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TIME MANAGEMENT:

ARE YOU A TIME SAVER
OR A TIME SPENDER?

Do you feel like there is simply never enough time in the day to get your business firing on all cylinders? Your personal time management beliefs may well be contributing to your productivity downfall, but a change in mindset can do wonders for business as well as your stress levels, argues **Nikki Heald**

Do you ever wish you had more hours in the day?

Do you find yourself stressed, anxious and a little overwhelmed when tasks are incomplete? Well, if you think it's getting harder and harder to manage your time, you're certainly not alone. More and more employees are complaining about the pressure on their time and that their workload appears to be increasing.

We each have 24 hours in our day, so why is it that some people breeze seamlessly through their tasks and others struggle with time?

Time management is really about managing yourself. While we can't control the number of hours in our day, we can control the way we work. Interestingly, your personal time management beliefs may well be contributing to your productivity downfall. Are you convincing yourself that there is not enough time? Do you refrain from delegating because it's easier to do it yourself? Are you in the habit of always saying yes to others? Do you believe that multitasking makes you more efficient?

Firstly, in order to make positive time management changes it's important to develop the mindset that your time is valuable. In other words, recognising the importance of what you do and deciding what deserves your energy. The essence of working effectively is firstly knowing what to do, and secondly just doing it.

TRIVIAL INTRUSIONS

While these may appear to be very simple steps at first glance, with so many distractions and interruptions in the workplace it's easy to lose focus. Research has demonstrated that about 2.1 hours per day is wasted on trivial intrusions. These time wasters destroy any attempt at effective time management if they are not identified and eliminated. Some interruptions, of course, are necessary and cannot be avoided, but many are just needless annoyances.

Think about your working day and consider all of the inconsequential disturbances that may occur. Some of the biggest time wasters include checking Facebook, texting, social chit-chat, smoking breaks, IT issues, humorous emails, feeling tired, personal phone calls, questions from colleagues, and notifications. It's easy to see just how quickly 2.1 hours can accumulate.



Your personal time management beliefs may well be contributing to your productivity downfall

Additionally, a lot of time may be spent on low-payoff activities, rather than high-payoff activities. Our high-payoff activities are those that bring us maximum return. Essentially, they are tasks or actions that are the most significant. High payoffs are duties that are generally aligned with our KPIs or targets, or form part of our job description.

Low-payoff activities are those activities that, in reality, don't significantly impact on results or the bottom line. And yet it's often these tasks that get the majority of our attention. Why? Well, firstly they often require minimal effort and can be done quickly. This provides us with instant gratification – we feel as though we've been 'busy'. Additionally, because they are easier, they may be more pleasant and enjoyable to complete than high-payoff tasks.

**TOP TIP**

Clear your workspace. Working in a cluttered environment clutters the mind, and unnecessary time is wasted looking for things.



TOP TIP

Think about when you are at your most productive, and then plan important tasks for this time.

IDENTIFY AND ELIMINATE

High-payoff activities will vary from person to person, job to job. A low payoff for one individual may well be a high payoff for another. Either way, it's vital you have a clear understanding of what your high payoffs are. That way, you can ensure that maximum time is devoted to these.

In theory and ideally, we should be aiming to work on high payoffs for around 70–80% of our working week. Unfortunately, research has demonstrated that realistically only about 40% of our working week is actually spent on them.

The trick is to identify your low payoffs and, once you've done so, consider ways to remove or eliminate them. Not everything has to be done by you! Create a list outlining low-payoff tasks in one column and high payoffs in the other. Doing this will provide clarity about where the majority of your time is being depleted, and allow you to recognise where your time should be invested.

Ensure you take regular breaks – allow yourself some rest time, which will improve your focus



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Learning to manage your time wisely not only improves productivity but also has important health benefits. When we feel more in control of our workload it's only natural we are likely to feel less stress. How many times have you taken work home or logged on remotely late at night? If you find yourself doing this consistently, it's important to recognise the toll on your health, wellbeing and ability to relax. See 'Top 10 Time Management Tips', at right, for advice that may assist you in increasing efficiency and managing your day better.

Remember, good time management is about managing yourself. We all have the same amount of time, but what we do with it and how we use it will determine whether or not we are successful. Happy planning! **MPA**

TOP 10 TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS

1. Take time to plan your day either first thing in the morning or in the afternoon before you leave work. Create a to-do list or a system that you can refer to. Invest planning time to save working time.

2. Diarise and allocate specific times to attend to certain tasks. Be sure to set time limits and stick to them. Utilise your most productive time.

3. Consider the 4 D's of time management:

Do it – Only if it takes less than two minutes to complete

Delegate it – Many low-payoff tasks can be delegated. Ensure the person you delegate to has the required competency or skills

Dump it – Trivial or meaningless information or emails that are not required

Diarise – Non-urgent tasks can be diarised to be done in the future

4. Keep track of time spent on low-payoff and high-payoff activities. Try to keep a schedule for the week.

5. Batch or 'chunk' similar work, such as processing or filing. This ensures you are in the headspace of doing repetitive work, and it promotes efficiency.

6. Avoid the urge to multitask. Research has demonstrated that multitasking slows you down and increases the likelihood of error.

7. Allocate contingency or buffer time in between tasks. This will allow for unexpected interruptions and distractions.

8. Plan for periods of relaxation, and try not to be a workaholic. Ensure you take your lunch break – resting improves focus and attention.

9. Don't always be a 'yes' person. Saying yes to others will certainly increase your popularity; however, it will impact negatively on your personal productivity. Learn to say no nicely.

10. Finally, resist the urge to check your inbox constantly – some things can wait and don't require your immediate attention.