



Time Management

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss various time management techniques.

Time Management

Getting Things in Order

In some workplaces it seems to be impossible to get everything done. This session will help you to prioritize what does need to be done and sort it out from things that you could do, but may not have the time to finish.

Brian Tracy wrote a great little book called *Eat that Frog!* that helps people get over procrastinating. He also plays with a couple of quotes from the writer Mark Twain that help us to remember what we are meant to do, and how to stop putting things off. The idea is this:

“If the first thing you do each morning is to eat a live frog, you can go through the day with the satisfaction of knowing that is probably the worst thing that is going to happen to you all day long. “

We are often guilty about procrastinating, and this stops us from getting things done. And as you likely already know, when we procrastinate about one thing, it can also interfere with getting other things done.

As Mark Twain said, “The rule of frog eating is this: If you have to eat two frogs, eat the ugliest one first.”

This quote is about taking the frog – the thing we are procrastinating about – and getting on with eating it. Clearly, after you’ve eaten a great big frog, everything else you have to do that day is going to be easier than what you started off with.

By procrastinating, that thing we are putting off often becomes a bigger and more daunting task than it really is, and the more we think about (rather than doing something about it), the more space it can take up in our head.

This is a very simple concept that can have a profound impact on our results. There is no self-satisfaction in knowing that we are letting things get away from us, and we feel better and more motivated when we go ahead and get these things crossed off our to do lists.

Do you have a frog or two waiting for you at work?

What is standing in the way of eating that frog?

Mastering E-mail

One of the greatest demands on our time is e-mail, and so it is important to put it in proper perspective with the demands of our jobs. We've become a society where we expect replies to e-mail immediately. Many people send e-mails out to more recipients and with more frequency than is often required.

While e-mail has become a benefit in many ways, it is also a huge contributor to people's stress. And it's not enough to just be able to check an e-mail on a computer somewhere; many managers have issued with a hand-held device that allows them to be connected to their e-mail 24/7.

Let's see what kind of an impact it has on your day in terms of time.

- How many e-mails do you receive in an average day? _____
- How many of those e-mails do you reply to? _____
- How many e-mails do you send (not including the replies)? _____

Let's say that an average e-mail takes you three minutes (and that is only if they are short and need very quick thinking on your part).

- Total from above: _____ x 3 = _____
- ***This is the total number of minutes per day that you manage e-mail.***

Look carefully at that number. It is not unusual for us to talk to managers who receive, reply, and create up to 100 e-mails per day. 100 e-mails a day is equivalent to 300 minutes, or five hours of time each day!

Since we normally have lots of additional tasks in the day in addition to e-mail (like meetings, administration, performance management and coaching), is it any wonder that we struggle to get through the day? Add to this the time you might take to read reports, meeting minutes or agendas, process information or work on projects, eat a healthy lunch, and perhaps some time spent invested in your people, and it's no wonder we are often looking for more time.

Time Management Tips

Time can get away on all of us, but if this happens regularly, we will never get caught up! Here are some time management tips that are collected from peak efficiency experts. You will find that if you implement even a few at a time, your productivity will improve enormously.

Eight Exciting Ideas

- You can save yourself an hour a day by getting organized. Did your mother ever tell you that there was "a place for everything and everything in its place?" The lesson there is to put things away and know where you put them. There is no need to do a big clean up once a year if you can take a half hour once a week to file, sort, and keep things organized.
- It is important to identify and operate within two time horizons: short and long term. Anticipating events allows things to get done in the short term which contribute to achieving long-term objectives.
- An up-to-date master calendar can be your most helpful planning tool. If you prefer an electronic version, make sure that it is backed up properly so that you don't lose your data.
- When things begin to get hectic, a "Things to do today" list can help you focus your attention on the highest priority items.
- Action Planning Worksheets, Milestone Charts, and PERT Diagrams are excellent planning aids when properly used.
- Planning contact with colleagues and staff will help minimize the disruption of their schedules. Keep a file for each person you meet with on a regular basis, with items to be discussed.
- The most effective approaches to planning are those tailored to meet individual needs. Concepts, procedures, and worksheets should all be customized to fit individual circumstances.
- Experts say nothing should be attempted without prior planning, but there must be flexibility in your plan.

A Planning Checklist

For every plan you make, cover all these points:

- What
- Where

- When
- How
- Who

Putting Plans into Action with Scheduling Aids

Some useful short term planning aids:

- A daily to-do list
- A planner with at least a week at a glance
- A monthly project list
- Project planning worksheet

Organizing Your Work Area and Your Paperwork

A clean desk is not a sign of an empty mind! Don't fall prey to the false notion that a messy work area means you're busy because you look busy, thinking that if you look busy, then you're productive. Being active is not the same as being productive!

Here are some tips for organizing your work area.

Do it now!

Anything that takes less than 30 minutes should be done as it comes up. Otherwise, we tend to procrastinate.

Dump.

Throw out or take home all those things you have collected that you don't need or use.

Sort and group.

Your desk should be organized logically; pencils and pens in one place, another place for letterhead and envelopes. Have a basket for projects and another one for priority items so that you can locate the things you need when you want them. You can use the same kind of system on your computer so that you can find your working files. Once a project is complete, move it into an appropriate folder for retention.

Set up a system.

Use a planner to jot down your daily to-do list and schedule in any tasks that will take longer than 30 minutes to do. Prioritize each item so that you know what to work on, and make sure that you stick to the list. (Maintain some flexibility for emergencies, but make sure you get back to priorities as soon as possible.)

Don't save papers you can easily find somewhere else.

Don't ask yourself, "Is there a chance I will need this someday?" because the answer is nearly always yes. Ask yourself, "If I know I need this, do I know how to find it?" One of our biggest time-wasters is searching for papers we know we have but we can't find. If a piece of paper is important enough to save, it is important enough to file for retrieval.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Time Management,(1996), By Chris Croft*
- ✓ *Successful Time Management,(2013), By Patrick Forsyth*