



Time Management: Setting Up Your Schedule For Success

Would you describe yourself as extremely busy? Do you often feel tired and stressed out? Sometimes our ambition is our worst enemy. Many of us with big goals try to do way too much. We spread ourselves a mile wide and an inch deep. We are involved in many different things, but aren't excelling at any one thing. Beware of mediocrity. Most of us want greatness. If that describes you, then you must prioritize your endeavors and adjust your schedule accordingly.

Assess your current schedule. Make a list of everything in your life that takes time. This includes school, work, extracurricular activities, sleeping, eating, studying, exercising, talking on the phone, hanging out with friends, chores, bathing, etc. List EVERYTHING. Then note how many hours per week you need for each item to do it well. Add up the hours. While there are only 168 hours in a week, many of us need two or three times that to accommodate our schedule. This is where stress and mediocrity come from.

Make your list again, but this time, find a way to limit yourself to 168 hours. There are only two ways to do this: reduce the number of weekly hours per item, or reduce the number of items. I recommend the latter. Cutting activities you enjoy out of your life can be painful, but it's necessary.

Then, to work more efficiently, try some of the following tips:

1. **Make a daily to-do list.** This will help you organize your day and prevent you from forgetting important tasks.
2. **Prioritize your to-do items.** Some tasks are not as critical as others. Assign each task an A, B or C rating. A items are important tasks that must get done right away. B items are important, but not as important as A items. C items are things that need to get done at some point, but there's no rush. Once you've assigned a rating to each task, re-write your to-do list with all the A items on top (in order of importance), then the B and C items. Complete the A items first. This may seem obvious, but think about how many times you've put off an important (sometimes unpleasant) task so you could call a friend, clean your room or do something else that really didn't need to happen at that time. Stick to what's important.
3. **Group similar activities together.** Make all your phone calls at once. Run all your errands at once. Transitioning from one type of activity to another takes time, so group like to-do items together and complete them at the same time.

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4. **Overlap.** Sometimes you can do two things at once. For example, you can read while you do the laundry. You can write a letter while you're on the bus. Be careful about doing multiple tasks if one of them requires your focus.
5. **Identify and avoid time wasters.** We all have them. I like to check my e-mail. Some people like to take unnecessary naps. Some people look for things to clean and organize as an excuse not to work. See what you do that wastes your time and stop doing it.
6. **Identify and avoid distractions.** My cat likes to jump onto my lap when I work. Some people work with music on, but then start singing. Maybe your phone rings a lot and you always answer. Eliminate these distractions when you need to get stuff done.
7. **Find a good place to work.** See where you're most productive and focused.
8. **Organize your workspace.**
9. **Keep flat surfaces clean.**
10. **Use an effective filing system.** Make sure you know where everything is.
11. **Take pit stops.** Sometimes taking a 5 minute snack break or a 60-second breathing break can re-energize you and improve your efficiency.
12. **Do more during your most productive hours.** Some of us are morning people while others are night owls. Work during your best time.

Many people think they must work harder to be successful. In most cases, they just need to work *smarter*. Take time to manage time. Otherwise, it will manage you.

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