



Time Management Tips & Tricks

Introduction

How many of us truly feel we manage our time exactly the way we want, maximize our productivity, aren't influenced by distractions and are rarely interrupted?

For most of us the exact opposite is true. It seems like projects continue to pile up on our desks, our inboxes continue to fill, and our employees continue to come to us with “emergencies.”

By effectively managing our time, we can actually accomplish more quality work in a shorter amount of time. Few of us, though, understand how to do this.

We hope the following 12 tips will help you take complete control of your day.

Enjoy!



1. The Dreaded To-Do List

This is by far the most important tip. If you don't know what you're supposed to be doing, how can you manage your time effectively to get it done?

A lot has been written on effective to-do lists, so we'll only cover few ideas here:

1. **Prioritize the tasks on your lists.** Whether it's with different colors, a coding system, or different spots on the page, you must prioritize the most important items.
2. **Update your list every day.** *Before you do anything else*, take some time to write down what you want to accomplish. At the end of the day, evaluate which items were completed and how you may need to rearrange the items left undone.
3. **Be specific.** If you have large projects on your to-do list, be sure to include very specific items within that project you want to accomplish. What steps do you need to make today so you're closer to accomplishing your goal tomorrow.

What would you like to accomplish at work this month? What about this week? Today?



2. Set Personal Goals

Setting personal goals is a top priority for highly effective people who manage their time well. *They understand where they want to be and what they want to accomplish.* More importantly, though, they write down the daily, weekly, and monthly steps necessary to achieve those goals.

Personal goals are also great because they provide a vision of accomplishment once you complete a task. It is vital you write down how to accomplish your goals or you simply won't be able to appropriate the necessary amount of time to achieve them.

3. Conquer Interruptions

After setting up your to-do list, keep a log for at least one week of all of the interruptions that take place. Write down who interrupted you, whether it was an emergency or not, and how much time it took to resolve the matter. Once your log is complete you will have a much better idea of who is distracting you and how.

Schedule routine meetings with individuals who really do need your time but constantly interrupt you. That way they will have access to you at a predetermined day and time.

If you do get interrupted, quickly inform the person of how much time he has to discuss his issue. Once that allotted time has run out, wrap up the meeting.

4. Invitation Only

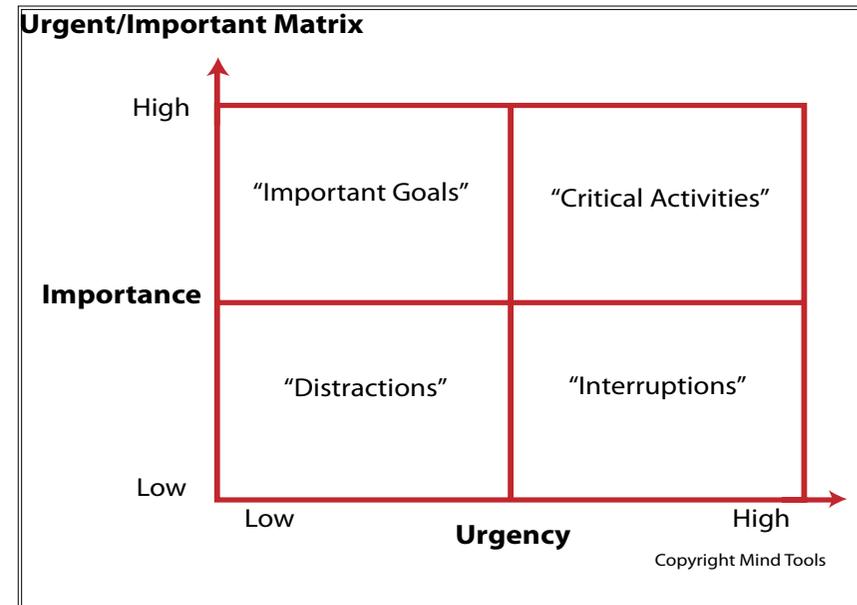
One of the best ways to avoid interruptions is to simply let people know when you are available and when you are not. Whether it's a closed door or a sign, your employees need to know when you are not to be bothered. This way you should only be interrupted in an emergency.

If you're a manager, it's important you don't abuse your "unavailable" time. If employees have issues or other concerns, they must know you will be available.

5. Prioritize

Since all of the tasks brought before you are “urgent,” *it’s important to distinguish between those tasks which are absolutely necessary and those that can wait.*

Mind Tools provides a great resource to entitled the Urgent/Important Matrix. This form distinguishes tasks by Importance and Urgency, and it asks you to label each task as being either high or low within those categories. High importance/high urgency tasks should be tackled first.



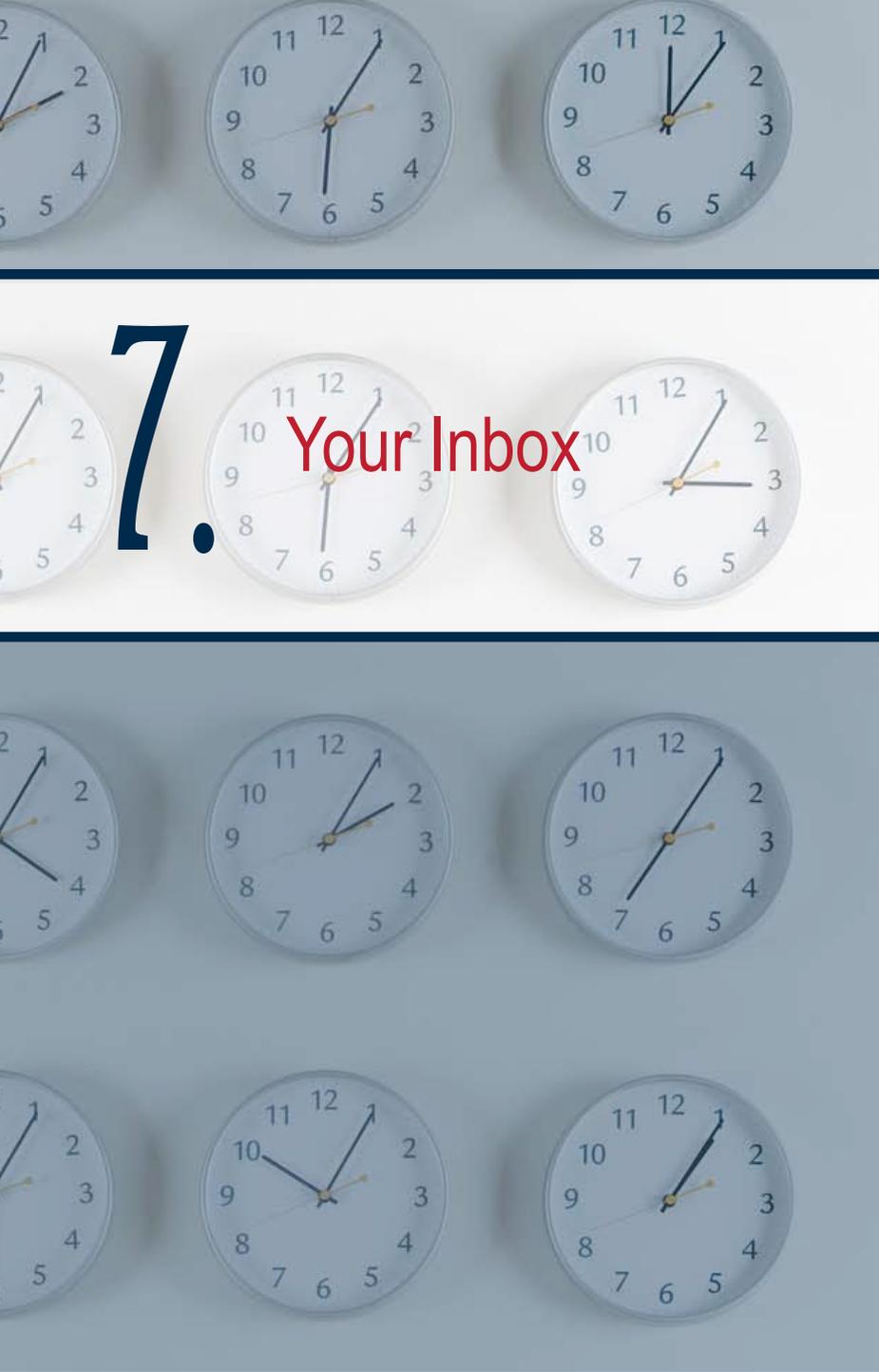


6. Effectively Schedule Tasks

Everybody is wired a little differently. Some people are effective in the morning while some may do their best work in the afternoon or even late at night.

Make sure you schedule your most important tasks when you are the most effective.

Scheduling this way will help you avoid tackling low-stress, low-energy work during the time when you would be the most effective. Working on tough projects during your least effective time will also make the projects take much longer than they should.



7. Your Inbox

If you let your email control your day, you will quickly find that while you may have an empty inbox, you will have accomplished none of the things you set out to do.

Avoid reading your emails as they come in. *In fact, one of the best things you can do is set a schedule to view your email at specific times during the day.* Most clients don't necessarily expect you to respond immediately, they just want to make sure you respond in a timely, predictable manner.

Also, during your set email time, move the emails out of your inbox once you read them. If you don't need the email – delete it. If it requires scheduling – get the item in your calendar. If it requires follow-up – put the item on your to-do or task list. Don't leave the email in your inbox. Leaving it there will make you much less efficient.



Avoid Multitasking

Many people think multitasking will help them complete multiple projects in a shorter amount of time. *However, studies show multitasking actually decreases your productivity by 20-40%.*

The human brain works much better when it is focused on only one task. You will actually work faster, more efficiently, and produce better results by focusing on one task at a time.

Dave Crenshaw wrote a fantastic article on [The Myth of Multitasking](#) if you are interested in finding out more about this.



9 Stay Organized

If you don't have a set system for organizing your paper files, computer files, website addresses, and other items, then you can easily waste a lot of time searching for documents when you need to retrieve them.

There are number of ways to effectively organize them, so the key is to remain consistent. If you save your documents a particular way, make sure you stick to that way. It is much easier to recall where and how items are stored when you do it the same way every time.

Also, make sure you bookmark websites you visit regularly in your web browser. Don't just mark the home page of the site, either. *Mark the page you continually need to access so you don't waste time clicking through pages to get what you need.*

10. Taking On Too Much

Individuals who have a hard time saying “no” to people will often end up overwhelmed with the amount of work they have to do. Because of their workload they will often produce poor, sloppy results.

If you already have too much on your plate, you must be assertive enough to say “no” when another project or task will overwhelm you. Make sure you explain to the person why you are declining his or her request for help, or bad feelings may arise.

Also, if you are a micromanager who has trouble delegating, you may quickly find yourself in over your head. Good managers understand what projects can be handled by their employees and how to explain specifically what they are looking for.

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Taking a Break vs. Procrastination

Nobody can work for 8 hours straight without taking some sort of break. Simply taking 5 minutes to walk around, get a drink, or take in some fresh air will actually improve your work product. If you have trouble remembering to take breaks you can set an alarm for yourself as a reminder.

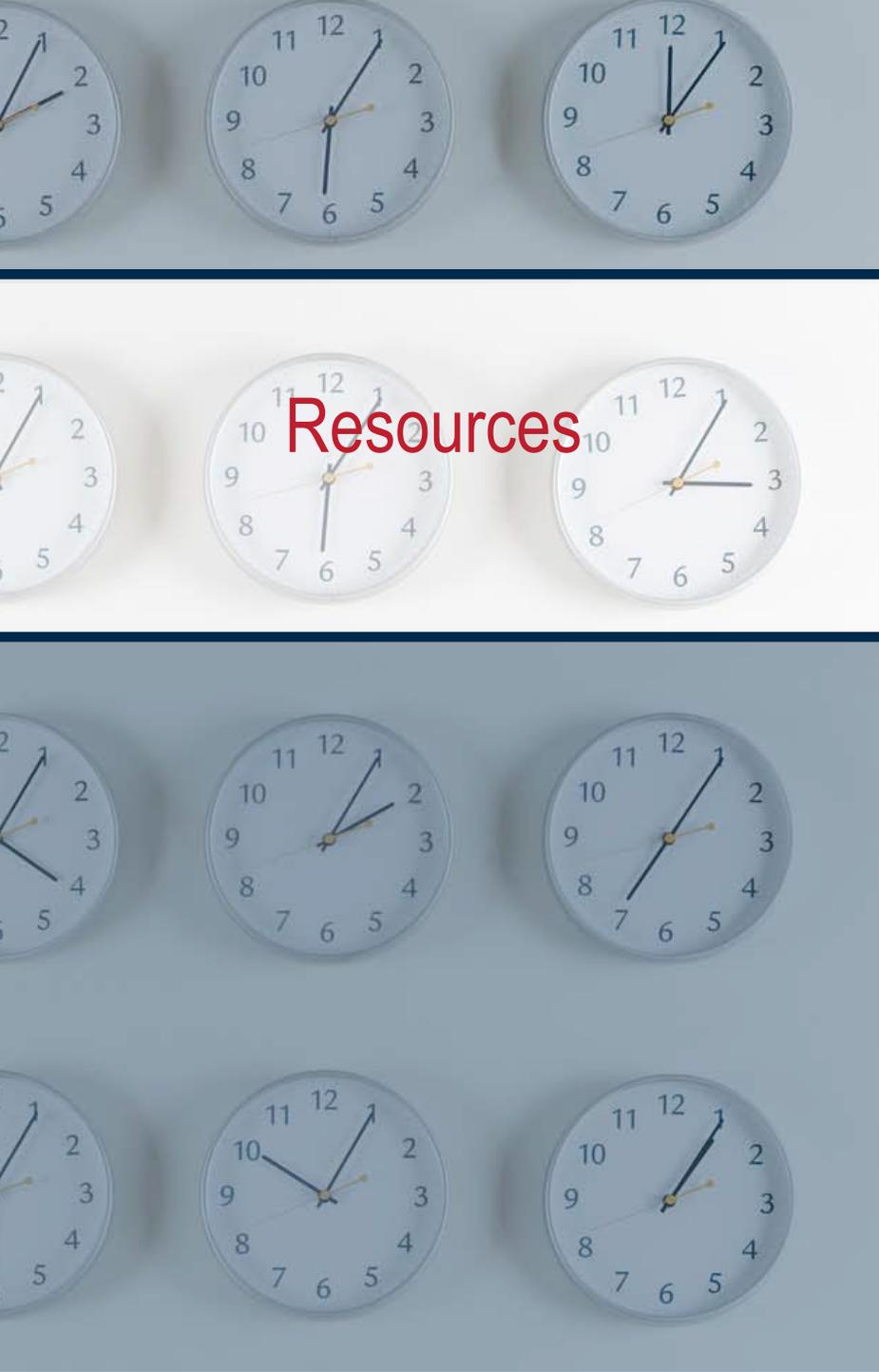
Taking a break is not to be confused with procrastination. Procrastination is when you put off the projects you should be working on at this very moment.

While most people think of procrastination as avoiding work completely, you are also procrastinating when you put off your most important tasks for easier, less urgent tasks.

12.

Baby Steps

One of the best ways to avoid procrastination is to make starting a project easy. Break up the initials steps of the task into 5 to 10 minute chunks. Working on small, manageable tasks will help you avoid feeling like you have to complete the entire project at one time.



Resources

1. *10 Common Time Management Mistakes*, Mind Tools, <http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/time-management-mistakes.htm>
2. *10 tips for time management in a multitasking world*, Penelope Trunk Blog, <http://blog.penelopetrunk.com/2006/12/10/10-tips-for-time-management-in-a-multitasking-world>
3. *10 Time Management Tips That Work*, Entrepreneur, Joe Mathews, Don De-bolt, and Deb Percival <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/219553>
4. *Personal Time Management Article- A Quick Start Guide To Managing Your Time*, Time Management Success, <http://www.time-management-success.com/time-management-article.html>