

Where Did All My Time Go?

by Daniel M. Sell, SPHR
Dansumur Consulting LLC

It just seems like we never have enough time. While we would love to, we do not have the ability to create more time; 24/7 is not just a phrase, it's reality. Once we use our time it's gone (unless you have those secret time machine plans floating around someplace in which case please disregard this article).

So if we can't create more time we better manage what we've got. With that in mind here are a couple of basic tips to help manage that precious commodity.

- Write it down – Plan in advance how you want to use your time and write it down, don't try to remember everything.
- Use only one source for your planning - Regardless of whether it's paper or electronic, have just one source that is always accessible to you for planning all your activities (both business and personal). Having multiple sources of information usually ends up with something getting missed or forgotten. However if those sources are electronic and can be synced together, you basically create one source with multiple access. Post-it notes and pieces of paper are easily lost or misplaced, and they add to clutter.
- Prioritize – There are two types of activities that compete for our time. One type is Important and the other type is Urgent. Those activities that are both Important and Urgent should be the top priorities (A). Important activities should be next (B). Urgent activities should be last (C). We tend to get caught up with those things that are Urgent because they are often more visible, have some energy or emotion attached, or because they are just easier to do.

Think of an example where there is \$1,000 spread out on a really big table. There are three \$100 bills, six \$50 bills, ten \$20 bills, ten \$10 bills, ten \$5 bills, forty \$1 bills, and \$10 in loose change. Whatever you can pick up in 5 seconds you can keep, but the table is too big and the money is too spread out to get it all. What do you have in your hand after the 5 seconds? My guess is you probably have the \$100 bills, most of the \$50's, and some of the \$20's along with a few \$10's, \$5's, and \$1's because they were near the larger bills. In other words while everything was Urgent (the 5 seconds time limit) you focused on what was Important (the denominations of the bills). Welcome to prioritization.

- Do It Now (“I’d like to procrastinate, but I keep putting it off”) - Sometimes we put off activities that we know we must do, but just don’t want or like to do them. We save them for last when we’re tired and not at our best. If it is something that you must do and it’s going to be a challenge, do it first while you’re fresh and able to focus.
- Do One Thing at a Time – Multitasking is about activity and not results. Focus on the specific results you need to get, and don’t dilute your efforts and energies by spreading them too thin. Do one thing at a time and do it well.
- Organizing E-mail – If you are using Outlook for your e-mail, you can have the system automatically organize your e-mail for you. If you right click on the Inbox folder and then click on New Folder you can create folders for specific people, or project names, or however you want to organize your e-mails. Then you can then have Outlook automatically move e-mail to the appropriate folder by clicking on Tools on the toolbar, clicking Rules and Alerts, and then New Rule. At that stage you can develop the particular rules that you want. A simple example would be to have e-mails from a specific person go directly to the folder you have set up for that person. After clicking New Rules go to Step 1 (Select a template) and select “Move messages from someone to a folder”. At Step 2 (Edit the rule description) click “People or distribution list” and select the person’s name. Then do the second part by clicking “Specified folder” and then clicking Next. Outlook will walk you through the rest of the process.
- Avoid the urge to copy everyone on your e-mails and just copy only those people who really need to be included in the distribution. By copying more people than necessary, it adds to their e-mails and encourages them to respond to you, regardless of whether they really have anything of value to add to the conversation.

I’d like to provide you with some more tips, but I’m out of time.