

Time Management

This is an extremely popular subject at the moment, which is probably not surprising bearing in mind the current business climate. People seem to have more to do and less time to do it in so any practical methods are welcome. Here is an approach that we have found particularly useful.

Step 1

Stop!

Take a deep breath and consider this. You cannot do it all. You are only human and you have a finite lifespan. You need to be realistic about what can be achieved and pace yourself. This may seem counter-intuitive but, as we shall see, it is a very important first step.

Step 2

Empty your head.

Your brain is very capable but can easily become filled with 'stuff'. There are things you must remember to do and appointments you must not forget. There are deadlines that must be met and people that must be called and there is just too much of it – too much to keep in our heads. So it starts to spill out and we then start to forget things. Not good.

This key step is therefore all about emptying your head. Take every single thing that is worrying you, concerning you, on your mind, mustn't be forgotten and record it somewhere. Any method will do, from a simple note pad to a voice recording, just as long as you get it all out of your head.

Step 3

Keep your head empty!

Again this might sound like a poor idea but if it's empty it can start to think properly and perform more efficiently. If it's full then this can't happen so easily. You should now be able to relax a little more and take on the challenges of work with greater confidence. But what about that big list of jobs?

Step 4

Develop a system.

Now that you have a long list of things to do you can start to tackle them sensibly.

There are generally two types of job – those which can be done really quickly and easily and those which take more time, and possibly several attempts, to finish.

If something can be done quickly then it's best just to do it now. Don't delay, just do it and then forget about it. More complex jobs must be planned however. You can estimate how many hours it will take and how many hours a day you can afford to spend on it. You can then estimate when you will be able to deliver and then start to plan your time accordingly.

All these larger jobs should be accounted for in your time management system. Personally I tend to work better in the mornings so that's when I schedule time for the more critical jobs that need my focus and attention. The other routine tasks then get slotted in around that.

As well as this you may also want to setup systems for recording key telephone calls, longer term projects, useful support information and good ideas that you don't have time to look at just now.

If your list equates to you working say 100 hours a week for the next year than at least you have some hard evidence to approach your manager with. They are much more likely to respond to this approach than they are to a casual 'I've got too much work to do'.

Step 5

Keep disciplined.

It's very easy to start a system (as outlined above) but much more difficult to maintain it. Priorities change and problems occur which can threaten your best laid plans.

Keep an eye open for 'time stealer' i.e. those activities that nibble away at your precious time allocation but only make a small contribution to achieving something worthwhile.

Common time stealers include interruptions, aimlessly surfing the web and using e-mail!

Yes, e-mail is a great invention but you can very easily become a slave to it (rather than it serve you). Consider turning-off e-mail reminders (they are extremely distracting). Better still, don't switch on your e-mails at all until later in the day! Instead try starting the day by working on that report you've been putting off or that sales analysis that you would rather forget about. This can be really tough to do but if you try it you will find that you should get more productive work done. After all there are very few instances where an e-mail can't wait for a couple of hours or so before you answer it. And don't forget whilst you are answering e-mails about other peoples problems you are not tackling your own! Try it and see.

Developing a workable system takes effort and discipline but this should repay itself in improved usage of your time and a more happy 'you'.

Good luck.
