it into practice for the rest of today and see how you get on.

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Time v Tasks

There are two ways to organize your day:

1) by time

2) by tasks

If you organize your day by **time** you're essentially committing a portion of it to work on something. Whether or not you complete the whole thing is less important than the fact that you actually make some progress with it.

Spending time on something improves it, but doesn't necessarily mean that you'll finish it.

If you organize your day by **tasks** you're obviously aiming to complete one, then move on to the next, and so on. This is great for getting things done, but it you'll have less control over your day.

Gettings things done can, and often does, take longer than expected.

Which way of working is best?

Well, it all depends on the context of the situation you're in...

Only you can judge whether or not an activity needs to be completed, or if it's better to move it forward.

The point is that you'll really benefit by planning, ideally before the start of the day, what it is (in terms of your tasks and projects) that you want to do.

Try to 'move on' with your current project(s). Most of the time, it's a question of how much progress you make rather than actually completing.

Make a list of tasks, estimate how long each one will take and build in a contingency buffer of time to allow for those unforeseen issues that will inevitably crop up.

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What's the Cost?

What's the cost if you...

- habitually check your phone when it alerts you
- say yes
- say no
- say 'I'll get back to you'
- don't use a timer on tasks
- don't or won't delegate it to someone else
- don't check the weather forecast
- open another tab
- have a messy desktop
- leave your phone on your desk
- stop for that water cooler chat
- have a late night
- don't make a daily task list
- do something you know is 'not on the list'
- put the paperwork there
- are late
- don't ask for clarification
- put it off
- rush it
- do it perfectly
- do it now
- do it later
- don't do it at all
- don't know your what your role is
- don't know your what your goal is
- don't know how to do it
- ignore what is important but not urgent

... to you, your family, friends, health, wealth or career?

Think of your time as money.

Everything you do, or decide not to do, has a price.

When you manage your time well you pay less for everything; in fact, you only pay for things that are worth paying for.

Have I lost you yet?!

I probably need to clarify; here's what I mean:

Imagine the following scenario...

You're at work, about to start your lunch break. If you work through it, you could get home 30 minutes earlier, but you 'pay' by losing that break in the middle of the day.

What's more important to you? A break in the day or more time at home?

There's no 'right' answer; obviously your circumstances will probably affect how you feel about the choice. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they will.

Challenge yourself about the way you habitually do things, and remember that you *do* have a choice.

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Make It Easier

Is your workspace conducive to work?

It's a lot easier to do what matters if you create the right conditions around you first.

The physical environment we create has a big impact on the things we do. If something is easy to reach, see or hear, it will demand more attention. Leave tasty snack on your desk and you'll know what I mean!

Action Idea:

Choose a set number of minutes (whatever you feel like doing).

Spend that time looking for ways to improve your environment.

Consider...

- What do you use most? Can you make it easier to get hold of?

- What's in the way? Could it be moved somewhere more appropriate?

- What distracts you? Why? What could you do about it?

- What deserves to be seen? What doesn't?

Create a space that make it easier to do what you want to do and harder to do what you don't.

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Just a Thought...

You have 24 hours to fill every day. How you choose to use them *is* your personal time management.

You can't avoid filling your day - it happens, whether you want it to or not.

So, the question is...

How will you fill the 'free' time you have available for the rest of today?

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The Goldilocks Approach to Punctuality

The month of April always reminds me of a prank I played on my family back when I was 16 years old.

In the early hours of the first day of the month, I slipped out of my bedroom, as quiet as a mouse, with a mission in mind.

As everyone slept, I moved every clock and watch in the house forward by one hour.

That morning my parents went to work an hour early, while my brother and sister wondered why the sky was so dark as the walked to school.

(They got their revenge with an early morning iced water attack, but that's another story…)

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Joking aside, punctuality is an issue that we all have to manage each day. It's also a habit that we all tend to repeat.

Are you punctual?

Being on time has many benefits:

- **You feel calm.** We all know the stress that comes from being late to something that matters. Habitually being on time makes that feeling a rarer occurrence.

- **You're ready.** Things invariably take time to set up and prepare for. Being punctual significantly reduces the risk.

- **You can plan.** When you've made time to plan you will profit throughout the day because you know exactly what you want to do. In essence, you 'reduce the random'.

- **You get off to a good start.** Rather than playing catch up you get the ball rolling and build the momentum as the day goes on.

- **You get a reputation.** If you're punctual, people probably won't notice. If you're late you can bet your bottom dollar that they will.

- **It shows how much you care.** If something is really important you'll show up. On the flip side, lateness tells it's own story too.

The trick is to be on time without wasting too much time waiting; not too late, not too early, but 'just right'.

How to do that?

Here are four tips:

- **Develop an evening routine.** Set things up and get them ready for the next day. If you've never done this before it takes a few goes to get it just right, but it's always worth it. Try it this evening.

- **Develop a morning routine.** Most mornings follow a weekly pattern. Work out what you need to do and how much time you need to do it. Allow some slack for when things go wrong.

- **Have something to look forward to.** Getting up can be hard -- what's more appealing than a nice warm bed? In all honesty, not much! But the thought of a cup of tea, a hot shower, or whatever else floats your boat certainly makes it more appealing.

- **Set your timepieces accurately.** Some people set theirs faster, but your brain is bright -- deep down you know you've got a few extra minutes, right? No, set them correctly and run your day accordingly.

Bottom line?

Punctuality is a habit that, with a bit of practice, anyone can benefit from.

Identify one thing you struggle to get to on time and improve your timekeeping with that, first.

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The Secret to Great Time Management

Who you are, the attitudes and values you hold, and the circumstances you currently find yourself in, are all perfectly understandable.

On one level you've always had the power to choose what to have, be and do.

Coke or water? Apple or chocolate? Stay or go? You'd think you had a choice, and on one level, you do.

But in another sense, our 'choices' have already been mapped out for us. What we chose (and choose) to do, be and have is simply a natural consequence of our reactions to what happened, and happens, around us.

These choices themselves are the result of of our preferences and experience, or consciousness.

Each of us are the sum of everything that has been poured into the mould that made us. The only way you or I can change and improve a state or situation is to become aware of it... to become conscious of its

meaning.

Consider your health...

Are you healthy or unhealthy? Why? What reasons, values and beliefs created your current eating and exercise habit patterns?

Unless you're truly aware of the reality that you are unhealthy, you'll probably stay that way until external circumstances force a change.

That is a fundamental law of nature. When something happens, we react to it in our best interests. That's why it's so important for us not to be too quick judge to each other.

How Does This Relate to Time Management?

In what areas of your life are you disorganized? When do you typically tend to procrastinate on projects? How often do you find yourself running late?

Without exception, there's always a good reason for when you are. Other people probably won't know why. You may not even know. But, rest assured, deep down, it hasn't 'hurt' enough not to.

No one else can improve your time management; they can only show you how YOU can.

Only *your* values, beliefs, habits and level of awareness will dictate how effective you are at managing time.

The key is to raise your awareness of the importance of time management. Doing this is the starting point. Once you really know *why* it matters, you'll have the drive to go on and do what matters.

Because you're reading this, I guess you're probably ready to learn how to do the latter.

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How to Make Time for Important but Not Urgent

The more time you can spend on doing things that matter in the long term, the less stress and pressure you will feel. Prevention is better than cure.

Sometimes this is easy -- in many instances you have already built in habits that ensure you take action now to prevent problems later.

But what if you don't? How do you tackle an important task or project *before* it blows up?

Here are three steps that will help ensure it gets completed in time:

1) Schedule it soon

Whenever you get something that you decide to do, make an appointment with yourself to start on it soon.

When is 'soon'?

Ideally the day after you get it, or the next day you'll have some time.

2) Break it down

Once you have scheduled a day to start it, do as much as your time and circumstances allow.

If you really don't know what to do, try 'time boxing' it -- work on it for as many minutes as you feel you can.

3) Think little and often

Once you have started, you have 'done' it for that day.

Re-schedule it to be re-actioned on the next suitable day. Keep doing this regularly until you complete it.

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How to Tackle Your Tasks and Projects

Here's system to ensure you get everything done that matters to you:

Your **tasks** usually require one action - all you need to do is organize how and when you do them (more on that later).

Your **projects** can be classed in two ways:

1. **Ongoing** - a series of relatively small tasks repeated over time, typically as part of a role or commitment you have (e.g. following a fitness program, managing email etc.)

2. **Standalone** - a series of different tasks leading to a specific goal (e.g. planning a vacation, organizing a social event etc.)

If you're anything like me, you'll have plenty of both on your plate at the moment.

Both tasks and projects can appear in your life at any time.

Although you cannot always predict what will show up, you can impose

order on them when they do. Doing so you means you will feel more in control, and get more done.

How to Organize Your Tasks

When a task appears in your life that you decide to do you have three choices about when to do it:

- **Now** - this is the sort of stuff that needs to be done immediately. It is very easy to react to demands and requests now, but, unless it is a genuine emergency, it is better to buffer them.

- **Today** - You may decide that a task is important enough to warrant your attention on the day you get it. In reality, most things aren't. Unless you can do it really quickly, the danger is that you will react to these tasks today at the expense of those you have scheduled...

- **The future** - This is the best place to 'park' your tasks. Ideally, schedule it for the day *after* you get it. Most actions that take longer to do they they take to write down can be scheduled for the following day. Doing so means you start each day with a finite list of tasks to accomplish.

You can organize your tasks with a task diary. Write down what you want to do under the appropriate date and use it as you would a to-do

list.

Whether you do it digitally or paper based, a single page a day diary works well.

How to Organize Your Personal Projects

At any given time you have multiple ongoing projects in your life.

Make a separate list of your projects as they appear. I use the back of my task diary. Unlike tasks, you don't need to work on each and every project each day.

Instead, as far as possible, tackle them one at a time.

See each project through to completion then move on to the next one on your list. This ensures that they all eventually get done.

This does not mean you have to complete the project in one go. Rather, you work on one project at a time, regardless of how many days or weeks it takes before you move on to the next one (obviously, deadlines will be the defining factor).

Once you know what project to work on, make sure you are clear about what the finished project will be. Then, block off some time (tomorrow) to plan each stage of the project. Break it down into specific tasks, then

work through them, day by day until the project is completed.

If for some reason the project cannot move forward (e.g. you are waiting on someone else), move on to the next project and carry that forward while you are waiting. When you can move again, go back to your initial project.

If you have several roles in your life you will have projects relating to each of them. If that is the case, the principle still applies - tackle one project at a time in each role.

To Sum Up:

Tasks - single actions
- Can be done now, today or in the future (ideally tomorrow).
- Use a task diary to schedule non urgent tasks.

Projects - more than one action. Can be ongoing or standalone.
- Make a list.
- As far as possible, work on one at a time.
- If it gets blocked move on with the next one.
- Stick to one project per role

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How to Prioritize Your Work

Have you got a list of things to be done?

If so, how do you know what to do next?

One idea is to rate each task according to its importance -- your most important tasks are A tasks, the next group are rated B, then C, and so on.

The trouble is we don't work that way. We should, but we don't.

Although this highlights what 'matters most', it ignores three unavoidable realities:

Firstly, you won't always *feel* like doing the A tasks. They are ones that, typically, need the most time, thought and effort.

As for B and C tasks, well... after doing the As, whoever gets round to doing *them*?!

Secondly, you may only have a few minutes available, which would be

better suited to one of the less (apparently) important tasks on your list. Answering emails is a classic example.

Finally, if you put something on your list, it mattered enough to you to do so.

If you only ever do the most important tasks the less important ones soon turn into priorities themselves because you didn't deal with them.

I know it seems counter intuitive, and it flies in the face of conventional time management wisdom, but there is better way to prioritize your work.

You make a list to help you do the things you write on it.

So do those things in the order that feels best for you.

When it comes to getting things done you need to operate with diversity and freedom, not to be confined by the tyranny of a sequentially ordered to-do list.

The only prioritization that really works is according to urgency.

If it's on your list, and it genuinely needs doing today or tomorrow, do it first. After all, you've got a deadline to meet, and a short one at that -- so get it done.

Everything else?

Give it equal value, then do it as and when opportunities present themselves.

For example, writing this was on my list of things to do today. I'm doing it right now as I have a two hour window in which to work without interruptions.

But other things on my list such as answering yesterday's emails, won't need as long, so I'll do them when I have a few minutes.

It doesn't matter what order you tackle your planned daily tasks as long as they all get done.

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When I say 'done' I mean take some action to move them on. Ideally you'll complete the task, but if not, re-enter it on your to-do list for the following day.

*The only thing that really matters is that you habitually **do something about everything** on your daily list, even if it is only a two minute chunk.*

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Once you build and maintain the momentum of doing something about everything on your list until it is done, you will react to far fewer things.

Of course, it still happens -- that's life -- it just happens a lot less often and feels far less stressful. Prioritizing by urgency will eventually become a rare occurrence for you.

Aim to do things when they show up, not when they blow up and you will gain a far greater sense of control over your day.

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Single Tasking – Doing It 'Till it's Done!

Does multi-tasking work?

It depends on how you define it. What *does* work is 'single tasking' - one of the most important time management skills you can master.

One of the most common problems many of us struggle with is not finishing what we started.

Let's face it -- *starting* a task can be hard enough.

But *completing* the job presents a whole new set of challenges to overcome. Distractions and disruptions can so easily stop use from seeing something through to the end.

Whenever you decide to get something done, use single tasking to do it. Focusing on doing it exclusively until it's 100% completed will improve your productivity and cut out time wasted on half finished projects.

The main reason is that this way of working is so efficient. It prevents 'stop-start syndrome'.

What happens when you stop and do something else? You either lose interest in the first task, or you have to come back and try to remember where to pick up where you were with it.

You're far more efficient and effective when you focus fully on seeing a task through to the end.

This doesn't apply to projects, working on something for hours without a break. Rather, it means choosing not to start anything else. Single tasking will cut down the amount of time it takes to complete any task or project.

The key word there?

'Choose'.

Throughout the rest of today, you'll have choices about each of the tasks to be done. With the next one that you do, you can see it through, or you can drop it and do something else.

How does this actually work?

As with other time management principles, single tasking is a habit to to apply as often as you can, but within the context of the rest of your life. It works well for relatively short tasks.

What about projects that need several hours' worth of work?

Clearly single tasking isn't practical.

But the clue's in the name: single tasking applies to *tasks*, not projects.

Break projects up into manageable chunks and, as far as possible, single task each one.

(If you're doing it online, *Now Do This* is a great little tool for helping you to focus on finishing one task at a time before moving on to the next.)

What about tasks that take too long? Or if finishing it has a knock-on effect for the other things you have to do?

As far as possible, fit the task to the time you have available.

If you have a decent amount of time at your disposal, use it to complete a task that you estimate will take as long as the time you have available. Or get your teeth into a larger chunk of your current project.

On the other hand, if you only have a few minutes, use them to tick off one or two of the smaller tasks on your to-do list.

Next time you do a task, ask yourself what it means to finish it.

Sometimes, this is easy to define. Other times you have to decide what constitutes 'good enough'.

Whatever your definition of Done, decide to single task everything for the rest of today and see what impact it has.

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When You Manage Time Well... But Others Don't

If you try to manage your time effectively, sooner or later you will do. Not only that, but you'll do so consistently.

This is great - you get to spend more time doing what matters, and you'll probably feel better about yourself, too.

But no person is an island. You'll have to interact with other people, and this means that, to a greater or lesser extent, you probably have to rely on *their* time management skills.

And that can be a real challenge.

Someone else may turn up late (or not at all). They may have misunderstood what was arranged, or they may have a completely different way of approaching time management to you.

So what can you do?

My approach to this is twofold.

On the one hand, communicate clearly, ideally in writing, exactly what has been agreed. Don't assume they will know what's been arranged.

Confirm Who, What, When, Where and, ideally, Why.

Secondly, hard as it can be, practice patience. People are busy; they have their own things going on, and, when they let you down, it's tempting to become angry or upset.

Don't let it worry you. You can only really control yourself, and, even then, you're fallible, just like the rest of us.

This article isn't going to win the Pulitzer prize; it's just a simple reminder to cover your bases, to not sweat the small stuff, and to remember that we're all dealing with life as best we can.

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