



## From the Team:

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## Time Management: Towards Optimal Performance

It would be hard to find a person who hasn't read a book or taken a workshop on time management, or at the very least thought about time management. Everyone is interested in learning to use their time more wisely.

However, the traditional time management wisdom seems to work well for about half the people, while others listen or read about planning, prioritising, scheduling, and doing, and then turn back to their normal way of doing things - which means notes tacked to every available surface, piles of paper everywhere, and several projects in the air at any given time.

It takes time to make time work for you. If you are truly going to make any difference in your life you have to be prepared to make some changes.

### Consider this scenario...

There is a weight loss clinic - a very expensive weight loss clinic - that won't take people who aren't prepared to make small changes in their life. They arrive at the clinic expecting to get a diet that will make them thinner. Instead they are asked to go home and fill out a journal of all the changes they can make in their lives in a week. They may want to drive to work a different way or sit at a different place when they sit down to a meal. They may try sleeping on the other side of the bed or making little changes in their early morning routine. When people go back to the clinic at the end of the week staff evaluate the changes the person was able to make. If these changes aren't successful, they are not accepted into the programme. They are told, "If you can't change these small things, how will you make the major changes required to learn new ways of thinking about food?"

### Are you truly ready to try making a few changes in the manner that you manage your time?

You see, apart from managing our personal time, we are also accountable for the manner in which we manage our time at work. Consider the following example: Memory was appointed by a local Namibian commercial bank as a Human Resources Officer. She was appointed on a permanent employment contract which expects her to deliver competent services to her employer for 40 hours per week on average. Her remuneration package was also structured to remunerate her for 40 hours in a five-day working week, which amounts to N\$12 500 per month. This effectively means that she gets paid N\$576-83 per working day, which equates to N\$72-10 per hour, which in turn equates to N\$1-20 per minute, and so forth. This means that each and every minute, hour and day that she spends at work, she gets remunerated for such time and hence needs to account for time spent to serve the organisation according to her mandate as expressed in her agreed contract of employment. Is she adding value by managing her time well?

In a global business environment where the emphasis is being placed on increased efficiency and performance, the pressure of managing one's time more efficiently is becoming an essential ingredient to success and not merely a "nice to have". This is actually even more accentuated by the current tendency to engage people on performance contracts with defined key performance areas, performance indicators, targets and milestone to be achieved. The most important step in managing your time better is to plan better!

### Five Point Planning Check

For every plan you make, cover all these points:  
What? Where? When? How? Who?

### "Five Minutes Before the Hour"

If you have a desk or other surface that is cluttered, set aside five minutes before each hour to clear off one small part of it. At the end of your five minute session, set a timer for 55 minutes so you'll remember the next five minute period. What can you get done in only five minutes? Try it - you'll be surprised. At the end of two weeks you'll see a vast improvement. This example of instant success will bring a feeling of genuine satisfaction. The foundational element in planning is to know what we want to achieve, and the way we word our goals is the most significant factor in helping us to achieve them. Lucky for us, some smart person has come up with an acronym to help us remember these characteristics.

### Goals should be SMART.

#### S-SPECIFIC

When we make our goals too general we aren't able to visualise them, and if we can't see them, we have a hard time devoting our efforts toward reaching them. We are more apt to do a good job of re-decorating the bathroom if we have a picture in our mind of how it will look when it's done.

#### M-MEASURABLE

If we can't measure a goal, we have no idea how close we are getting to reaching it, and that can be de-motivating. For example, you have decided you will save some money from every pay cheque in order to take a holiday this summer. But if you don't set a specific amount each payday, and you don't have an amount you want to reach, you are less apt to put the money away.

#### A-ATTAINABLE

We sometimes think that we should set high targets or goals for ourselves, in order to grow and stretch. Well, we do want to grow and stretch, but if we set goals that aren't do-able, we soon get discouraged and we stop trying. The really high achievers in the world know this. They set goals that they know they can reach, with a little

stretching, and when they get there, they set another goal they know they can reach. They climb the mountain one foot at a time.

#### R-RELEVANT

Goals have to make sense, and have some importance, or they will soon be discarded. Set goals that make sense to you. (Another word that is often used for the R in this acronym is Realistic.)

#### T-TIMED

Put a deadline on your goals. Deadlines are great for getting things done.

### You will also want to make sure that your goals have the three P's.

Personal  
Positive  
Put in writing

#### Make them Personal.

You set goals because you want to reach them, not because your boss wants you to. Similarly, when you are helping your employees set goals, they must be goals that your employees want, not the goals you want for them. Without buy-in, you are wasting your time.

#### Make them Positive.

We can create some negative energy by saying what we aren't going to do, but the effect is more sustainable when we say what we will do. Goals aren't just about work. You are a whole person with many more sides to you than just your skill as an employee for your organisation. While you are thinking about setting goals, let's think about areas in which you want to set goals.

Setting a goal isn't enough though. The next step is deciding how we can achieve that goal.

Most people do not have goals. So if you do have goals, you are one step ahead of the pack. And if you have a strategy for reaching your goals, you are two steps ahead of the pack. Now the final thing I would suggest to keep you out there is to put these goals where you will see them often, to remind you of what you want to achieve.

#### Put these goals or targets in writing.

So everyone will remember them all the time and work towards them.

### The Four D's

#### Do it now

Do you spend a lot of time looking for things? Research tells us that the average person spends about 10% of the day looking for documents. If that were so, you could gain 5 weeks a year just by getting your retrieval methods under control!

Handle the little things that reduce concentration and cause anxiety: the clutter on your desk, the incomplete jobs. This is the opposite of prioritising. Do the quick and dirty tasks NOW! The crises in our lives are often the result of not handling the little things or not reacting to a nagging feeling that something is wrong. Ignore the little toothache and you wind up with a root canal.

Handle the worst first. We create more stress and anxiety, and waste more time and energy, over the things we least like to do. Why not just do them.

Try the salami technique. Break things down into small steps and get started. That is how we eat an elephant, one bite at a time.

#### Dump

This will take some practice and a hard-nosed approach if you have a tendency to hang on to stuff. If throwing it out is too difficult, give it away, or ask someone else to throw it out for you.

#### Delay

Occasionally we have legitimate delays. We are waiting for somebody else to get us information or complete a task. However, if you have deadlines, pass on deadlines to others as well. Don't let someone else's lack of planning short-circuit your deadlines.

#### Delegate

Don't waste your time doing things that somebody else can do, especially if they can do them better than you. Save your time for those things which you are uniquely qualified to do.

#### Other Information

In this information age, we have to know what we need to keep and what we don't need to keep. Don't keep what you don't need. Don't ask, "Will I ever need this?" The answer is almost sure to be "Maybe." Ask instead, "Where could I get this if I needed it?"

Most people occasionally battle the habit of procrastination - putting off something you really want or need to do. And in spite of how good you are at setting goals, procrastination can sabotage your personal and professional life.

Remember the weight loss clinic mentioned earlier? Are you willing to make small changes in your journey of achieving sustainable results over time? If so, then reading this article was 10 minutes of time well spent!

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