

Thirteen Timely Tips for More Effective Time Management

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Thirteen straight forward time management tips are summarized in this NebGuide.

Spend Time Planning and Organizing. Using time to think and plan is time well-spent. In fact, according to time management pioneer Alan Lakein, failing to plan is in effect, planning to fail. Organize in a way that makes sense to you. If you need color and pictures, use them on your calendar or planning book or in your electronic organizer. Some people need to have papers filed away; others get their creative energy from their piles. So forget the “should’s” and organize your way.

Set Goals. Goals give your life, and the way you spend your time, direction. When asked the secret to amassing a fortune, one of the wealthy Hunt brothers from Texas replied: “First you’ve got to decide what you want.” Set goals that are specific, measurable, realistic and achievable. Your optimum goals are those that cause you to “stretch” but not “break” as you strive for achievement. Goals can give creative people a much-needed sense of direction.

Prioritize. Use the 80-20 Rule originally stated by the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto. He noted that 80 percent of the reward comes from 20 percent of the effort. The trick to prioritizing is to isolate and identify that valuable 20 percent. Once identified, prioritize time to concentrate your work on those items with the greatest reward. Prioritize by color, number or letter — whichever method makes the most sense to you. Flagging items with a deadline is another idea to help stick to priorities.

Use a “To Do” List. Some people thrive using a daily “to do” list constructed either the last thing the previous day or first thing in the morning. Such people may combine a “to do” list with a calendar or schedule. Others prefer a “running to do” list that is continuously being updated. Or you may prefer a combination of the previously described methods. Do whatever way works best. Don’t be afraid to try a new system — it might work even better than your present one!

Be Flexible. Allow time for interruptions and distractions. Time management experts often suggest planning for 50 percent or less of one’s time. With just 50 percent of your

time planned, you will have the flexibility to handle interruptions and any unplanned “emergency.” When you expect to be interrupted, schedule routine tasks. Save larger blocks of time for priorities. When interrupted, ask Alan Lakein’s question, “What is the most important thing I can be doing with my time right now?” to help you get back on track fast.

Consider Your Biological Prime Time. That’s the time of day when you are at your best. Are you a “morning person,” a “night owl,” or a late afternoon “super person?” Know when your best time is and plan to use that time of day for your priorities, if possible.

Do the Right Thing Right. Noted management expert, Peter Drucker, said “doing the right thing is more important than doing things right.” Doing the right thing is effectiveness; doing things right is efficiency. Focus first on effectiveness (identifying what is the right thing to do), then concentrate on efficiency (doing it right).

Eliminate the Urgent. Urgent tasks have short-term consequences while important tasks are those with long-term, goal-related implications. Work toward reducing the necessary urgent things so you’ll have more time for your important priorities. Flagging or highlighting items on your “to do” list or attaching a deadline to each item may help keep important items from becoming urgent emergencies.

Practice the Art of Intelligent Neglect. Eliminate from your life trivial tasks or those tasks that do not have long-term consequences for you. Can you delegate or eliminate any of your “to do” list? Work on those tasks which only you can do.

Avoid Being a Perfectionist. Many cultures have a belief that only gods are considered capable of producing anything perfect. When people in these cultures make something, a flaw is left on purpose so the gods will not be offended. Some things need to be closer to perfect than others, but perfectionism, paying unnecessary attention to detail, can waste time and be a form of procrastination.

Conquer Procrastination. One technique to try is the “Swiss cheese” method described by Alan Lakein. When you are avoiding something, break it into smaller tasks and do just one of the smaller tasks. Or set a timer and work on the big task for just 15 minutes. By doing a little at a time, eventually you’ll reach a point where you’ll want to finish.

Learn to Say “No.” Such a small word — and so hard to say. Focusing on your goals may help. Blocking time for important, but often not scheduled, priorities can also help. But first you must be convinced that you and your priorities are important — that seems to be the hardest part in learning to say “no.” Once convinced of their importance, saying “no” to the unimportant in life gets easier.

Reward Yourself. Even for small successes, celebrate achievement of goals. Promise yourself a reward for completing a task or finishing the total job. Then keep your promise to yourself and indulge in your reward.

Resources

Druker, P. (2002). *The Effective Executive* (4th ed.). New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.

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**Index: Families
Management**
Issued September 2007

Extension is a Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln cooperating with the Counties and the United States Department of Agriculture.

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