

# First Line Management CMI Level 3

## Session 2

### Time Management

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## Time Management

Time Management skills are essential for successful people - these are the practical techniques, which have helped the leading people in business, sport and public service reach the pinnacles of their careers.

The skills explained in the articles below help you to become reliable and effective and show you how to identify and focus on the activities that give you the greatest returns. The section finishes by explaining goal setting, which is a vitally important skill for achieving what you want to achieve with your life.

While you are reading these articles, have a look at the time management book reviews, resources and stores on the sidebars - these will help you to develop your skills further and will support you in your regular use of time management skills.

- **Introduction**
- **Costing Your Time** - Finding out how much your time costs
- **Deciding Work Priorities** - Doing tasks which add the greatest value
- **Activity Logs** - Understanding where you lose time
- **Small-Scale Planning** - Action Plans
- **Prioritised To Do Lists** - Doing the most important things first
- **Personal Goal Setting** - Planning to Live Your Life Your Way
- **Time Management Resources**

## Time Management Skills

This section discusses personal time management skills. These are essential skills for effective people.

People who use these techniques routinely are the highest achievers in all walks of life, from business to sport to public service. If you use these skills well, then you will be able to function effectively, even under intense pressure. They help you to get the most out of the limited time you have.

- At the heart of time management is an important shift in focus:
- *Concentrate on results, not on being busy*
- Many people spend their days in a frenzy of activity, but achieve very little because they are not concentrating on the right things.

### The 80:20 Rule

This is neatly summed up in the Pareto Principle, or the “80:20 Rule”. This argues that typically 80% of unfocussed effort generates only 20% of results. *The remaining 80% of results are achieved with only 20% of the effort.* While the ratio is not always 80:20, this broad pattern of a small proportion of activity generating non-scalar returns recurs so frequently as to be the norm in many areas.

By applying the skills in this chapter you can optimise your effort to ensure that you concentrate as much of your time and energy as possible on the high payoff tasks. This ensures that you achieve the greatest benefit possible with the limited amount of time available to you.

## **Time Management Tools**

The tools we will discuss are:

- Finding out how much your time is worth - Costing Your Time
- Making sure you concentrate on the right things - Deciding Work Priorities
- Checking how you really spend your time - Activity Logs
- Planning to solve a problem - Action Plans
- Tackling the right tasks first - Prioritised To Do Lists
- Deciding what your personal priorities should be - Personal Goal Setting

By the end of this section, you should have a much clearer understanding of how to use time to its greatest effect.

## **Costing Your Time - Finding Out How Much Your Time is Worth**

*How to Use Tool:*

The first part of your focus on results should be to work out how much your time costs. This helps you to see if you are spending your time profitably.

If you work for an organization, calculate how much you cost it each year. Include your salary, payroll taxes, the cost of office space you occupy, equipment and facilities you use, expenses, administrative support, etc. If you are self-employed, work the annual running costs of your business.

To this figure add a 'guesstimate' of the amount of profit you should generate by your activity.

If you work normal hours, you will have approximately 200 productive days each year. If you work 7½ hours each day, this equates to 1,500 hours in a year.

From these figures, calculate an hourly rate. This should give a reasonable estimate of how much your time is worth - this may be a surprisingly large amount!

When you are deciding whether or not to take a task on, think about this value - are you wasting your or your organization's resources on a low yield task?

### **Key points:**

Calculating how much your time is worth helps you to work out how whether it is worth doing particular jobs. If you have to spend much of your time doing low-yield jobs, then you can make a good case for employing an assistant.

## **Deciding Your Work Priorities - Finding Out What to Spend Your Time On**

*How to Use Tool:*

An important part of focusing on results is working out what to focus on! Many people work very hard all day doing little jobs that do not actually affect the quality of their work.

This section concentrates on three areas - clarifying what you enjoy, understanding what your strengths and weaknesses are, and working out both what your job is and what constitutes excellent performance.

### **Doing what you enjoy**

It is important for your own quality of life that you enjoy your job. If you know broadly what you like and dislike, you will be more able to move your job towards doing things that you enjoy. This is important as you are much more likely to do your job effectively if you love it than if you loathe it.

Note that almost every job has tedious or unpleasant elements to it - it is important that these parts are done properly. It is up to you over time to minimize this.

### **Concentrating on your strengths**

It is also important to know what your talents and weaknesses are. A good way of doing this is to carry out a SWOT analysis. This provides a formal approach to evaluating your strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats that you face. It makes a lot of sense to find a job that suits your strengths, and where your weaknesses do not matter.

### **Understanding how to be excellent at your job**

One excellent way of ensuring that you concentrate on the right things is to agree them with your employer!

You should ask the following questions:

*What is the purpose of the job?*

If possible, express this in a single sentence starting with the word 'To' - for example 'To ensure effective distribution in the South East'

*What are the measures of success?*

Work out how your employer will decide whether you are good at your job or not. Find out what the key targets to be achieved are, and how achievement will be measured.

*What is exceptional performance?*

Find out what this is considered to be, and work out how to achieve it.

*What are the priorities and deadlines?*

You need to know this so that when you are overloaded with work, you know what to focus on.

*What resources are available?*

This ensures that you are using all the tools at your command.

*What costs are acceptable?*

This lets you know the boundaries within which you can move.

*How does this relate to other people?*

What is the broader picture within which you have to work?

If you have answers to these questions, you will know how to do your job in precisely the right way. If you know what exceptional performance is, you can plan to achieve it using all the resources you have available.

### **Key points:**

This section gives you three ways of deciding your work priorities:

- *Concentrating on what you enjoy*
- *Using a SWOT analysis to work out your strengths and weaknesses.* This helps you to play to your strengths, minimize weaknesses, and move in the right direction.

Finally it explains how to *clarify your job* with your employer, and concentrate on doing well in the areas he or she considers to be most important.

By concentrating on the right priorities you will ensure that you are always working as effectively as possible.

## **Activity Logs - Finding Out How You Really Spend Your Time**

*How to Use Tool:*

Activity logs help you to analyse how you actually spend your time. The first time you use an activity log you may be shocked to see the amount of time that you waste! Memory is a very poor guide when it comes to this - it is too easy to forget time spent reading junk mail, talking to colleagues, making coffee, eating lunch, etc.

You may also be unaware that your energy levels may vary through the day - most people function at different levels of effectiveness at different times. Your effectiveness may vary depending on the amount of sugar in your blood, the length of time since you last took a break, routine distractions, stress, discomfort, or a range of other factors. There is also some good evidence that you have daily rhythms of alertness and energy.

### **Keeping an Activity Log**

Keeping an Activity Log for several days helps you to understand how you spend your time, and when you perform at your best. Without modifying your behaviour any further than you have to, note down the things you do as you do them. Every time you change activities, whether opening mail, working, making coffee, gossiping with colleagues or whatever, note down the time of the change.

As well as recording activities, note how you feel, whether alert, flat, tired, energetic, etc. Do this periodically throughout the day. You may decide to integrate your activity log with a stress diary.

### **Learning from Your Log**

Once you have logged your time for a few days, analyse the log. You may be alarmed to see the length of time you spend doing low value jobs!

You may also see that you are energetic in some parts of the day, and flat in other parts. A lot of this can depend on the rest breaks you take, the times and amounts you eat, and quality of your nutrition. The activity log gives you some basis for experimenting with these variables.

#### **Key points:**

Activity logs are useful tools for auditing the way that you use your time. They can also help you to track changes in your energy, alertness and effectiveness throughout the day.

By analysing your activity log you will be able to identify and eliminate time-wasting or low-yield jobs. You will also know the times of day at which you are most effective, so that you can carry out your most important tasks during these times.

### **Action Plans - Small Scale Planning**

#### *How to Use Tool:*

An Action Plan is a list of tasks that you have to carry out to achieve an objective. It differs from a To Do List in that it focuses on the achievement of a single goal.

Wherever you want to achieve something, draw up an action plan. This allows you to concentrate on the stages of that achievement, and monitor your progress towards it.

To draw up an Action Plan, simply list the tasks that you need to carry out to achieve your goal. This is simple, but still very useful!

#### **Key points:**

An Action Plan is a list of things that you need to do to achieve a goal. To use it, simply carry out each task in the list!

### **Prioritised To Do Lists**

#### **Remembering To Do All Essential Tasks, In The Right Order**

#### **How to Use Tool:**

A 'To Do List' is a list of all the tasks that you need to carry out. It consolidates all the jobs that you have to do into one place. You can then prioritise these tasks into order of importance. This allows you to tackle the most important ones first.

To Do Lists are essential where you need to carry out a number of different tasks or different sorts of task, or where you have made a number of commitments. If you find that you are often caught out because you have forgotten to do something, then you need to keep a To Do List.

Whilst To Do Lists are very simple, they are also extremely powerful, both as a method of organizing yourself and as a way of reducing stress. Often problems may seem overwhelming or you may have a seemingly huge number of demands on your time. This may leave you feeling out of control, and overburdened with work.

### **Preparing a To Do List**

The solution is often simple: write down the tasks that face you, and if they are large, break them down into their component elements. If these still seem large, break them down again. Do this until you have listed everything that you have to do. Once you have done this, run through these jobs allocating priorities from A (very important) to F (unimportant). If too many tasks have a high priority, run through the list again and demote the less important ones. Once you have done this, rewrite the list in priority order.

You will then have a precise plan that you can use to eliminate the problems you face. You will be able to tackle these in order of importance. This allows you to separate important jobs from the many time-consuming trivial ones.

### **Using Your To Do Lists**

Different people use To Do Lists in different ways in different situations: if you are in a sales-type role, a good way of motivating yourself is to keep your list relatively short and aim to complete it every day.

In an operational role, or if tasks are large or dependent on too many other people, then it may be better to keep one list and 'chip away' at it. It may be that you carry unimportant jobs from one To Do List to the next. You may not be able to complete some very low priority jobs for several months. Only worry about this if you need to - if you are running up against a deadline for them, raise their priority.

If you have not used To Do Lists before, try them: they are one of the keys to being really productive and efficient.

### **Key points:**

Prioritised To Do Lists are fundamentally important to efficient work. If you use To Do Lists, you will ensure that:

- you remember to carry out all necessary tasks
- that you tackle the most important jobs first, and do not waste time on trivial tasks.
- you do not get stressed by large volumes of unimportant jobs.

To draw up a Prioritised To Do List, list all the tasks you must carry out. Mark the importance of the task next to it, with a priority from A (very important) to F (unimportant). Redraft the list into this order of importance.

Now carry out the jobs at the top of the list first. These are the most important, most beneficial tasks to complete.

## **Personal Goal Setting - Planning to Live Your Life Your Way**

### *How to Use Tool:*

Goal setting is a formal process for personal planning. By setting goals on a routine basis you decide what you want to achieve, and then step-by-step move towards the achievement of these goals. The process of setting goals and targets allows you to choose where you want to go in life. By knowing precisely what you want to achieve, you know what you have to concentrate on to do it. You also know what is merely a distraction.

Goal setting is a standard technique used by top-level athletes, business-people and achievers in all fields. It gives you long-term vision and short-term motivation. It focuses your acquisition of knowledge and helps you to organize your resources.

By setting sharp, clearly defined goals, you can measure and take pride in the achievement of those goals. You can see forward progress in what might previously have seemed a long pointless grind. By setting goals, you will also raise your self-confidence, as you recognize your ability and competence in achieving the goals that you have set. The process of achieving goals and seeing this achievement gives you confidence that you will be able to achieve higher and more difficult goals.

Goals are set on a number of different levels: firstly you decide what you want to do with your life and what large-scale goals you want to achieve. Then you break these down into the smaller and smaller targets that you must hit so that you reach your lifetime goals. Finally, once you have your plan, you start working towards achieving it.

## **Starting to Set Personal Goals**

This section explains how to set personal goals. It starts with your lifetime goals, and then works through a series of lower level plans culminating in a daily to-do list. By setting up this structure of plans you can break even the biggest life goal down into a number of small tasks that you need to do each day to reach the lifetime goals.

### **Your Lifetime Goals**

The first step in setting personal goals is to consider what you want to achieve in your lifetime - setting Lifetime goals gives you the overall perspective that shapes all other aspects of your decision making.

To give a broad, balanced coverage of all important areas in your life, try to set goals in some or all of the following categories:

*Artistic:*

Do you want to achieve any artistic goals? If so, what?

*Attitude:*

Is any part of your mindset holding you back? Is there any part of the way that you behave that upsets you? If so, set goals to improve or cure the problem.

*Career:*

What level do you want to reach in your career?

*Education:*

Is there any knowledge you want to acquire in particular? What information and skills will you need to achieve other goals?

*Family:*

Do you want to be a parent? If so, how are you going to be a good parent? How do you want to be seen by a partner or by members of your extended family?

*Financial:*

How much do you want to earn by what stage?

*Physical:*

Are there any athletic goals you want to achieve, or do you want good health deep into old age? What steps are you going to take to achieve this?

*Pleasure:*

How do you want to enjoy yourself? - you should ensure that some of your life is for you!

*Public Service:*

Do you want to make the world a better place by your existence? If so, how?  
Once you have decided your goals in these categories, assign a priority to them from A to F. Then review the goals and re-prioritise until you are satisfied that they reflect the shape of the life that you want to lead. Also ensure that the goals that you have set are the goals that you want to achieve, not what your parents, spouse, family, or employers want them to be.

## **How to Start to Achieve Your Lifetime Goals**

Once you have set your lifetime goals, set a 25 year plan of smaller goals that you should complete if you are to reach your lifetime plan. Then set a 5-year plan, 1-year plan, 6-month plan, and 1 month plan of progressively smaller goals that you should reach to achieve your lifetime goals. Each of these should be based on the previous plan.

Finally set a daily to-do list of things that you should do today to work towards your lifetime goals. At an early stage these goals may be to read books and gather information on the achievement of your goals. This will help you to improve the quality and realism of your goal setting.

Finally review your plans, and make sure that they fit the way in which you want to live your life.

## **Staying on Course**

Once you have decided your first set of plans, keep the process going by reviewing and updating your to-do list on a daily basis. Periodically review the longer term plans, and modify them to reflect your changing priorities and experience.

## **Setting Goals Effectively**

The following broad guidelines will help you to set effective goals:

*State each goal as a positive statement:* express your goals positively - 'Execute this technique well' is a much better goal than 'don't make this stupid mistake'

*Be precise:* set a precise goal, putting in dates, times and amounts so that you can measure achievement. If you do this, you will know exactly when you have achieved the goal, and can take complete satisfaction from having achieved it.

*Set priorities:* where you have several goals, give each a priority. This helps you to avoid feeling overwhelmed by too many goals, and helps to direct your attention to the most important ones.

*Write goals down:* this crystallizes them and gives them more force.

*Keep operational goals small:* keep the low-level goals you are working towards small and achievable. If a goal is too large, then it can seem that you are not making progress towards it. Keeping goals small and incremental gives more opportunities for reward. Derive today's goals from larger ones.

*Set performance goals, not outcome goals:* you should take care to set goals over which you have as much control as possible. There is nothing more dispiriting than failing to achieve a personal goal for reasons beyond your control. These could be bad business environments, poor judging, bad weather, injury, or just plain bad luck. If you base your goals on personal performance, then you can keep control over the achievement of your goals and draw satisfaction from them.

*Set realistic goals:* it is important to set goals that you can achieve. All sorts of people (parents, media, society) can set unrealistic goals for you. They will often do this in ignorance of your own desires and ambitions. Alternatively you may be naïve in setting very high goals. You might not appreciate either the obstacles in the way, or understand quite how many skills you must master to achieve a particular level of performance.

*Do not set goals too low:* just as it is important not to set goals unrealistically high, do not set them too low. People tend to do this where they are afraid of failure or where they are lazy! You should set goals so that they are slightly out of your immediate grasp, but not so far that there is no hope of achieving them. No-one will put serious effort into achieving a goal that they believe is unrealistic. However, remember that your belief that a goal is unrealistic may be incorrect. If this could be the case, you can change this belief by using imagery effectively.

## Achieving Goals

When you have achieved a goal, take the time to enjoy the satisfaction of having done so. Absorb the implications of the goal achievement, and observe the progress you have made towards other goals. If the goal was a significant one, reward yourself appropriately.

With the experience of having achieved this goal, review the rest of your goal plans:

- If you achieved the goal too easily, make your next goals harder
- If the goal took a dispiriting length of time to achieve, make the next goals a little easier
- If you learned something that would lead you to change other goals, do so
- If while achieving the goal you noticed a deficit in your skills, decide whether to set goals to fix this.

Failure to meet goals does not matter as long as you learn from it. Feed lessons learned back into your goal-setting program.

Remember too that your goals will change as you mature - adjust them regularly to reflect this growth in your personality. If goals do not hold any attraction any longer, then let them go. Goal setting is your servant, not your master - it should bring you real pleasure, satisfaction and a sense of achievement.

### *Example:*

The best example of goal setting that you can have is to try setting your own goals. Set aside two hours to think through your lifetime goals in each of the categories. Then work back through the 25-year plan, 5-year plan, 1-year plan, 6-month plan, a 1-month plan. Finally draw up a To Do list of jobs to do tomorrow to move towards your goals. Tomorrow, do those jobs, and start to use goal-setting routinely!

### **Key points:**

Goal setting is an important method of:

- Deciding what is important for you to achieve in your life
- Separating what is important from what is irrelevant
- Motivating yourself to achievement
- Building your self-confidence based on measured achievement of goals

You should allow yourself to enjoy the achievement of goals and reward yourself appropriately. Draw lessons where appropriate, and feed these back into future performance.

If you do not already set goals now is a great time to start!

## **Stress Diary - Finding Your Optimum Stress Levels**

*How to use tool:*

Keeping a stress diary is an effective way of finding out what causes you stress, the level of stress you prefer, and your effectiveness under pressure.

In this diary note down your stress levels and how you feel throughout the day. In particular, note down stressful events. Record the following information:

At a regular interval, for example every hour, record routine stress. Note:

- the time
- the amount of stress that you feel (perhaps on a scale of 1 to 10)
- how happy you feel
- how efficiently you are working
- When stressful events occur, write down:
  - What the event was
  - When and where did it occur?
  - What important factors made the event stressful?
  - How stressful was the event?
  - How did you handle the event?
  - Did you tackle the cause or the symptom?
  - Did you deal with the stress correctly?

### **Analysing the Diary**

After a few weeks you should be able to analyse this information. It may be interesting as you carry out the analysis to note down the outcomes of the jobs you were doing when you were under stress.

This should give you two types of information:

You should be able to understand the level of stress you are happiest with, and the level of stress at which you work most effectively. You may find that your performance is good even when you feel upset by stress.

You should know what the main sources of unpleasant stress in your life are. You should understand what circumstances make stresses particularly unpleasant, and should be able to see whether your strategies for handling the stresses are effective or not.

You will get the real benefits of having a stress diary in the first few weeks. After this the benefit you get of keeping it each additional day will reduce. If, however, your lifestyle changes or you begin to suffer from stress again in the future, then it may be worth using the diary approach again. You will probably find that the stresses you face have changed. If this is the case, then keeping a diary again will help you to develop a different approach to deal with them.

Once you have discovered the stress level you are happiest with, and understand what triggers unpleasant stress, make an Action Plan to control it. Some elements of this action plan will be actions you are going to take to contain, control or eliminate problems that are causing you stress. Other parts may be health related such as taking more exercise, changing your diet, or improving the quality of your environment. It may also cover stress management techniques that you will employ when stress levels begin to build.

**Key points:**

Keeping a stress diary helps you to learn how you handle stress. It helps you:

- find out the stress levels you prefer
- to know how effectively you operate under pressure
- understand the things that cause you stress
- to see how effective your stress control strategies are

Once you have kept a stress diary for a number of weeks, you will be in a position to analyse it and develop an action plan to control stress.

# Personal SWOT Analysis

## Understanding Your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

### Why use the tool?

SWOT Analysis is a very effective way of identifying your Strengths and Weaknesses, and of examining the Opportunities and Threats you face. Carrying out an analysis using the SWOT framework will help you to focus your activities into areas where you are strong, and where the greatest opportunities lie.

### How to use tool:

To carry out a SWOT Analysis write down your answers to the following questions. Where appropriate, use similar questions:

#### *Strengths:*

- What are your advantages?
- What do you do well?
- What do other people see as your strengths?

Consider this from your own point of view and from the point of view of the people you deal with. Don't be modest - be realistic. If you are having any difficulty with this, try writing down a list of your characteristics. Some of these will hopefully be strengths!

#### *Weaknesses:*

- What could you improve?
- What do you do badly?
- What should you avoid?

Again, consider this from an internal and external basis - do other people seem to perceive weaknesses that you do not see? Are your competitors doing any better than you? It is best to be realistic now, and face any unpleasant truths as soon as possible.

#### *Opportunities:*

- Where are the good opportunities facing you?
- What are the interesting trends you are aware of?
- Useful opportunities can come from such things as:
  - Changes in technology and markets on both a broad and narrow scale
  - Changes in government policy related to your field
  - Changes in social patterns, population profiles, lifestyle changes, etc.
- Local Events

#### *Threats:*

- What obstacles do you face?
- What is your competition doing?
- Are the required specifications for your job, products or services changing?
- Is changing technology threatening your position?
- Do you have bad debt or cash-flow problems?

Carrying out this analysis will often be illuminating - both in terms of pointing out what needs to be done, and in putting problems into perspective.

You can also apply SWOT analysis to your competitors - this may produce some interesting insights!

Example:

A start-up small consultancy business might carry out the following SWOT analysis:

*Strengths:*

- We are able to respond very quickly as we have no red tape, no need for higher management approval, etc.
- We are able to give really good customer care, as the current small amount of work means we have plenty of time to devote to customers
- Our lead consultant has strong reputation within the market
- We can change direction quickly if we find that our marketing is not working
- We have small overheads; so can offer good value to customers

*Weaknesses:*

- Our company has no market presence or reputation
- We have a small staff with a shallow skills base in many areas
- We are vulnerable to vital staff being sick, leaving, etc.
- Our cash flow will be unreliable in the early stages

*Opportunities:*

- Our business sector is expanding, with many future opportunities for success
- Our local council wants to encourage local businesses with work where possible
- Our competitors may be slow to adopt new technologies

*Threats:*

- Will developments in technology change this market beyond our ability to adapt?
- A small change in focus of a large competitor might wipe out any market position we achieve

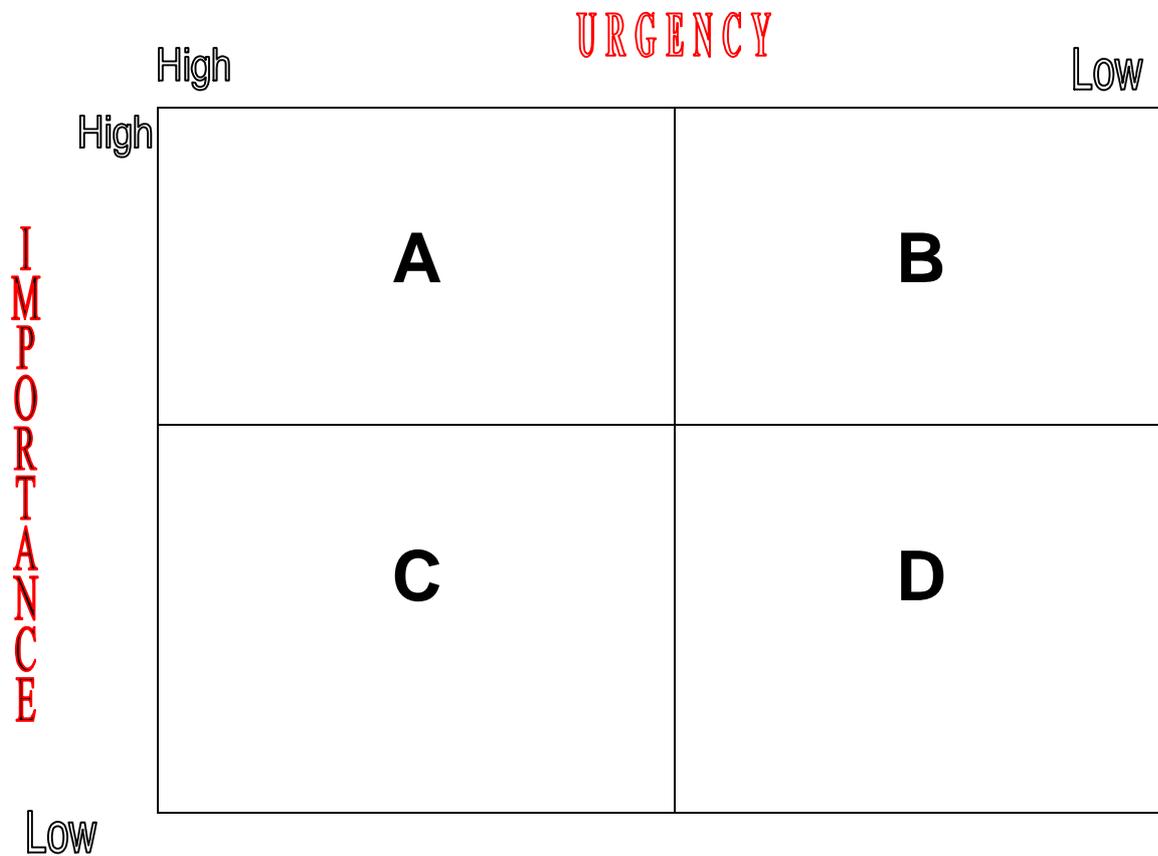
The consultancy might therefore decide to specialise in rapid response, good value services to local businesses. Marketing would be in selected local publications, to

get the greatest possible market presence for a set advertising budget. The consultancy should keep up-to-date with changes in technology where possible.

**Key points:**

SWOT analysis is a framework for analysing your strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats you face.

## LOGICAL TIME MANAGEMENT



**Pane A: High Importance, High Urgency.** High priority items which someone should do now, probably you.

**Pane B: High Importance, Low Urgency.** Less important tasks that need doing soon. You could deal with these if they take a short time, otherwise they should be delegated to someone else.

**Pane C: Low Importance, High Urgency.** Important that these are done efficiently but not necessarily today. Consider delegating these to key members of your team who can start building the foundation for successful completion.

**Pane D: Low Importance, Low Urgency.** You may be tempted to ignore these altogether. Consider filling in your 'bring forward' tray when the ageing process may have moved them up the hierarchy. They could also be a useful opportunity to delegate to a new or inexperienced member of staff giving them some initial exposure in a low risk area.

# Personal Time Management

*Time passes, quickly. This article looks at the basics of Personal Time Management and describes how the Manager can assume control of this basic resource.*

## The “Eff” words

The three “Eff” words are [*concise OED*]:

- Effective - having a definite or desired effect
- Efficient - productive with minimum waste or effort
- Effortless - seemingly without effort; natural, easy

Personal Time Management is about winning the “Eff” words: making them apply to you and your daily routines.

## What is Personal Time Management?

Personal Time Management is about controlling the use of your most valuable (and undervalued) resource. Consider these two questions: what would happen if you spent company money with as few safeguards as you spend company time, when was the last time *you* scheduled a review of your time allocation?

The absence of Personal Time Management is characterized by last minute rushes to meet dead-lines, meetings which are either double booked or achieve nothing, days which seem somehow to slip unproductively by, crises which loom unexpected from nowhere. This sort of environment leads to inordinate stress and degradation of performance: it must be stopped.

Poor time management is often a symptom of over confidence: techniques, which used to work with small projects and workloads, are simply reused with large ones. But inefficiencies, which were insignificant in the small role, are ludicrous in the large. You cannot drive a motorbike like a bicycle, nor can you manage a supermarket-chain like a market stall. The demands, the problems and the payoffs for increased efficiency are all larger as your responsibility grows; you must learn to apply proper techniques or be bettered by those who do. Possibly, the reason Time Management is poorly practised is that it so seldom forms a measured part of appraisal and performance review; what many fail to foresee, however, is how intimately it is connected to aspects, which do.

Personal Time Management has many facets. Most managers recognize a few, but few recognize them all. There is the simple concept of keeping a well-ordered diary and the related idea of planned activity. But beyond these, it is a tool for the systematic ordering of your influence on events; it underpins many other managerial skills such as Effective Delegation and Project Planning.

Personal Time Management is a set of tools, which allow you to:

- ❖ eliminate wastage
- ❖ be prepared for meetings
- ❖ refuse excessive workloads

- ❖ monitor project progress
- ❖ allocate resource (time) appropriate to a task's importance
- ❖ ensure that long term projects are not neglected
- ❖ plan each day efficiently
- ❖ plan each week effectively and to do so simply with a little self-discipline.

Since Personal Time Management is a management process just like any other, it must be planned, monitored and regularly reviewed. In the following sections, we will examine the basic methods and functions of Personal Time Management. Since true understanding depends upon experience, you will be asked to take part by looking at aspects of your own work. If you do not have time to this right now - ask yourself: why not?

## Current Practice

What this article is advocating is the adoption of certain practices, which will give you greater control over the use, and allocation of your primary resource: *time*. Before we start on the future, it is worth considering the present. This involves the simplistic task of keeping a note of how you spend your time for a suitably long period of time (say a week). I say simplistic since all you have to do is create a simple table, photocopy half-a-dozen copies and carry it around with you filling in a row every time you change activity. After one week, allocate time (start as you mean to go on) to reviewing this log.

## Waste Disposal

We are not looking here to create new categories of work to enhance efficiency (that comes later) but simply to eliminate wastage in your current practice. The average IEE Chartered Engineer earns about 27,000 pounds per annum: about 12.50 pounds per hour, say 1 pound every 5 minutes; for how many 5 minute sections of your activity would you have paid a pound? The first step is a critical appraisal of how you spend your time and to question some of your habits. In your time log, identify periods of time that might have been better used.

There are various sources of waste. The most common are social: telephone calls, friends dropping by and conversations around the coffee machine. It would be foolish to eliminate all non-work related activity (we all need a break) but if it's a choice between chatting to Harry in the afternoon and meeting the next pay-related deadline ... Your time log will show you if this is a problem and you might like to do something about it before your boss does.

In your time log, look at each work activity and decide objectively how much time each was *worth* to you, and compare that with the time you actually spent on it. An afternoon spent polishing an internal memo into a Pulitzer prize winning piece of provocative prose is waste; an hour spent debating the leaving present of a colleague is waste; a minute spent sorting out the paper-clips is waste (unless relaxation). This type of activity will be reduced naturally by managing your own time since you will not allocate time to the trivial. Specifically, if you have a task to do, decide before hand how long it should take and work to that deadline - then move on to the next task.

Another common source of waste stems from delaying work, which is unpleasant by finding distractions that are less important or unproductive. Check your log to see if any tasks are being delayed simply because they are dull or difficult.

Time is often wasted in changing between activities. For this reason it is useful to group similar tasks together thus avoiding the start-up delay of each. The time log will show you where these savings can be made. You may want then to initiate a routine that deals with these on a fixed but regular basis.

## **Doing Subordinate's Work**

Having considered what is complete waste, we now turn to what is merely inappropriate. Often it is simpler to do the job yourself. Using the stamp machine to frank your own letters ensures they leave by the next post; writing the missing summary in the latest progress report from your junior is more pleasant than sending it back (and it lets you choose the emphasis). Rubbish!

Assigning secretarial duties to secretaries can make large gains: they regularly catch the next post; they type a lot faster than you do! Your subordinate should be told about the missing section and told how (and why) to slant it. If you have a task which could be done by a subordinate, use the next occasion to start training him/her to do it instead of doing it yourself - you will need to spend some time monitoring the task thereafter, but far less than in doing it yourself.

## **Doing the work of others**

A major impact upon your work can be the tendency to help others with theirs. Now, in the spirit of an open and harmonious work environment it is obviously desirable that you should be willing to help out - but check your work log and decide how much time you spend on your own work and how much you spend on others'. For instance, if you spend a morning checking the grammar and spelling in the training material related to your last project, then that is waste. Publications should do the proofreading, that is their job, they are better at it than you; you should deal at the technical level.

The remaining problem is your manager. Consider what periods in your work log were used to perform tasks that your manager either repeated or simply negated by ignoring it or redefining the task, too late. Making your manager efficient is a very difficult task, but where it impinges upon your work and performance you must take the bull by the horns (or whatever) and confront the issue.

Managing your manager may seem a long way from Time Management but no one impacts upon your use of time more than your immediate superior. If a task is ill defined - seek clarification (is that a one page summary or a ten page report?). If seemingly random alterations are asked in your deliverables, ask for the reasons and next time clarify these and similar points at the beginning. If the manager is difficult, try writing a small specification for each task before beginning it and have it agreed. While you cannot tactfully hold your manager to this *contract* if he/she has a change of mind, it will at least cause him/her to consider the issues early on, before you waste your time on false assumptions.

## External Appointments

The next stage of Personal Time Management is to start taking control of your time. The first problem is appointments. Start with a simple appointments diary. In this book you will have (or at least should have) a complete list of all your known appointments for the foreseeable future. If you have omitted your regular ones (since you remember them anyway) add them now.

Your appointments constitute your interaction with other people; they are the agreed interface between your activities and those of others; they are determined by external obligation. They often fill the diary. Now, be ruthless and eliminate the unnecessary. There may be committees where you cannot productively contribute or where a subordinate might be (better) able to participate. There may be long lunches that could be better run as short conference calls. There may be interviews, which last, three times as long as necessary because they are scheduled for a whole hour. Eliminate the wastage starting today.

The next stage is to add to your diary lists of other, personal activity that will enhance your use of the available time. Consider: what is the most important type of activity to add to your diary? No: - stop reading for a moment and really, consider.

The single most important type of activity is those that will save you time: allocate time to save time; a stitch in time saves days. And most importantly of all, always allocate time-to-time management: at least five minutes each and every day.

For each appointment left in the diary, consider what actions you might take to ensure that no time is wasted: plan to avoid work by being prepared. Thus, if you are going to a meeting where you will be asked to comment on some report, allocate time to read it so avoiding delays in the meeting and increasing your chances of making the right decision the first time. Consider what actions need to be done before AND what actions must be done to follow-up. Even if the latter is unclear before the event, you must still allocate time to review the outcome and to plan the resulting action. Simply mark in your diary the block of time necessary to do this and, when the time comes, do it.

## Scheduling Projects

The most daunting external appointments are deadlines: often, the handover of deliverables. Do you leave the work too late? Is there commonly a final panic towards the end? Are the last few hectic hours often marred by errors? If so, use Personal Time Management.

The basic idea is that your management of personal deadlines should be achieved with exactly the same techniques you would use in a large project:

- check the specification - are you sure that you agree on what is to be delivered
- break the task down into small sections so that you can estimate the time needed for each, and monitor progress
- schedule reviews of your progress (e.g. after each sub-task) so that you can respond quickly to difficulties

Like most management ideas, this is common sense. Some people, however, refute it because in practise they find that it merely shows the lack of time for a project that must be done anyway. This is simply daft! If simple project planning and time

management show that the task can not be done, then it will not be done - but by knowing at the start, you have a chance to do something about it.

An impossible deadline affects not only your success but also that of others. Suppose a product is scheduled for release too soon because you agree to deliver too early. Marketing and Sales will prepare customers to expect the product showing why they really need it - but it will not arrive. The customers will be dissatisfied or even lost, the competition will have advanced warning, and all because you agreed to do the impossible.

You can avoid this type of problem. By practising time management, you will always have a clear understanding of how you spend your time and what time is unallocated. If a new task is thrust upon you, you can estimate whether it is practical. The project planning tells you how much time is needed and the time management tells you how much time is available.

There are four ways to deal with impossible deadlines:

- Get the deadline extended
- Scream for more resources
- Get the Deliverable redefined to something practical
- State the position clearly so that your boss (*and* his/her boss) have fair warning

If this simple approach seems unrealistic, consider the alternative. If you have an imposed, but unobtainable, deadline and you accept it; then the outcome is *your* assured failure. Of course, there is a fifth option: move to a company with realistic schedules.

One defence tactic is to present your superior with a current list of your obligations indicating what impact the new task will have on these, and ask him/her to assign the priorities: "I can't do them all, which should I slip?" Another tactic is to keep a database of your time estimates and the actual time taken by each task. This will quickly develop into a source of valuable data and increase the accuracy of your planning predictions.

There is no reason why you should respond only to externally imposed deadlines. The slightly shoddy product which you hand-over after the last minute rush (and normally have returned for correction the following week) could easily have been polished if only an extra day had been available - so move your personal deadline forward and allow yourself the luxury of leisured review before the product is shipped.

Taking this a step further, the same sort of review might be applied to the product at each stage of its development so that errors and rework time are reduced. Thus by allocating time to quality review, you save time in rework; and this is all part of project planning supported and monitored by your time management.

Finally, for each activity you should estimate how much time it is worth and allocate only that amount. This critical appraisal may even suggest a different approach or method so that the time matches the task's importance. Beware of perfection, it takes too long - allocate time for "fitness for purpose", and then stop.

## Monitoring Staff

Your Personal Time Management also affects other people, particularly your subordinates. Planning projects means not only allocating your time but also the distribution of tasks; and this should be done in the same planned, monitored and reviewed manner as your own scheduling.

Any delegated task should be specified with an (agreed) end date. As a Manager, you are responsible for ensuring that the tasks allocated to your subordinates are completed successfully. Thus you should ensure that each task is concluded with a deliverable (for instance, a memo to confirm completion) - you make an entry in your diary to check that this has arrived. Thus, if you agree the task for Tuesday, Wednesday should have an entry in your diary to check the deliverable. This simple device allows you to monitor progress and to initiate action as necessary.

## **Long term Objectives**

There are many long-term objectives that the good Manager must achieve, particularly with regard to the development, support and motivation of his/her work-team. Long-term objectives have the problem of being important but not urgent; they do not have deadlines, they are distant and remote. For this reason, it is all too easy to ignore them in favour of the urgent and immediate. Clearly a balance must be struck.

The beauty of Time Management is that the balance can be decided objectively (without influence from immediate deadlines) and self-imposed through the use of the diary. Simply, a manager might decide that one hour a week should be devoted to personnel issues and would then allocate a regular block of time to that activity. Of course if the factory is on fire, or World War III is declared, the manager may have to re-allocate this time in a particular week - but barring such crises, this time should then become sacrosanct and always applied to the same, designated purpose.

Similarly, time may be allocated to staff development and training. So if one afternoon a month is deemed to be a suitable allocation, then simply designate the second Thursday (say) of each month and delegate the choice of speakers. The actual time spent in managing this sort of long-term objective is small, but without that deliberate planning it will not be achieved.

Once you have implemented Personal Time Management, it is worth using some of that control to augment your own career. Some quiet weekend, you should sketch out your own long-term objectives and plan a route to them. As you would any long-term objective, allocate time to the necessary sub-tasks and monitor your progress. If you do not plan where you want to go, you are unlikely to get there.

## **Concluding Remarks.**

Personal Time Management is a systematic application of common sense strategies. It requires little effort, yet it promotes efficient work practices by highlighting wastage and it leads to effective use of time by focusing it on your chosen activities. Personal Time Management does not solve your problems; it reveals them, and provides a structure to implement and monitor solutions. It enables you to take control of your own time - how you use it is then up to you.

## **To Do Lists**

### **Remembering To Do All Essential Tasks, In The Right Order**

#### **How to Use Tool:**

A 'To Do List' is a list of all the tasks that you need to carry out. It consolidates all the jobs that you have to do into one place. You can then prioritise these tasks into order of importance. This allows you to tackle the most important ones first.

To Do Lists are essential where you need to carry out a number of different tasks or different sorts of task, or where you have made a number of commitments. If you find that you are often caught out because you have forgotten to do something, then you need to keep a To Do List.

Whilst To Do Lists are very simple, they are also extremely powerful, both as a method of organizing yourself and as a way of reducing stress. Often problems may seem overwhelming or you may have a seemingly huge number of demands on your time. This may leave you feeling out of control, and overburdened with work.

#### **Preparing a To Do List**

The solution is often simple: write down the tasks that face you, and if they are large, break them down into their component elements. If these still seem large, break them down again. Do this until you have listed everything that you have to do. Once you have done this, run through these jobs allocating priorities from A (very important) to F (unimportant). If too many tasks have a high priority, run through the list again and demote the less important ones. Once you have done this, rewrite the list in priority order.

You will then have a precise plan that you can use to eliminate the problems you face. You will be able to tackle these in order of importance. This allows you to separate important jobs from the many time-consuming trivial ones.

#### **Using Your To Do Lists**

Different people use To Do Lists in different ways in different situations: if you are in a sales-type role, a good way of motivating yourself is to keep your list relatively short and aim to complete it every day.

In an operational role, or if tasks are large or dependent on too many other people, then it may be better to keep one list and 'chip away' at it. It may be that you carry unimportant jobs from one To Do List to the next. You may not be able to complete some very low priority jobs for several months. Only worry about this if you need to - if you are running up against a deadline for them, raise their priority.

If you have not used To Do Lists before, try them: they are one of the keys to being really productive and efficient.

**Key points:**

Prioritised To Do Lists are fundamentally important to efficient work. If you use To Do Lists, you will ensure that:

- you remember to carry out all necessary tasks
- that you tackle the most important jobs first, and do not waste time on trivial tasks.
- you do not get stressed by large volumes of unimportant jobs.

To draw up a Prioritised To Do List, list all the tasks you must carry out. Mark the importance of the task next to it, with a priority from A (very important) to F (unimportant). Redraft the list into this order of importance.

# TIME MANAGEMENT PROFILE

## Section 1: Questions

1. How much of your time do you spend on really essential work?
2. What are the areas that take up large amounts of time and contribute little to overall effectiveness?
3. How much of what you do is planned, and how much just happens?
4. How often were you able to finish a task within the time planned?
5. What are the main cause of interruptions to your work?
6. Could you reduce the time taken to do certain activities? If so which and how?
7. Which of your activities could be done by somebody else - upwards, down or sideways? Who are they?
8. During which times of the day were you particularly productive? Why was this?
9. How much of your time are you spending operating rather than managing?
10. If you could free up more time at work, how would you use it?

## **TIME MANAGEMENT PROFILE**

**My strengths as a Time Manager are: -**

**My Weaknesses as a Time Manager are: -**

**My Time Robbers are: -**

## TIME MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

PRIORITY TIME ROBBER	1	2	3
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ACTION TO OVERCOME	1	2	3
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WHO WILL BE INVOLVED?	1	2	3
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WHEN WILL IT BE ACHIEVED?	1	2	3
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HOW WILL I KNOW I'VE BEEN SUCCESSFUL?	1	2	3
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## **DELEGATION GROUND RULES**

1. Identify the task
2. Decide what should be delegated
3. Identify the right person
4. Explain why you are delegating it to them
5. Specify the expected outcomes
6. Establish a target completion date
7. Discuss how they may go about it
8. Identify the resources they will need
9. Decide how and when you are going to monitor progress
10. Identify who else needs to be informed.