

Planning, Problem Solving and Decision Making

Time management works best when you think of your day as a series of decisions that you'll make, big and small. Every decision, no matter how simple or complicated, affects your progress toward your goals and time management.

Follow these principles of good planning and decision making, and you may find that a lack of time becomes less of an issue.

1 Set SMART goals. Planning experts recommend that the goals you set be **SMART**: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ewarding and **T**imely. Measure every goal you set against these five principles.

2 Take prompt action. When a problem arises, take steps to solve it right away so it doesn't eat up your time. Define the problem and its scope; gather together the key people who are affected by the problem and are needed to help solve it; then move forward.

3 Weigh possible outcomes. Brainstorm ideas when you're faced with a big decision. Then spin out each idea to its outcome so you can see the pros and cons of each possible decision. This analysis will help you make the right choice and execute it efficiently.

4 Plan well. Make goal setting, decision making and planning part of your routine. Don't just set a goal or make a major decision and walk away. Make time to solicit feedback, revisit schedules and to-do lists, and analyze results to stay on track. Moving forward in the wrong direction wastes time.

5 Make decisions in steps. Some small decisions are made quickly and without much thought. But larger decisions require more time and more thought. The main steps to making large decisions are defining the scope, getting ideas, analyzing outcomes, gathering resources and taking action.

The bottom line: Save time in your weekly schedule for planning. Time spent planning ahead can save you hours down the road and can help ensure that you're always moving toward your goals.

More Time Management Success Strategies

Remember the 80/20 rule. The "Pareto Principle" states that 80 percent of your unfocused efforts go toward achieving only 20 percent of your results. Conversely, that means only 20 percent of your best efforts go where they're truly effective. Good time management can improve that percentage.

Faced with a large long-term project? When breaking down large projects into small chunks, plan on each component taking you no more than a couple of hours to complete.

Make your to-do list work better by attaching a time estimate to each task. Knowing how long each item will most likely take can help you piece together an accomplished day. Also, you'll get a picture of whether you're spending too much or too little time on certain areas.

Track your time. Jot down how long you spend on every task during your day; then think of ways you could save time (delegating, simplifying, changing procedures). You'll be surprised how much you can cut back.

Chart your progress. Toiling away without seeing any results is a sure recipe for burnout. Set short-term goals that you can accomplish so you feel a sense of pride. Celebrate your accomplishments along the way, no matter how small.

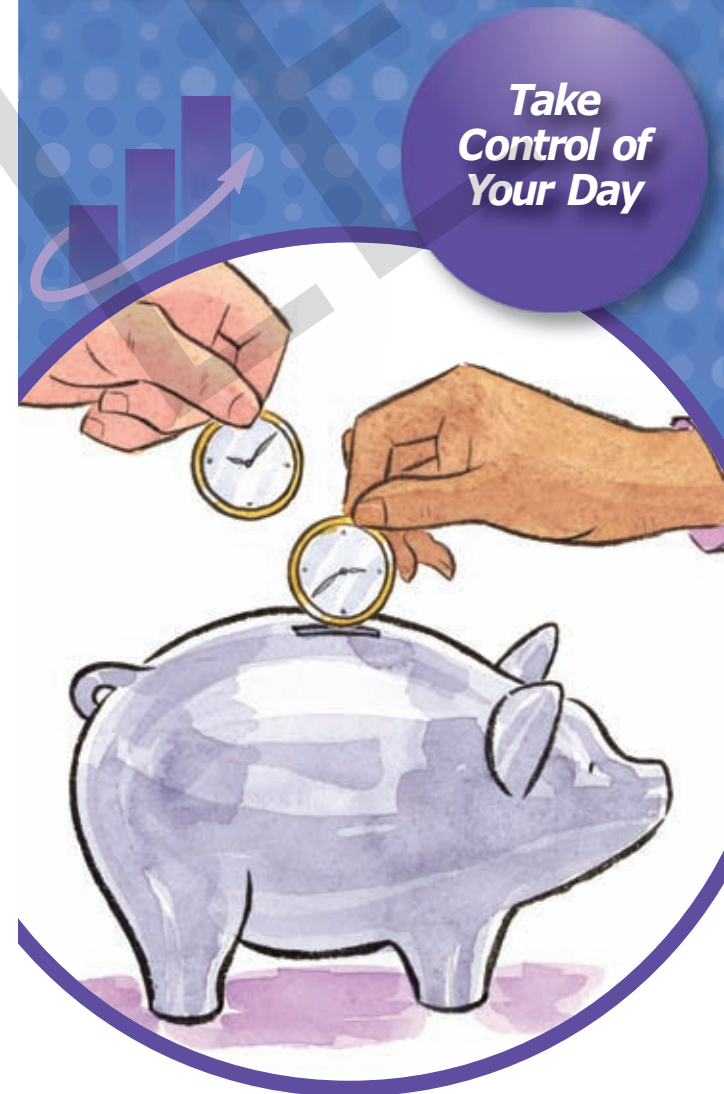
Lose excess baggage. As you review and prioritize your to-do list, ask yourself which tasks can be deleted or rescheduled. Don't waste time doing — or worrying about doing — things that aren't absolutely essential.

Don't let stress steal your time. Maybe today is manageable, but you're worrying about tomorrow or yesterday. Stress makes it difficult for your mind to focus and can make you feel like your time is more out of control than it truly is. Put some stress management techniques into your time management toolbox, and practice them regularly. Try 30 minutes of exercise, 10 deep breaths, stretching, playing a sport, doing a hobby, visualizing your successful completion of a task or meditating to relieve stress.

Final thought: The minutes tick by ... whether you're using your time wisely or wasting it. Time doesn't have to be your enemy. Recognize which habits need to change, and take steps to take control.

21 Ways to Save Time

Take Control of Your Day



Put Time on Your Side

Take a look at these statements:

- There never seem to be enough hours in the day to get everything done.
- I'm busy all the time, but at the end of the day I feel like I have accomplished little.
 - I shortchange myself on sleep, healthy meals or leisure time in order to do more.

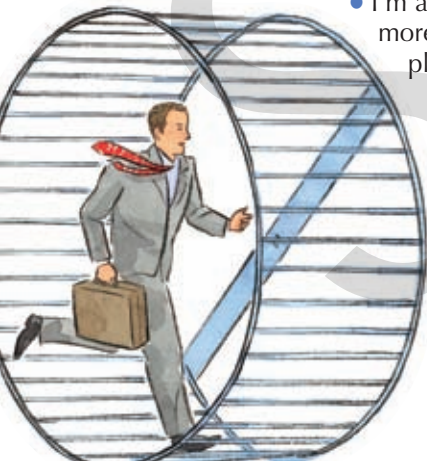
Sound familiar? There's no magic way to add time to your day, but if you learn to better manage the time you have, you'll feel better and get more done in less time. It's not about being busier — it's about working smarter and maximizing the time you do have. This brochure gives you 21 easy ways to do that.

Is Your Time Under Control?

Circle true or false for each statement:

- I often feel like I am running to catch up. . . . **T F**
- Most days, I leave tasks unfinished. **T F**
- I can't let go of anything until I think it's perfect. **T F**
- I never get to the end of my to-do list. **T F**
- I'm not sure where my time goes. **T F**
- I'm always taking on more, even when my plate is full. **T F**

If you answered true to more than two statements, you might find the following time management tips useful. **Read on for time ideas that can make a difference.**



21 WAYS TO SAVE TIME

- 1. Out with perfection.** Recognize that while doing good work is an admirable goal, seeking perfection is futile.
- 2. Set specific goals.** Personal and professional, daily and long term — have a clear picture of what you want to accomplish so you don't waste time on unimportant tasks.
- 3. Get a strong start.** Save important tasks for when you're most alert.
- 4. Find tools that work for you.** Whether it's a calendar, a planner, a whiteboard, a PDA or notepad, find a tool you like and use it daily.
- 5. Stop procrastinating.** Gather your resources, set a goal and a deadline, and get started!
- 6. Set boundaries.** Let people know when you're available and when not to interrupt.
- 7. Use a schedule.** Use an electronic or paper calendar to block out time for meetings, appointments, task work and other responsibilities.
- 8. Prioritize.** Separate tasks into high, medium and low priority.
- 9. Reduce information overload.** Be selective about what you want — or need — to know. Skip unnecessary phone calls, chitchat, e-mail and Internet browsing.
- 10. Set a time limit.** Accomplish as much as you can in that time, then move on to something else.
- 11. Prepare the night before.** Lay out your clothes and pack snacks and lunch for work. Organize your bag or briefcase so that it's ready to go.
- 12. Bundle similar activities.** Set aside a block of time for returning calls, filing or writing reports.
- 13. Break down large tasks.** Huge projects can lead to procrastination and disorganization. Break projects down into smaller goals, each with its own schedule and list of tasks to accomplish.
- 14. Leave some breathing room.** Make sure your schedule allows time for interruptions, mistakes, setbacks and distractions.
- 15. Accept that time is out of your hands.** It's been said many times: You can't manage time, but you can manage yourself. Recognize that time marches on, no matter what kind of day you're having. If your day gets out of control, regroup and try again.

16. Be cautious about multitasking. Your mind can really only focus on one thing at a time. Performing two or more tasks simultaneously slows you down and increases chances for errors.

17. Learn to delegate. Done right, delegation not only frees up your time, but also creates an opportunity for someone else to improve skills and gain experience.

18. Create routines. Decide on how you will handle interruptions, prepare for meetings or start your day. Processes and routines can help you work more efficiently.

19. Turn down e-mail alerts. Wean yourself from the beep and the blink. Schedule time to check e-mail.



20. Get organized.

Put materials away, organize paperwork and toss out what you don't need. Spend less time looking for lost items.

21. Use waiting time.

Got a minute? Do something ... water a plant, cross items off your to-do list, write a quick e-mail, make an appointment, eat a healthy snack, check your voice mail, file a paper or put tools away.

