

Time Management

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TIME MANAGEMENT

1. Introduction

Is your Outlook Inbox overloaded? Is your voicemail box full? Do you feel stressed just looking at the piles in your office? Are you afraid you're going to drop the ball on something – you just don't know what?

There's good news and good news. You are not alone in the time management challenge and there are simple and effective changes you can make to make life easier. The trick is finding what works for you and to keep at it. There is an immediate and continuous payoff when you implement time management techniques. You have more energy, enthusiasm and less stress. If this sounds much like an ad for weight loss and exercise, it's for good reason. Just as eating healthy, exercising and getting sufficient sleep need to be a part of our daily routine, so do time management techniques. We all need to keep at it and practice until a new technique becomes a new habit. Once a new technique becomes a habit, it's automated, takes less effort and becomes an easier part of daily life. Will it really ever be that perfect? Maybe. Can you be better at it? Definitely.

2. Some Things You Should Know About Your Brain

Your brain, smart though it is, has its limitations. Neuroscience has come a long way in helping us understand our capabilities. Your prefrontal cortex is primarily responsible for making decisions and problem-solving. It is, however, only a very small part of the brain (4-5%).¹ A rare resource, it needs to be used in the most efficient manner possible or it will be exhausted.

If you are coming into work and looking at 100 emails first thing in your day, you are taxing your brain. If you are checking email on your computer and/or your phone constantly while working on a file, you are wearing down your mental energy. If you are remembering (or trying to remember) all the things you need to do today without writing them down, you are hurting your ability to function at your peak. Time management techniques help you with all of these issues. That's why they are recommended!! So save your brain, your focus and your energy and try implementing a couple of new techniques.

3. Provide Yourself with Some Incentive to Change

If the thought of giving your brain a break is not sufficient incentive for you to improve your time management skills, take a moment and think about the choices you are making for your day.

¹ Your Brain at Work – Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long, David Rock, HarperCollins, 2009, p.5.

Scenario 1 is where you open your email and 100 are sitting there waiting for a response. Or you're working on a contract or drafting pleadings that are due today and your phone rings or someone pokes their head in your office to chat. Or you know you've forgotten to do something – you just can't remember what. You know that stress.

Scenario 2 is your ideal day. You work hard all day long. You're organized. You get through a number of files. You hold productive conversations with your assistant and your colleagues. You cope with that client who is in crisis. You end the day feeling satisfied, hit the gym and then head home to spend some quality time with your family.

Every time you think about putting off these techniques until tomorrow or next week, think about the difference in how you feel when you read each of those 2 scenarios above. Then get started on making a change.

4. Time Management Techniques

All lawyers demonstrate excellent time management skills from time to time. Most show greatest efficiency when preparing to leave on holiday. They focus on the tasks that need doing, they ignore distractions and they get things done. However, we're not always headed off on holiday nor do we want the stress of trying to complete everything in such a short time period. Here are some alternatives to consider.

a. 4-Step Time Management

- **Step 1: Write it down**

In order to know what needs doing, you need a to-do list. Trying to keep all the things you need to do in your head taxes your prefrontal cortex and wastes its energy. It also causes needless stress, a sense that there are more things you need to do than you are capable of, feelings of guilt that you're forgetting something important and a general sense of overwhelm. If you get it out of your head and onto paper, you free up your brain for more important tasks. Do separate lists for work (preferably at work) and home (preferably at home).

- **Step 2: Prioritize**

Once you create your to-do list, you need to determine what is most important. Rate each item:

- A – urgent and important