

Introduction

We live in a fast-paced world, where new opportunities and advances in technology are making our lives simultaneously easier and harder than they have ever been before.

Our days are filled with seemingly never-ending emails, meetings, blogs, books, newspapers to read, new skills and technology to keep abreast of. Added to that, owning a smartphone means you can easily get through a few more emails at home, while commuting, or even on holiday.

It's little wonder many of us feel overwhelmed and exhausted. We're living in an epidemic of 'busy,' and some of the technology that helps us be more productive is also fragmenting our focus. How many times have you picked up your smartphone 'just for a minute' to check your emails, and found yourself on Facebook an hour later, phone still in hand?

Everybody is busy. We're working more hours, consuming more content, watching more television, learning more new skills. Time pressures and distractions are everywhere, and it can be overwhelming to know how to deal with them.

Poor time management doesn't just impact your work. It increases stress and can impact your health. The longer it continues, the more tired and frustrated you become as you try to keep on top of your never-ending to-do-list. Your relationships can become strained when you don't have enough time to devote to the important people in your life.

You might look at other people who seem to be fitting everything in and wonder how on earth they manage it. The fact that you picked up this book means that A) you're feeling the time pressure, and B) you're ready to make time work for you.

You're in the right place!

There are no one-size fits all solutions to time management, but with the tips and techniques outlined in this book you will be able to:

- Identify your biggest time drains and how to avoid them
- Work smarter, not harder
- Tackle procrastination head-on
- Delegate effectively
- Make time for the things that are important to you
- Enjoy true work-life balance

By following the tips and techniques laid out in the following chapters, you will be able to take back control over how you use your time.

Chapter One: Where's Your Time Going?

How often have you asked somebody how they are, to receive the response *I'm so busy*?

How often do you find yourself responding to that question in the same way? It's almost the modern person's mantra. Moms, students, business people. We're all 'busy.'

Yet, how much are you achieving for all your busy-ness? Do you end each day with a sense of accomplishment, having moved closer to your goals; or are you simply spinning your wheels doing more and more *things* and yet staying in place?

We all have the same amount of time, which breaks down to:

- 24 hours a day
- 168 hours a week
- 720 hours a month (approximately).

If we all have the same time available to us, why do some people seem to accomplish so much while you can barely get to the end of your to-do-list for the day?

The thing is, you don't have to be too busy. You can be successful, productive, and still have time for socializing and spending quality time with your family.

What if I told you it was possible to gain back hours in the day? Become more productive? Take enough time to rest and recharge? Get an adequate amount of sleep?

Would you think I was crazy?

The fact is, you do have enough hours in the day to accomplish everything you need to. All it takes is to learn a few techniques to allow you to master time, instead of allowing time to master you.

Setting Goals

Before we look at how to manage your time, take some time to think about your goals. Goals are at the root of all effective time management. What would you like to have more time to accomplish?

Write down your top goals for the month, the year, and the next five years. What would give you the greatest sense of accomplishment to achieve?

These goals can be both work and life-related. You might want to achieve a promotion, take a distance learning course, or write a book. Whatever it is you want to achieve, write it down. Make them goals you can be passionate about, and not simply what you think might be expected of you to achieve.

Make each goal SMART:

- Specific—it's very clear what the goal is.
- Measurable—it's clear what success looks like.
- Attainable—it's actually possible to achieve (although don't make it too easy!)
- Relevant—it's relevant to your overall life or career plan.
- Time-bound—it's linked to a timeframe that creates some urgency but is achievable.

Instead of writing, *I want to write a book*; you might set your goal as *I want to have a completed first draft of my sci-fi novel by the end of December next year*.

Setting goals like this gives you both long-term vision and short-term motivation. When you are clear about what you are aiming towards, it becomes easier to reach it. Writing them down will force you to get clear and specific about what your goals are, and makes them feel more real.

Tracking Your Time

The first step to taking control of your time is to identify what you are actually doing with the time you have now. You'll be surprised at how much can be achieved in a day when you take a cold, hard look at where your time is currently going- and apply proven techniques to get more done in less time.

If you're not a fan of tracking your time, then bear with it. The end results will be worth it, I promise. Understanding how you currently use your time will help you understand which time management techniques will have the biggest impact on you.

It might be tempting to try to skip this part, in favor of making a list of what you know you do, and how long it takes. Unfortunately, that often doesn't work.

If you were asked to describe what you did with your time, you'd probably have a pretty good idea of which tasks you do the most. It might surprise you to learn, however, that we tend to under-estimate or over-estimate exactly how long we spend on certain tasks.

Think of how time passes when you're doing something you love. Perhaps watching your favorite movie, or spending time with friends. Now think of how time passes when you do something you don't enjoy. Perhaps your regular workouts drag on, or writing a business report seems to take forever.

This phenomenon of time seeming to move faster or slower for different tasks can lead us to miscalculate exactly how long we spend on each activity.

Then there are the activities we forget that we've done. Have you ever had that panic as you've gotten halfway to work that you didn't lock the door, or turn the stove off only to rush back and discover that you did- you just don't remember it?

When we repeat certain actions regularly, they become less memorable. While I certainly don't expect you to track your time so thoroughly as to note locking your door or turning off your stove; some tasks

that we repeat throughout the day for short bursts can actually add up to a big chunk of time over a week.

Track your time as closely as you can for one week, including outside of office hours.

Be as specific as you can about how you're spending your time. Logging 15 minutes as *on social media*, is fine, but putting *10 minutes Facebook, 5 minutes Twitter*, etc. will help you pinpoint more precisely where your time is going. In the same manner, note exactly what kind of work-related tasks you are completing - emails, meetings, phone calls, report writing, etc.–and when you are interrupted or distracted.

The most important thing is that you are as accurate and consistent as possible when you are tracking your time.

When it comes to *how* you measure your time, you can use:

- a journal
- a spreadsheet
- an online tracking system
- a combination of all three

It may also be worth looking into mobile apps that can measure how long you spend on social media on your phone. Often people will check social media numerous times throughout the day, almost as a reflex. If you don't use an app to track this, note down as soon as possible on your time tracker each time you are using social media on your phone.

If you are using a journal or spreadsheet, divide each day into 30-minute blocks, and mark down what tasks you are doing in any 30-minute period. Make it your mission for the week to log your time regularly, and accurately.

An example of a time log might look something like this:

Monday

From	To	Task	notes
6.30am	7.00am	Wake up, shower	
7.00am	7.30am	Eat Breakfast	
7.30am	8.00am	Catch Train to work.	Arrived in the office 7.55am
8.00am	8.30am	Reading emails	
8.30am	9.00am	Writing Weekly Report	Answered urgent email 8.45-8.50am

9.00am	9.30am	Team Meeting	Discussing last week's figures
9.30am	10.00am	Writing Weekly Report	5-minute interruption from a colleague asking a question
10.00am	10.30am	Writing Weekly Report	Stopped and checked Facebook 10.20-10.25
10.30am	11.00am	Coffee Break/Finishing Weekly Report	Coffee break until 10.40

Analyzing Your Time

You've collected your data, so it's time to look for obvious ways you can gain more time back.

At the end of the week go through and categorize the activities. Separate them out into high-level categories and add up how much time you spent on each category:

- Work,
- Socializing
- Sleep
- Internet
- Television
- Family time
- Eating/drinking
- Exercise
- Errands
- Household chores
- Other activities.

Create sub-categories where needed; for example, you'll want to break down 'work' into tasks relevant to your role such as emails, phone calls, meetings, report writing.

We'll start by analyzing the time you spend outside of the office. Are there any obvious areas where you spend time on things that are not important? Is there an excessive amount of TV, or are you spending time outside the office answering emails?

If you can identify areas where you can change your habits to gain additional time, make a note of them and resolve to use that time more effectively. For example, if one of your goals is to get fit, and you spend only an hour a week exercising but ten hours a week watching TV, can you take some of the TV time and devote it to exercise instead?

One category that should be protected is your sleep time. Everybody's sleep needs are a little different, but it's prudent to aim for at least 7 hours of sleep a night.

Getting enough sleep is crucial to productivity, so don't be tempted to try to gain additional time by reducing your sleeping hours. If your tracker shows you aren't getting enough sleep, your top priority should be to make enough time for sleep.

When you've analyzed your non-working time, move along to your work time, and answer the following questions:

How much of the time that you were 'busy' working was spent on tasks that moved you towards your goals? How much was spent on tasks that did not need to be done?

Pay attention to how productive you are at certain times. Do you get the most done early in the morning, or later in the afternoon? Could you schedule the biggest, most important tasks to coincide with your peak productivity?

How often during your work were you interrupted by emails, phone calls, and colleagues calling by your desk? How much of the work you did could be easily delegated?

Your goals and any important and urgent tasks that cannot be delegated should be your main priority. Most of your productive activities should be moving you closer to achieving your goals. That's the real secret of successful people. It's not luck; it's ruthless prioritization.

The fact is that you can't control time. It carries on, regardless of what you do with it. It's what, and how, you prioritize that will make the most difference.

We'll investigate prioritization much more closely in the next chapter, but in a nutshell, time is a commodity, and it is finite. There's nothing you can do to increase the hours you have in the day, but what you can control is how you use those hours.

Good time management isn't about getting things done faster; it's about doing more of the right things.

Now you know what your goals are, and how much or how little time you are spending on what is important, it will become easier to cut back on activities that don't move you forward towards your goals.