

Do It Now: Good Time Management

Introduction

How many people do you know who are always claiming they are rushed off their feet, always busy, no time to think, stop, eat, talk to you...? If you followed them around for a day, you would almost certainly find they could plan their time far better, so they could actually free up time to relax, chat, destress themselves, have a latte.

Stress is one of the great killers of our time. No job is worth dying for. The trouble is these days, we're all

too easy to get hold of – everything is wanted NOW and to make matters worse, most of us have to do our own typing!

To help with Time Management, try and remember the Four "D's":

- **DO IT NOW**
- **DELEGATE IT**
- **DIARY IT**
- **DUMP IT**

Do ...delegate ...diary ...dump

DO IT NOW. The biggest mistake most people make is putting off all the little jobs till later because they're "not very important." All this does is create an ever-growing list of little jobs that, by the end of the day or week is hanging over you like some great sword of doom – "I can't possibly go home till I've done all these jobs." It preys on your mind and you can't concentrate fully on other tasks. Why not do the little jobs now, one by one, as they come up? Someone wants some information which you've got on a factsheet – pop it in an envelope and stick it in the post tray. Job done. You don't even have to think about it again.

Or you can...**DELEGATE IT** to someone else to do and report back to you when they've done it. That's another job done. (That's provided of course that you've got someone to delegate it to!). Don't forget though that delegation carries responsibility: ensure that what you are delegating is relevant and appropriate, you are not just off loading tasks for the sake of it— unless you want a revolt on your hands!



DIARY IT. Decide when to do it. Make time for things. Plan it in. If a job's worth doing it's worth doing well. Set aside some time to do a major job – and don't let anything else overlap with it. Maybe you've got a report or a funding bid to write. Lock yourself away with strict instructions not to be disturbed. Or take it home – provided you can guarantee you're not going to get disturbed there every five minutes by children, the cat, spouse, live-in lover or whatever. If you've got a huge job to do, such as writing a business plan, don't try and do it all at once. Spread it over several weeks or even months, in bite-sized chunks.

And don't forget, some jobs just aren't worth doing – be ruthless... **DUMP IT.** You've only got so many hours in a day, so why spend them reading through a sheaf of reports of minor interest to your organisation or that are only trying to sell you something. If you think it might be useful in future for reference, file it. If not, bin it – **NOW!**

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The keys to success

The key to time management is to partition your life into neat parcels. That way you only need to think about one thing at a time. If you've got a meeting next week, put it in your diary. If you need to read up on some paperwork for that meeting, diary some time for that as well, a day or two in advance. Then you don't need to think about it 'til the time comes. And diary some free time as well – don't let your diary get completely full, because you're going to need some spare hours to catch up with all the messages that have come in while you've been in meetings. This is called Desk Time.

During the Second World War, some vital piece of information about the German V2 rocket programme was discovered by British scientific intelligence and Prime Minister Winston Churchill asked when they became aware of it. "Two days ago," said his scientific adviser. "Why wasn't I told immediately?" growled Churchill. "Because since then I've been in seven scientific committee meetings," said the adviser. Churchill was not happy, and asked how anybody was supposed to get any important war work done if they were just going from one committee meeting to another. He ordered the adviser to ignore any committees he didn't consider important. And we can all do that for ourselves – in the voluntary sector there are always more meetings than there are hours in the day. Be clear about your reasons for attending – ask, "what's in it for us? Is this of any value to the organisation?" If the answer's "No," **don't go.**

It all sounds terribly easy and of course it's mostly common sense. We can all look at our lives and think, "If only I was a bit more organised I could do all this."

And if there really isn't enough time...

If, despite all this, you still aren't getting the job done, stop. Think. Be honest. Is it you or is it the job? We all tend to blame ourselves and think it must be us. But the truth is, particularly in the voluntary sector, jobs tend to pile up on the shoulders of one person. If this is the case, talk it through with your supervisor,

Life's not perfect, especially in the voluntary sector, where things are inevitably a bit less structured. But if you follow the four D's you'll make a big difference to your life and reduce your stress levels into the bargain. Some people overuse the "always busy" routine. They seem to think it makes them look important.

Thinking time is valuable time

Set aside time for that too. If you've got a report or bid to write, the worst thing you can do is sit down with a blank sheet of paper and two hours to finish it in. You could have been collecting information in note form, maybe organising ideas sessions with colleagues, so that the process of writing the report/bid is just a matter of distilling your notes into plain English and assembling them into a logical order.

Have a "to do" list

Cross things off as you do them. Then if you've unexpectedly got a few spare minutes, look down the list for a "quick win," such as making a brief phone call. That's another job off the list. There's nothing more satisfying than crossing off the last item at the end of the day and chucking the paper in the bin.

Value other people's time

Be on time for appointments – don't keep people waiting when they've arrived on time to see you - it gives the impression you consider your time more important than theirs. Listen to what people say. Too much time is wasted by people not listening properly, jumping to conclusions, not letting the other person finish.

line manager or committee. Can the job description be adjusted to reflect a changing workload or priorities? Can anything be delegated to somebody else or even dropped completely? Don't be defensive about it. If the job has really grown too big, it's not fair to expect one person to do it.

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Dealing with stress

Having too much to do, and poor time management, contribute to increased stress. We probably all know of people who have had to resign due to stress – or even died because of it. It's just not worth it, so ensure that you try and deal with the warning signs by raising the issues with your supervisor, line manager or committee.

Stress Warning Signs

- Not sleeping properly, dreaming about work
- Frequent minor infections or stomach problems
- Constant feeling of worry, dreading going to work
- Feeling tired all the time
- Difficulty concentrating in meetings
- Getting emotional or losing temper over little things, at home or at work
- Increased consumption of alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, caffeine, etc

Originally written by Derby CVS and adapted with their permission.

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