

David Drennan's Top Time Management Tips

for

Getting Things Done With Your Time

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Getting Things Done With Your Time

If Only I Had More Time!

- Do you feel that you always seem to be short of time?
- Do you often feel you have too much to do?
- Do you then feel guilty about what you don't get done?
- Do you find yourself struggling under piles of paperwork?
- Has the advent of e-mail and mobile phones just added to the burden?
- Do you go home some days and wonder just what you have achieved?
- Do you sometimes feel stressed with all the things you have to do?
- Do you work overtime, or into evenings and weekends just to cope with it all?
- Could you use a few more hours in the day?

Well, the tips and techniques described here are bound to help you. In fact, if you follow the tips given here religiously, you will give yourself at least an extra hour of effective time every working day. Indeed, that's what will happen if you just follow Tip No. 1 by itself. It proved so effective for Bill Schwab, he paid his consultant thousands of dollars for that one idea alone. But in this case, it won't cost you a penny!

And just think about what that extra hour actually means. One extra hour a day amounts to over 20 extra hours a month, around 240 hours a year, or around six extra working weeks a year! Do you think if someone gave you an extra six weeks to use just as you saw fit, you could get some useful things done? I'll bet you could! Well, now's your opportunity.

So, let's get on to the practical advice straight away.

Tip No. 1 - The Schwab Action List

Way back in the 1920's Andrew Carnegie was one of the most famous millionaires in America. He owned the Bethlehem Steel Company which produced rails for the American railroads. He employed as his chief executive a man called William Schwab, whose ability in managing and motivating people he admired so much, he paid him a salary of \$1 million a year! Imagine what that would be worth today. (I can tell you : it's \$35 million in 2009 money.)

A management consultant once approached Schwab claiming he had an idea which would help him and his senior executives get more done with their valuable time.

He said he did not want to charge Schwab any fee - he simply wanted him to try the idea for a month or so, and then pay him what he thought it was worth. After only three weeks' trial Schwab sent the consultant a cheque for \$25,000. That's worth more than \$750,000 in today's money. Some idea! So what was it?

This is what the consultant told Schwab :

Every evening make a list of all the things that are on your mind, and on which you need to work the following day. Don't leave anything out. The order does not matter. Then decide what are the first three things you will work on, and write the numbers 1, 2, 3 against them. Don't go any further than that.

Next day :

- **Start on number one**
- **Do not start on number two until you have finished number one!**

That's it. There's no more to say. That's the whole story.

It all seems so simple. Why did Schwab find it so useful, why did he think it was worth so much money? Well, the act of writing everything down and applying numbers to your tasks forces you into deciding your priorities every day, to decide what is most important to get done, and in what order. Instead of going home at night thinking: 'I really should have got that done today', you will know you got down to the really important things first.

That's why Schwab liked it so much. He spent a lot less of his day on time-wasting trivialities - he really got major things done. If a manager like Schwab - already paid \$1 million then because he was such a great manager - thinks this idea is worth today's equivalent of \$750,000, then it is clearly worth thinking about.

I have used this system personally for years, and I have to say, of all the tactics I've ever used for managing my time, this is the most useful of the lot. It's both simple and it works. However, here are a few extra tips and points about the system which you will find useful.

(a) Compose your list the night before

When you do that, and without your doing anything active about it, you will find your subconscious mind begins to work on the items, both as you go home, and overnight too. Then, having incubated them silently overnight, you will often find ideas popping out next day which will help you handle problems more effectively. In addition, you will find yourself preparing for a prompt start as you travel in to work, as you already know what you are going to be working on. That way you

spend less time on office chatter and other distractions and get down to work straight away.

(b) Put everything you can think of down on your list

Have you ever been working on an item, but something else you haven't done keeps nagging away at the back of your mind, and you can't concentrate properly on what you are doing? I suppose we've all done that. Well, get it all down on the list - once you can see it down there, your mind will let it go and you'll be able to concentrate much better on what you're doing now.

(c) Keep checking your priorities

When you have finished with item number one, review your list and consider whether item two is still the next priority. If it is, get straight on with it. However, a phone call might have added something urgent to the list in the meantime. Or you suddenly remember something you should have been working on. Just add the new item to your list, reconsider your 1, 2, 3, and start again on number one.

(d) Resist the time-wasting trivia

Because your lists are sometimes long, there will always be a tendency to 'knock off' a few of the trivial items first, just to make the list look shorter. If you do that you'll find you are half-way through the morning and you still haven't started on your real number one. However, some relatively unimportant things may have to be done by a certain time e.g. the post goes at four o'clock and you need to get something off that day. Because you get to choose your next three items, you can use a mixture of both the urgent and the important. The system is very flexible.

(e) Delegate!

Once you have used the system for a few weeks, you'll realise that some items are never going to rise to the top. These are the candidates for delegation. If you have an assistant, show them what needs to be done in detail, and let them handle these items permanently. If you have no subordinates, speak to your boss or colleagues about how you can find a different way of dealing with them. Better still, if nothing much has happened as a result of going undone, consider dropping them altogether!

(f) Just use one list

Don't use several lists for different purposes, just work off one list. Keep it visible on your work surface all the time, and put a definite line through each item as you complete it. Two useful psychological things will happen :

- There's a great deal of satisfaction seeing yourself visibly getting through the work.
- Because everything you need to do is on the list, you will not feel guilty all day

about the things you haven't done yet - they will get done, but all in good time.

(g) You have to practise

You can't play good tennis simply by reading the rules, you have to practise. It's the same here. You will find, despite my warning you against it, there will be a great temptation every time to knock off trivial items before you get started on your number one, or to 'just answer this e-mail', or 'just make this phone call'. Resist that. If it needs doing first, you should have made it your number one! Stick with the priorities you yourself have decided. And as you practise, you will find yourself getting better all the time.

Tip No. 2 - The Two-Ship Syndrome

Computer simulations often reveal useful new ways of tackling old problems. When I was involved some years ago helping to improve productivity in the docks, we conducted a computer study which demonstrated a simple truth which has influenced how I work ever since. I have dubbed it **The Two-Ship Syndrome**. It's illustrated on the next page.

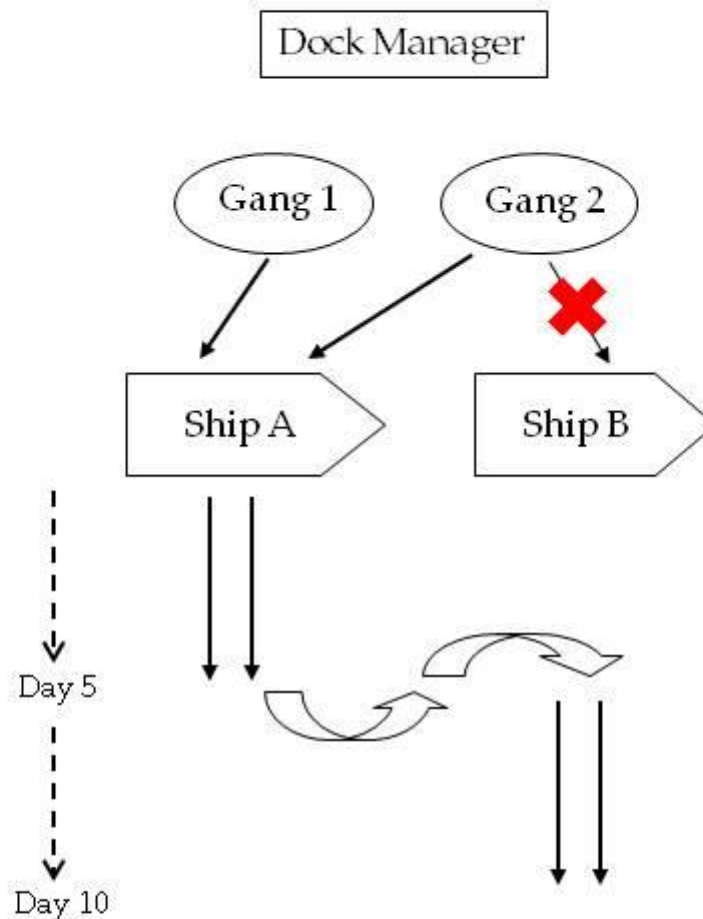
Traditionally dock work has been measured in 'gang shifts' i.e. estimating how many shifts it would take for a gang of, say, eight men, to unload a particular cargo. Imagine that two ships enter a port at the same time, each with ten gang shifts of unloading work. With only two gangs available, the dock manager would normally allocate one gang to each ship - that way no ship gets an unfair advantage, and each ship departs at the end of day ten.

Our computer simulations told us that was the wrong thing to do. Despite the aggravation he might get from one ship's master, the dock manager should allocate both gangs to one ship first. With two gangs operating, Ship A would then depart in half the time (day five). Both gangs should then transfer to Ship B. It would not depart until day ten, of course, but under the old system it was always going to depart on day ten anyway! The advantage is that by putting all his resources on to one vessel at a time, Ship A can depart much earlier, and the second ship is completed in the same time as before.

Have a look . . .



The Two-Ship Syndrome



Notes

Both ships arrive at the same time. Each ship has ten gang days of discharging work to be done. If the Dock Manager puts one gang onto each ship, as requested, each ship will leave in 10 days' time.

However, if he puts two gangs first onto Ship A, it will leave after only 5 days. If the two gangs then move onto Ship B, it will leave on Day 10. But by the other method, it was always going to leave on Day 10. With exactly the same resources, the Dock Manager has improved Ship A's productivity by 100%, while losing none for Ship B.

Moral : Put all your resources into getting Job One done first. Then transfer all your resources to Job Two.

The implications of this simple but fundamental point can be quite far-reaching. The clear lessons are :

- **Give all your resources and attention to one task at a time until it is completed.**
- Don't keep several things going at one time - it is confusing, it makes life complicated, and it takes longer to get any one thing done.
- Choose your first priority and stick with it until you are through. Most important : there is no disadvantage to task number two if you stick with task one until it is complete. It gets done in the same time as before. But someone can be getting the benefit of your first piece of completed work while you are working on the second.
- There is no magic. It is simply the best way to get the best productivity from your valuable time.

Tip No. 3 - Reactive Time and Proactive Time

Many people say they could arrange their time much better if it weren't for other people - they are the real problem. They send you letters that need replies, they call you to meetings, they send you endless e-mails, they phone at the most inconvenient times, and generally disrupt your day.

It is quite true that in organisations of any size, demands are made of you by your boss, colleagues, subordinates and others. But clearly you all need to work together to make the whole business operate efficiently. So you need to accept that much of your day will be taken up with reacting to other people's requirements of you. This is what is called **reactive time**, and just accept that in any organisation of any size, it is inevitable.

Once you accept mentally that this is an essential and inescapable part of everyone's job, you will immediately feel less frustrated and less resentful that people are 'stealing' your precious time. However, **your in-basket is not the job!** You need to spend at least part of every day devoted to doing the important parts of your job, to delivering the results for which you are being paid - that is called **proactive time**.

So, what should the proportions be exactly? That depends on the job. If you are a manager with a number of subordinates or colleagues with whom you have to interact, then perhaps less than 50 per cent of your time can be put in the 'proactive' category. The more senior you are the less likely you are able to control the amount of proactive time you get. Then again, if you are serving customers face to face, more than 90 per cent of your time may be spent 'reacting' to their needs. But that is the important part of the job - administration and working alone will come second. Normally, you should be able to get in about two hours or more each day on the

major objectives of your job, or on the 'proactive' tasks that will really make a difference to the performance of your department or your business. If you cannot say what these objectives or tasks are off the top of your head, you need to spend time getting clear in your mind exactly what they are. Otherwise you will definitely not be in control of your time or your life - you will simply be letting events and circumstances buffet you around willy-nilly.

You can identify the 'proactive' tasks of your job by asking yourself questions like the following :

- (a) What are the outputs required of my job? In other words, what are the tangible results I am expected to deliver?

Note : We are not interested here in all the activities required to produce the result, only the result. The task then is to minimise the activities required to produce the result. That is the key to improved productivity. You need to focus particularly on the outputs of the job. For example, the output of a salesperson is not sales calls, but actual sales. The first is only the means to the end, and the end is what you need to identify.

- (b) What contributions can I, in my job, uniquely make to the organisation?

Every job will have unique contributions it can make to the organisation. For example, a manager might be responsible for providing the right equipment and training to do a job, but the member of staff will be responsible for the quality of work they turn out. That contribution is unique to them. So, describe exactly what a quality job would look like in your case. That is what the company is actually paying you for, and is what you should spend important time on.

- (c) Who are my customers, and what do they expect of me?

In this sense, your customers are the people who get the result of your work. They can be both internal and external. If you don't know exactly, you will get a lot of useful credit if you go and ask them. Here's what to ask them :

- What gets done well now which you appreciate and want me to continue?
- What could I do which might improve my service to you?
- If I were to concentrate on just two of these items, which would be most important to you?

By the way, don't promise the earth, but the goodwill you generate, and the pointers you get on how you could spend your time effectively, will be invaluable.

This is all about your proactive time, identifying the real value you can deliver to your organisation; and in knowing how to allocate your time, there is nothing more important.

Tip No. 4 - Getting Undisturbed Time

You may find it difficult ever to get enough uninterrupted time to get something major or worthwhile done. That is a common management problem. The only way you can regularly get some **undisturbed time (UDT)** is to make some agreements with your boss, colleagues and subordinates. Here's what one group of managers decided to do to get over the problem.

They agreed that they would take their UDT in chunks of one-and-a-half hours. Why one-and-a-half hours? Because you can get something useful done if you don't get disturbed for an hour-and-a-half. And there is seldom anything so urgent that a colleague can't wait for that length of time to speak to you without any real problem.

Being in the insurance business this group of managers found they had a big pile of mail every morning, and they often had minor questions and problems to sort out first thing. So they agreed they would all be available to each other early each morning. Anyone having some UDT would take it between the hours of 11.30 and 1.00p.m. or between 2.30 and 4.00 p.m.

The arrangement means they all know when they can actually get some undisturbed time, and also when they can get their queries answered by their colleagues both morning and afternoon. They all agreed to respect each other's UDT - that's important, or this system won't work. When a secretary says: "He's taking some UDT", they leave her boss alone. But they also know when they will be able to see to him that day, namely before 11.30, between 1.00 and 2.30, and again after 4.00 p.m. Since this group adopted the system, they find they can get all their little issues dealt with at three different times during the day, but they also find they can get much more done with their personal time.

There is a great tendency for the urgent to crowd out the important all the time. You know the syndrome - you rush about all day doing things but you feel you are 'not really getting anything done'. So, book some meetings with yourself. If all you put in your diary is meetings with other people, you imply that time for yourself is less important than attending to everyone else's needs. So book your own time and fit the rest around it. That way you'll get some time for these essential positive tasks.

Don't offend your colleagues by shutting yourself away and refusing to see them, however. Otherwise you imply that anything you are doing is much more important than whatever they want to see you about. They'll just get back at you later by being 'unavailable' when you need them. The better solution is to make agreements with them about when you will be regularly available, and about respecting each other's UDT.

Some eighty years ago a mathematician called Pareto discovered that 80% of the wealth in Italy was owned by just 20% of the population. This has become known as 'Pareto's Law', or the 80/20 rule. In business this shows as a tendency for a relatively small proportion of factors to have the greatest impact on results. For example, many companies find that 80 per cent of their sales are accounted for by only 20 per cent of their product lines. Similarly 80 per cent of their sales may come from only 20 per cent of their customer list, and so on. These 20 per cent are the critical few customers on which any business would want to concentrate to maximise its results.

Similarly, in doing your job it is important to identify the 'critical few' tasks which matter in your job, rather than be bogged down by doing the 'trivial many'. Make sure you know which are the 20 per cent which matter and do some work on them every day. Never go home any day without having done something to advance your work on these, the key outputs of your job.

Tip No. 5 - Managing Other People

I once had a 2.30 appointment to meet a Senior Manager, but there was a queue of five people waiting to see him at his office when I arrived. He dealt with them all one by one before we were able finally to sit down together, late. They all thought it was marvellous to be able to come to Norman and get quick answers, and he secretly felt it was a daily demonstration of how important he was to the company i.e. how indispensable he was.

But he wasn't managing his time at all, it was managing him. It's easy to be seduced by the idea that the place would fall apart if you weren't there, it's flattering to your ego. But it's not managing. What happens, as in this case, is that your people feel it's easier to get you to provide an answer to all their problems, and it's safer too - because if they do what you say and it happens to go wrong, then it's obvious who will be to blame.

What also happens is they arrive in your office and say something like : "We've got a problem", and then proceed to explain it to you. That's the first step : instead of it being their problem, it's now shared, it's become our problem. You discuss it, there does not appear to be a quick answer, so you say : "I need to think about this. Leave it with me, and I'll get back to you." That's step two. They have taken this troublesome monkey and left it in your office. It's not their problem any more, it's all yours! And that's a killer for any effective management of your time.

There's a simple solution for this all-too-regular event. Your people won't act with greater responsibility until you give them more responsibility. And not doing

everything for them will give you a lot more of your own time back. So, don't ever agree to talk about any problem unless your people come with a recommended solution. That means all of the thinking time will be theirs, and importantly, you will be helping them develop their management skills in the process.

Don't ever fall into the trap of saying : "If you want a job doing right, you'd better do it yourself", or "By the time I've explained how to do it, I could have done it myself". That's a person who is always going to be short of time, who is not going to develop their people, who is going to stay merely a do-er rather than a manager. Ask yourself each time : 'Is this something I should really be doing, or could it be done just as well or better by somebody else?' Good managers delegate to get more done. And you can use this three-level delegation process to help you get there.

- 1 The subordinate presents you with a recommended solution. You approve, they implement. This is the stage where the member of staff is still being 'educated' to take on full responsibility for the matter in question.
- 2 The subordinate implements an action to solve a problem by themselves, then advises you what they have done to keep you up-to-date.
- 3 You feel the person concerned can now be trusted fully with the task concerned. They no longer have to advise you, they take on full responsibility, and implement their own problem solutions without reference. That's the way they grow, and relieve you of a work burden at the same time.

A Dozen More Tips and Advice

- 1 Keep a time log for two weeks - it will show you what you actually do with your time, and help you see how you can use your time better. On the last page of this booklet you will find a simple Daily Time Record form you can photo-copy and use for the purpose.

Don't just record the events at the end of the day, you'll start rationalising how you have spent your time. Record what you do every half-hour (or get your secretary to do it) to get at the full truth. You may be surprised at what you find.

- 2 Make a routine of any task that is recurrent, and then delegate it to a subordinate.
- 3 Buy a personal organiser or PDA, and use it for information you need constantly, which you can then locate quickly.
- 4 When you have a major deadline to meet, create small deadlines in your diary along the way - you need to give yourself milestones to ensure you stay on track.

- 5 If you say you are going to get back to someone, do so. Don't wait for them to get back to you. It just wastes their time and yours.
- 6 If you are not going to make a deadline, be sure you inform anybody who is affected before the event, and not after. Before the deadline is a reason, after the deadline is just an excuse.
- 7 However long your day is, your work will expand to fill it. Working late won't necessarily mean you achieve more.
- 8 Handle any single piece of paper once only, and deal with it first time. Practise - it makes a big difference.
- 9 When working on a task, first clear everything not to do with the task off your desk. Then focus on just that one.
- 10 Do whatever you find difficult before 10 o'clock. That way the rest of your day will be easy and completely guilt-free!
- 11 Never go to a meeting without an agenda.
- 12 Use travelling time constructively. Read, or think about - and solve - one problem.

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All of the ideas in this booklet will help you use your time more effectively. But don't try and do them all at once! Try one for a month, and practise it religiously. After 30 days it will have become a good new habit. Then add more, one at a time, as you go along. And remember, time is your most valuable resource.

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Daily Time Record

Day

Date

8.00	8.30
9.00	9.30
10.00	10.30
11.00	11.30
12.00	12.30
1.00	1.30
2.00	2.30
3.00	3.30
4.00	4.30
5.00	5.30
6.00	6.30