

Plan Your Time - Make Time for Yourself

Effective Scheduling

Scheduling is the process by which you look at the time available to you, and plan how you will use it to achieve the goals you have identified. By using a schedule properly, you can:

- Understand what you can realistically achieve with your time;
- Plan to make the best use of the time available;
- Leave enough time for things you absolutely must do;
- Preserve contingency time to handle 'the unexpected'; and
- Minimise stress by avoiding over-commitment to others.

A well thought-through schedule allows you to manage your commitments, while still leaving you time to do the things that are important to you. It is therefore your most important weapon for beating work overload.

Scheduling

Scheduling is best done on a regular basis, for example at the start of every week. Go through the following steps in preparing your schedule:

1. Start by identifying the time you want to make available for your work. This will depend on the design of your job and on your personal goals in life.
2. Next, block in the actions you absolutely must take to do a good job. These will often be the things you are assessed against.
For example, if you manage people, then you must make time available for coaching, supervision, and dealing with issues that arise. Similarly, you must allow time to communicate with your boss and key people around you. (While people may let you get away with 'neglecting them' in the short-term, your best time management efforts will surely be derailed if you do not set aside time for those who are important in your life.)
3. Review your To Do List, and schedule in the high priority, urgent activities, as well as the essential maintenance tasks that cannot be delegated and cannot be avoided.
4. Next, block in appropriate contingency time. You will learn how much of this you need by experience. Normally, the more unpredictable your job, the more contingency time you need. The reality of many people's work is of constant interruption: Studies show some managers getting an average of as little as six minutes uninterrupted work done at a time.

Obviously, you cannot tell when interruptions will occur. However, by leaving space in your schedule, you give yourself the flexibility to rearrange your schedule to react effectively to urgent issues.

5. What you now have left is your "discretionary time": the time available to deliver your priorities and achieve your goals. Review your Prioritized To Do List and personal goals evaluate the time needed to achieve these actions, and schedule them in.

By the time you reach step 5, you may find that you have little or no discretionary time available. If this is the case, then revisit the assumptions you used in the first four steps. Question whether things are absolutely necessary, whether they can be delegated, or whether they can be done in an abbreviated way.

Remember that one of the most important ways people learn to achieve success is by maximising the 'leverage' they can achieve with their time. They increase the amount of work they can manage by delegating work to other people, spending money outsourcing key tasks, or using technology to automate as much of their work as possible. This frees them up to achieve their goals.

Also, use this as an opportunity to review your to do list and personal goals. Have you set goals that just aren't achievable with the time you have available? Are you taking on too many additional duties? Or are you treating things as being more important than they really are?

If your discretionary time is still limited, then you may need to renegotiate your workload. With a well-thought through schedule as evidence, you may find this surprisingly easy.