

The
Time Management
Toolkit

Course
Notes



Introduction

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Time is finite.

There are only 24 hours in a day, which is 1,440 minutes or 86,400 seconds.

And if we sleep for the recommended 8 hours a night, that only leaves us with 16 hours, or 960 minutes, or 57,600 seconds to work, spend time with families and friends, indulge in our hobbies and develop ourselves.

Which is not a lot of time really. So how we plan and manage that time becomes really important if we want to get the most out of our short time.

This short course aims to help you do that by looking at how people perceive time, and how that affects how some people are better at managing it than others.

It will show you how to change your perception of time to get the most out of your time at work and elsewhere.

There are tools, techniques and processes to help you manage your time more effectively, and the great part about it is that you can take it at your own pace.

I hope you get some benefit from the course and find, as I did that you can improve your time management quite easily.

FOCUS /10

Perception of Time

Some people are naturally better at managing time than others.

The way that we perceive time affects our natural ability to manage it effectively, so it is worth looking at how this works – and what we can do about it

Physical time is basically objective but psychological time is malleable and subjective. Our perception of the passing of time changes and we have sayings like, time flies and a watched pot never boils. For me, it always seems to take longer to drive home when I've been working away than it does to get to where I'm working.

We don't even perceive time itself, but rather the changes in time, or events. We often perceive time in a linear way with a series of events so that the line resembles a string of pearls with gaps of different lengths between events.

Timeline



Neurologists believe we have a complex system to make sense of time in our heads. This system differs from our senses since we can't directly perceive time like we can with sounds or smells but have to reconstruct it.

When the brain receives new information the raw data doesn't necessarily arrive in the right order so it organises it so you can easily understand it. With familiar information it takes less time to process it than with unfamiliar information so it feels like it takes less time than unfamiliar information.

Perception of time also depends on focus. Measuring the length of an event takes focus and off that reason, when you are focused on something which takes your whole attention it can feel like time passes more quickly.

So, although we see time as a line with events separated with different length gaps, there are two main differences to the way people see those lines, and this difference leads to different behaviours and abilities to manage time.

Timelines

Through time

People who perceive their timeline in from of them, with time passing from one side to another (usually left to right) are called Through Time people who are looking through their timeline.

They tend to be naturally better at managing their time, punctual, good at meeting deadlines and planning as well as reviewing and learning from the past.

In time

In time people see themselves as standing in their timeline, usually with the past behind them and the future in front of them.

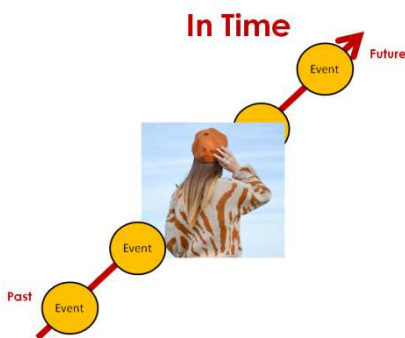
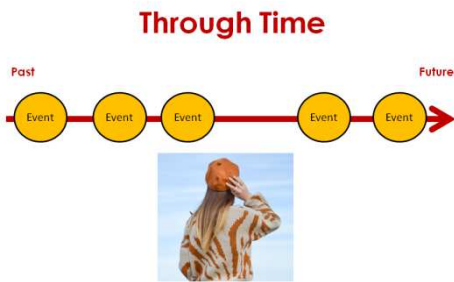
They tend to be very good at being in the moment and focused on the 'now'.

They also tend to be less good at planning or reviewing and learning from the past, less punctual and less able to work to deadlines.

There are advantages and disadvantages to both of these and it is useful to be able to swap from one to the other as needed.

Choosing to be through time when you want to plan or meet a tight deadline, review what just happened or learn from the past is relatively easy.

Similarly, the ability to be in the moment when you need to be is really useful, and simple to do.



Parallel Processing

Parallel processing is the ability to focus on one task while your unconscious thinks about something else altogether

Have you ever gone to sleep at night with a problem and woken up with a solution? If you have, you will understand that your unconscious mind is constantly processing and thinking, even when your conscious mind isn't.

So parallel processing is really about using this ability in a controlled way. By setting your unconscious a task you can get on with something else while your internal team is working on something else.

From a time management perspective this is really helpful. A great way to use this is if you are planning a presentation. If you sit down at your screen straight away you will usually find it takes quite a long time to prepare your presentation. If you delay the planning, the same thing happens when you finally sit down to do it.

If you have a conversation with your unconscious and formally give it a task, with objectives, parameters and any other key information it needs, then arrange to have another discussion at a set date and time to review, you will find that preparing your presentation when you do sit down to do it will take much less time so saving you time and freeing you up to do other things.



So this is a natural process you can take control of and use effectively in a whole range of situations which will allow you to fully focus on a task so you can complete it effectively and quickly, making the most of your time, while, at the same time thinking about other tasks you need to do, increasing your creativity, improving your planning and ensuring that you do not forget any tasks.

So, this might sound a little strange, but it really does work and, like with everything else covered on this course you need to try it out and see how it works for you.

It might feel a little uncomfortable, but, to learn anything new you have to step outside your comfort zone.

Distracters

The best planned day can go awry due to a whole range of distracters – but even these can be managed

Training You can also train your customers to communicate on your terms. Every time you update a client tell them when you will next be working on their project and encourage them to phone or email you at that time. E.g. "I will be working on this on Friday morning so call me at 9.00 a.m. to let me know what thoughts you have. If that's not convenient email me to let me know when you will be available". This way you control the telephone communication.

Email Contrary to popular belief emails do not have to be answered (or even read) the second they arrive. Plan time in the day for attending to emails and ignore them at other times. If you find it impossible to ignore the pop up telling you that you have mail then either disable it or close down your mail programme altogether.

Phones Similarly, you don't have to be available to talk on the phone just because someone has called you. The best solution to this is to brief the receptionist on whether or not you can be disturbed (and who by, in what circumstances) during any given task. If you don't have a receptionist discuss the problem with colleagues – perhaps you could take it in turns to deal with calls thus allowing each other some undisturbed time in each day. However, you must plan in regular times to deal with calls because good customer service is critical.

Colleagues Sometimes, with the best will in the world, a friendly colleague can be a problem and open plan offices can really exacerbate that problem. If someone is distracting you with idle chatter it is better to give them some polite and friendly feedback rather than to seethe inwardly.

Office noise If the office atmosphere is just too noisy and generally distracting consider moving to a quieter part of the building or assess whether it might be appropriate to work from home occasionally. However, beware of the home distractions which can be far more powerful than workplace distractions.

Customers Customers phone you or email you (or even just drop in to see you) when they have time, not when you do. To counteract this problem you need to plan for it and to train your customers:

Plan for it If you plan time to regularly review projects with your customers and communicate with them pro-actively they will feel valued and so will be less likely to complain or fuss because they don't know what is going on.

Dealing With Distractions

In the introduction to this course I asked you to score yourself out of 10 for focus.

The reason you don't score 10 is that you are distracted. We are distracted by a wide range of things both work and non work related.

Have you ever been in the middle of something and suddenly remembered a deadline fast approaching that you had forgotten about?

Or something comes to mind that you said you would do but haven't?

Or the gas bill you haven't paid?

This is perfectly normal. The problem is that distractions lead to a reduction in focus which reduces your effectiveness in whatever you are doing now which often means the task takes longer and isn't completed properly.

There are only 2 ways to deal with distractions. You can either, deal with the distraction, get it out of the way now and leave the way free to focus on the job in hand, or you can choose to leave it until later – but make a decision.

If you do that, though, choose a time to do it.



The problem is, your unconscious isn't very good at telling the time and to it, the word 'later' means just that. 1 second later is 'later' so you will find that the distraction keeps popping into your head, even though you have made a decision to do it later.

If you say, I'll do that at 4pm, you will find that the distraction goes away until much closer to 4pm. After a while, as your unconscious learns to trust that 4pm means 4pm, you will forget about the distraction until 4pm, allowing you to concentrate fully on the job in hand.

Another way to deal with distractions is to avoid them. You can do this by prioritising your activities with the Eisenhower matrix or the Urgent Important matrix.

Scheduling

You can also use scheduling.

Block out your diary for routine activities.

If it is really urgent – put it in the right place on your matrix and do it.

One of the biggest problems of the digital age (according to client) was caused by Blackberry when they introduced push notifications.

Users I spoke to found that they were feeling less and less in control of their activities as they answered, got distracted and often acted on notifications as they came in.

I've also been in meetings where I watch people's eyes move to the bottom right corner of their screen when an email arrives and then watch them glaze over as their focus moves elsewhere.

Take control of this by scheduling time to deal with emails – perhaps the first 30 minutes and the last 30 minutes of your day. There is very little that can't wait. We have conditioned ourselves into responding immediately to emails and other messages as soon as they arrive. It is extremely rare that someone needs a reply that quickly. They might like it – but it's not critical.

Block out your calendar – especially if other people have access to it. I speak to lots of people who have their diary crashed by other people which messes up their plans for the day. It's harder if you have it blocked out already.



Saying No

People often adopt passive behaviour because they want other people to like them. This means that they often get pushed around and end up agreeing to things against their will.

Saying 'No' can be tremendously difficult for many people. There are many different reasons people find it so hard. Some people just like to please others and feel that 'NO' would be an unwelcome response. Others are afraid of the aggressive reaction a 'NO' might provoke.

On the other hand, some people are just unthinking or unrealistic about what they are able to deliver. Whatever the reason, a lot of individuals find 'NO' impossible.

If someone's first reaction is to say 'NO', then it is important for them to think about why they want to say 'NO'. If they believe it is the right response, then they should find a way of saying it as directly as possible without making excuses and beating about the bush, or giving long-winded explanations.

The key to an assertive 'NO' is to remember that – You have the right to say 'NO' without guilt.

Unless you say no too often and without considering the request first. One of my client's had a Manager who was nicknamed 'No Billy' behind his back because his first response was always no to anything that was suggested he do or was requested of him.



Saying 'NO' firmly and reasonably is quite acceptable to most people and much better than letting them down later. It can be helpful for people to think about the kinds of things they find it hard to say 'NO' to and also what kind of people are hard to refuse. Is it doing favours for friends? Taking on extra work from a senior person? Giving money to doorstep callers? Saying 'NO' becomes easier with practice and saves a lot of worry and lack of self-respect later. It is worth trying.

Keep it short and simple.
Avoid long justifications.
Give a reason for refusing (not an excuse).
Avoid 'I can't'.
Don't apologise.
Acknowledge the person.
Ask for clarification.
Ask for time.

Procrastination

pro·cras·ti·nate (pr -kr s t -n t , pr -)

v. **pro·cras·ti·nat·ed**, **pro·cras·ti·nat·ing**, **pro·cras·ti·nates**
v.intr.

To put off doing something, especially out of habitual carelessness or laziness.

v.tr.

To postpone or delay needlessly.

Procrastination is the antithesis of productivity. Sometimes it is clear that we are procrastinating – for example, when we are checking out Facebook rather than working! At other times we can even convince ourselves that we are working – we're just not working as planned. For example, procrastinating students are notorious for being able to spend three days devising a beautiful, full colour revision plan – whilst leaving only one day to actually revise.

Notice the ways in which you procrastinate – which jobs do you habitually avoid? Why?

Consider adopting the "eat a toad" approach to your work.

"Eat a toad for breakfast every day. That way, you can be sure nothing worse will happen to you all day."

Having established your day's work-load (using the matrix above) start the day by completing the tasks you least want to do – that way they won't be hanging over you all day and you won't have the same need to procrastinate.



**Urgent
Important**

Do you have too many tasks to keep them all in your head?

Do you make lists?

For lots of people, the problem with lists is that it is difficult to prioritise them. We tend to start at the top and work our way down, and any new tasks either get added to the bottom or we do them as they come in rather than continuing our systematic approach.

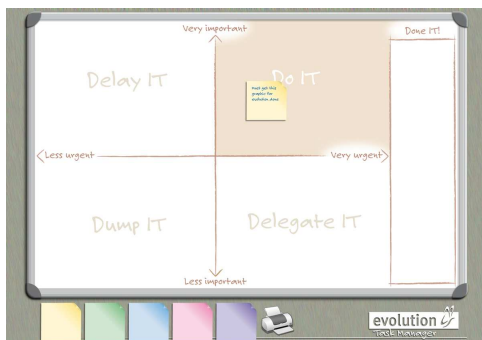
At the end of the day we turn the page and start the process again the next morning.

This is ineffective, unproductive and demotivating.

Dwight Eisenhower said in a speech in 1954 "I have two kinds of problems: the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent"

Urgent means that a task requires immediate attention. These are the to-do's that shout "Now!" Urgent tasks make us reactive.

Important tasks are things that contribute to our long-term objectives. Sometimes important tasks are also urgent, but typically they're not. When we focus on important activities we are much more proactive and motivated.



Steven Covey popularised this approach to prioritising with an urgent/important matrix split into four quadrants. This helps you to decide whether a task should be done, dumped, delegated or delayed.

I have adapted this approach to make it more dynamic so you can continually review and revise tasks throughout the day or week and accurately change priorities when new tasks arrive.

It also allows you to feel a sense of achievement when you have completed tasks – always a good motivator.

Delegation

Eisenhower's Matrix has three options to not do a task.
Delay it, Dump it or Delegate it.

Delaying the task usually only means you have to do it later-
usually when you are strapped for time.

Dumping it – ie ignoring it often backfires
when you find yourself in trouble for not completing the task
which became important and urgent.

So, the only way to get a task done
while freeing up your time to let you focus on other things
is delegation.

We often back away from delegation for a number of reasons.

Some of the reasons I have heard in the past are:

They might not do it as well as I do

They might do it better than I do

No one else has the skills

It's my job

I can't delegate that.

They're too busy

There isn't anyone to delegate to.

There are very few things you can't delegate. The main one being Accountability.

You can delegate Authority for a task, but you are still accountable

for the job getting done.

So what are benefits of Delegating apart from the obvious freeing up of your time:

Develops subordinates.

Improves motivation.

Creates time for planning and creative work.

Increases job satisfaction.

Inspires confidence and trust.

Quicker action.

Assessment of potential.

Aids succession planning.

Fosters teamwork.

Fresh viewpoint of task.

Platform for better work.

Creates opportunity for achievement.

Improved communication through feedback.

Reduce costs.

Improves all-round effectiveness.



Delegation

So what should you delegate?

My rule of thumb is –
if it takes longer to explain than to do it, and it only has to be done infrequently
– do it yourself.
If it will free up more time than it takes to explain and/or it happens
on a regular basis, delegate it.

Don't just choose all the things you don't like to do.
If you don't like it there's a good chance no one else will.

If you don't have anyone obvious to delegate to, you will have to be creative.
There's no reason you can't delegate sideways, or upwards –
or out of the organisation, as long as that doesn't go against company policy.

Of course there is a difference between delegating and dumping on someone and there are some risks to delegating .

Choose the wrong person.
Where to stop.
Halo effect.
Resentment from other staff.
Cost.
Mistakes.
Individual becomes overworked – stress.
Too many leaders.

The way that you delegate the task will mean the difference between success and failure.

Decide what to delegate.
Decide who to delegate to.
Interview to assess willingness.
Additional responsibility needed.
Additional authority needed.
Provide resource

Additional training and experience needed (dates).
Decide target date for full acceptance.
Set standards.
Review job descriptions.
Monitor progress (stewardship interviews).
Give support and recognition.
Use the form



Delegation

Example of a Delegation Plan

Name: Peter Harding.
 Task Delegated: Completion of monthly financial report
 Target date for Completion: 5th October.

Sub - Tasks	Additional authority needed	Plan for additional Training / Experience	Others to be notified	Date	Action
1. Review last 3 financial reports to establish format / style etc.	Password needed to access / use reports. ER to contact IT for password – needs approval from Finance Director	Discuss previous reports with ER – Q&A session.	Finance Director IT	By June 30th	ER PH
2. Collect data from finance staff in all departments.		PH to meet all staff in person.	Finance staff in all departments.	By 2 nd of each month	ER PH
3. Enter data into spreadsheet.		One to one training on data categories / structure of spreadsheet.	IT training staff TJ Trained by end of June	On 3 rd of each month	PH TJ
4. Run automatic reports		One to one training on reports – software capabilities.	IT training staff TJ Trained by end of June	On 3 rd of each month	PH TJ
5. Write conclusions / recommendations and complete cohesive report.	Seek approval for final report from ER prior to submission to board.	Coaching by ER around style / conclusions / political awareness as needed.		By 5 th of each month	PH ER
Review dates	June 31 st	July 5 th	July 20 th	August 5 th	September 5 th

Signed
(Delegating Manager) Date: 15th June

Elaine Roberts

Signed Date: 15th June

Peter Harding

Top Tips

Manage Your Timeline.

Use Parallel Processing whenever possible.

Be creative in your approach to work. Don't allow yourself to fall into the "But that's the way we've always done it" mindset.

Manage your workload – don't be managed by it. Be assertive with people who eat into your productivity.

Find out what's involved before you say "yes" to anything.

Manage meetings so that they are truly productive – keep the customer on track and summarise so that everyone knows what is required of them.

Use a diary and a time planner.

Train colleagues, customers and managers to ensure that they have realistic expectations of you and so are rarely disappointed.

Be assertive.

Manage your environment so that it works for you.

Allocate time for the "unexpected".

Use the urgent / important matrix.

Do one job at a time and give it your full attention.

Handle each piece of paper only once.

Group tasks according to type.

Clear your desk at the end of each day but don't worry if it is untidy mid-task so long as this doesn't interfere with your efficiency.

Do the big stuff first.

Eat the toad for breakfast.

Follow project plans to the letter and communicate any potential problems to colleagues as soon as possible.

A Final Word

I hope you found the course interesting and useful. And I'm sure what you have learned will improve your use of the finite time we have in both your work and private life

Of course, it's not what you know that's important, it's what you do with what you know that makes the difference. Taking action is the key and the more action you take, the more difference you will see.

Remember the old saying, "if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got."

If you want something different you have to do something different.

I imagine that you came to this course wanting to get something different? Obviously just wanting something different isn't going to make it happen, you need to have some different tools and a different way of thinking to make it happen.

From this course you have got some tools, and alternative ways of thinking about time and the way you use it.

So try it out, look at your timeline, play with it to help you perceive your time differently, learn how to deal with distractions and try getting them out of the way or planning a time to deal with them.

Delegate more, delegate what you can, when you can and do it in a structured way.

Put a whiteboard on your wall and fill it with urgent important post-it's, start a conversation with your unconscious and utilise your internal team to help you be more creative and effective.

You might not get it all right at first but, imperfect action beats perfect action every time.

For all learning to be permanent it has to take place at an unconscious level. The way to make that learning unconscious is to practice, repeat the actions often and, importantly get feedback to reinforce the benefits of your actions.

Ask other people for feedback and make sure you give yourself feedback. Take time to review what you've done and how it has helped.

It's a good idea to use the time log and look at how you spend your time compared with how you did it at the start of the course.