



Time Management Training Course

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1 - Introduction

The skills of time management are essential for everyone, not only at work, but in all other areas of our lives. They enable us to make good use of the time we have to achieve the things that are important to us. Unfortunately, for many of us, time is the resource least considered and worst regarded.

Time is a limited resource. We all have 168 hours every week and nothing we can do can increase that. Within this limit some people manage to achieve so much they are almost superhuman. For many of us, however, each week that passes represents another opportunity missed and another week wasted.

The key to changing this situation lies in four main areas:

- What we choose to do
- How we go about things
- Our personal habits
- Other people

This course is designed to equip you with the tools and techniques necessary to control your use of time, enabling you to organise the various aspects of your working life in a more positive and efficient manner.

The main objectives of this course are to enable you to achieve the following:

- Define clear objectives for your job
- Prioritise tasks more effectively
- Plan and schedule activities to achieve your goals
- Organise your time to get the important things done
- Manage interactions and interruptions



2 - Prioritising

Every day we are faced with hundreds of time use decisions. These are usually identifiable when we ask ourselves: "*What shall I do next?*" A better question to ask is: "*What is the best use of my time right now?*"

Those who make consistently good decisions about what to do next are the achievers. Those who do not tend to be very busy but achieve very little. They also tend to have higher stress levels and spend much more of their time "fire fighting"

The only way to make that "what to do next" decision, is to know the priority of each task.

Prioritising involves two parameters:- **Importance** and **Urgency**

Importance is the extent to which an activity takes you towards achieving your objectives.

Urgency is a measure of how soon a task needs to be done.



3 - Know Your Own Objectives

Before you can decide what is important, you must know your objectives. These can best be described as your measurements of success. When you achieve them you will be successful.

Developing your objectives can be difficult, but it is essential for effective time management. Start by writing out a list of headings that describe the main areas of your job. For each heading write a single sentence that describes success in that aspect of your job. Ideally each of these objectives should be:

- Specific**
- Measurable**
- Achievable**
- Realistic**
- Time framed**

Specific - This means that the objective is clear and unambiguous. It should consist of only one sentence. If you cannot write it in one sentence, you are probably unclear on what you are trying to achieve.

Measurable - The best objectives are measurable. A measurement gives absolute information on how successful you are and how far you have achieved the objective. However, some objectives, particularly those to do with people, are very difficult to measure. They should still be included in your list; and you ought to spend time on them even if it is hard to measure your achievement.

Achievable - An objective should be achievable but may not be realistic, because it would require too much of your time, or because it would conflict in some way with other objectives. Your objectives should be achievable within the constraints of your ability and your resources. They should also be realistic within the constraints of all other things you have to achieve.

Time framed - An objective without a time frame is a wish. You just do not do things that have no deadline. All your objectives must have a time frame. A straightforward example of this is a sales target where you are expected to achieve sales of, say, €100,000 by December. However you should note that some objectives may have an on-going time frame.



Defining your objectives in this format can be very difficult, particularly when it comes to the management of people and other interpersonal issues. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile developing them as best you can as they will help you enormously in deciding how to spend your time.



4 - Types of Tasks

There are four main types of tasks which can be listed in order of importance. Efficient task management ensures that each one will be completed, but those that are considered more urgent will be given more priority.

Type 1 - Urgent and important

These tasks need to be done soon. They are everyday tasks that must be done to keep everything moving - the maintenance tasks. They are also the crises and emergencies that arise regularly in the course of a day.

Type 2 - Longer-term activities

Depending on your job they may stretch out years in the future. They tend to be large and cannot be completed quickly and which normally require chunks of uninterrupted time. The only way we manage to get them done efficiently is to plan them. They fall into two categories:

1 Maintenance tasks - Maintenance tasks are those which have to be done to keep the operation running. They form part of our normal routine and we just do them. They require no justification and are safe and easy to do. They do not go away.

2 Progress tasks - These tasks do not *have* to be done. They are activities that enable us to develop; to move to a totally different position. Getting the time to do these normally requires some justification and may involve some risk if it doesn't prove successful.

Type 3 - Active and busy.

They tend to involve much activity and little progress. They are characterised by interruptions, phone calls and lots of little bits of tasks. You have more likely become used to your bustling. As an example, ask your self this question: do you interrupt your colleagues whenever you need to talk to them or do you meet them at a scheduled time?



Type 4 - Less urgent and less important.

They are usually on paper and may not need to be done at all. The consequences of not doing them are usually minimal.

Choosing between Type 2 and Type 3 tasks is difficult. We like to be active and busy and we tend to dislike the long-term, planned tasks. But while the Type 2 tasks can be avoided in the short term, their importance realises itself in the long-term and therefore must not be ignored.

The solution to the "What to do next" question is to opt for the Type 2 tasks more often and, if possible to minimise the Type 3's.

A realistic goal would be to reduce the time you spend on Type 3 by 10% and transfer that time to doing Type 2's.



5 - The "To Do" List

One of the simplest tools for identifying what we should be doing is the 'To Do' list. This is a simple list of unscheduled tasks and can be in any convenient format. To be effective it should be:

- Written out at the same time each day, preferably last thing before you go home. This unloads the things you have been remembering during the day and enables you to switch off when you leave work. The list should be previewed at the start of each day to remind you what has to be done.
- Limited to a maximum of about 10 items. Any bigger and it will appear too daunting.
- Prioritised. Take some time to review the items on the list and label each task with a priority rating. (e.g. 1 - 4, as covered earlier)
- Crossed off as the items are completed. Visibly crossing out the items gives a sense of achievement. Carry forward and undone items to the following day.
- Your 'To Do' list contains items which are not scheduled. It is not for meetings but for items which have to be done at some time. They are fitted in to the space between the scheduled tasks.

An example of a To Do list:

ITEM	PRIORITY	DONE
Draft next yrs budget	2	
Call IT Support	1	
Write job ad	1	
Find name of ...	3	
Organise meeting	3	
Tidy files	4	
Sort appraisals	2	



6 - Quiet Time

One of the greatest time management problems is that you are always available. This allows other people to use and abuse your time. The result is more Type 3 tasks than you should be doing and therefore an inability to get your job done properly. Being too available makes it almost impossible to get Type 2 tasks done effectively.

The answer is to ration your availability and to set aside time when you are available. The aim is not to shut others out but to enable you to do your job. The time you set aside is **Quiet time** and you need to answer a number of questions when setting it up:

- How much uninterrupted time do you need in a typical day/week in order to get your job done properly?
- How much time will you take in each session? This depends on:
 - a) How long your job can survive without your presence.
 - b) The optimal length of time to work on these kinds of tasks.
 - c) Your attention span.
- Where can you go?
- When should you do this?

When you have answered these questions, there are two other steps to take:

Organise it: Tell one person where you will be. Choose someone who will take your calls or visits if you are not there. Give that person some sort of decision rule to help them decide whether to interrupt you or not.

Schedule it: Schedule your quiet time as if it were a meeting - other wise you will not do it.



7 - Delegation

Delegation is a valuable tool for those with staff reporting to them. In many cases there are tasks which can be done by other members of staff, but you end up doing them yourself for a number of reasons: habit, fear etc

Delegation means getting members of staff to carry out tasks which are currently part of the manager's job. Effective delegation has two powerful results: It frees up the manager's time and it provides a means of developing staff.

There are a number of steps for effective delegation:

1) Identify tasks which could be delegated

These normally include everything except purely managerial functions. Look for tasks which are repeated or routine, they represent the best return on your time. Avoid delegating tasks which you dislike; they will tend to be regarded as dumping.

2) Identify people who can take on these delegated tasks.

They must have the ability, the time and the willingness

3) Carefully define the task in terms of the outcomes which are expected.

Sell the task to the person and make a contract of the agreement. The more explicit the agreement, the less trouble you will have later on.

4) Organise the task by providing the person with the resources, training, authority etc they need to carry out the task.

Agree when the person will report back and what will happen if they need help in the interim time.

5) Walk away

6) Provide support when required

7) Thank them for doing part of your job



8 - How We Do Things

Having spent some time considering the first important aspect of time management - what we choose to do - we will now move on to the second - how we go about doing things i.e. our efficiency at doing the tasks we choose to do.

There are three points to consider here:

1. Time Wasters
2. Meetings
3. Paperwork.

1. What wastes your time?

It is worth asking this question at regular intervals, maybe every six months. The problems are usually found in four different areas:

Resources Not working properly
 In the wrong place
 Not adequate for the job
 In short supply

Information Inadequate
 Unavailable
 Late
 Difficult to use

Training Can not do the task well

Responsibilities People don't do things when they are supposed to

Examine these topics in relation to your own work place and what can be done to improve things.



2. Meetings

A good meeting is a very effective way of using people's time. It enables fast and effective communication between a group. However, many meetings are simply ineffective and a lot are a serious waste of time. The following guidelines will help ensure a worthwhile, successful meeting:

Have a clear objective

Start the meeting on time - don't reward latecomers by holding on

Make sure the right people attend

There are a number of possible groups: the decision makers, the implementers, those affected and those with information. Whoever you invite, try to keep the numbers to 10 or less

Choose an appropriate venue

Make sure it is comfortable, quiet, uninterrupted and has appropriate equipment

Agree a time frame for the meeting and stick to it

The best meeting lasts less than an hour. There are exceptions, of course, for example, a sales meeting for which people have travelled a considerable distance. Nevertheless, all meetings should be kept short as it is practical.

The agenda is the plan of the meeting

It should be sent out in time to allow everyone to study it and prepare for the meeting. Keep the number of items realistic; there is no point in trying to cover too much.

An effective chairperson is essential for any meeting

This person's role is to control the meeting and to encourage participation. He or she runs the agenda to make sure that everything is addressed, controls the participation of the noisier people; encourages participation from the quieter ones; clarifies points; summarises positions; and seeks consensus. For most meetings, this is enough to keep the chair occupied and the chairperson is unlikely to have any attention left over to devote to the content of the meeting.

Finally, regular meetings should be evaluated

Set aside some time to discuss how effective the meeting is and how it might be improved.



3. Paperwork

Most people have more paper on and around their desks than they would like. And they get a new supply of paperwork every day, which only adds to the problem! The result is a cluttered desk which overflows with paper and makes it impossible to get things done.

To be effective, you need to have a clear work area. The first thing to do is to get rid of the clutter. Most people, when they try to clear the clutter off their desks, do the little jobs that are represented by all the paper. Often the paper on a desk is not associated with major progress or maintenance tasks. It consists of notes, letters and other things that pile up daily and are not terribly important.

Initially, to clear the clutter, take all the items off your desk, make a note of what they are and file them. Then prioritise the items and deal with them, one at a time, in priority sequence.

On a daily basis, as more paperwork comes to you, you should use a different method.

Sort the paperwork into one of two folders:

To do folder

To read folder

The items in the **To do folder** are organised in priority sequence, just like a To do list and these are the things that you need to do something about.

In the **To read folder** are those items that you would like to read but which aren't critical. The rest goes straight in the bin, if you are not going to do anything with it and you are not going to read it, then you might as well throw it away now.

In general, it is easier to deal with paperwork in batches. By the time you have set yourself up to do it, you will find it much easier to keep handling paperwork for a short time. Therefore, schedule regular times of the day when you spend a short time, maybe 20 minutes, dealing with paperwork. This is when you will deal with your To do folder.



The idea is that once the paper is sorted into the two folders, you will handle it only once more. Starting at the top folder, with the highest priority item, you will handle each piece of paper only **ONCE**. You should do one of 4 things to it:

The first option is to process it. This may involve reading it, signing it, filling it or keying it.

The second option is to pass it on to someone else who needs it. This is not passing the buck!

The third option is to file it.

And the final option is to dump it.

Filing

There are two kind of filing:

Statutory filing is that paper which must be filed because the law says so e.g. invoices, or because the organisation has decided that it should be. You have no choice about this and should just file these items carefully and regularly.

Discretionary filing involves the paper which we choose to keep. It tends to accumulate at a great rate and is rarely easy to find. There is only one valid reason for filing discretionary items and that is because they will be needed again.

- For those few things you choose to file, use a consistent filing system e.g. alphabetically.
- File regularly and do not have a file called "Miscellaneous" - it is just an excuse for not deciding where to file things.
- Go through your discretionary files every year and throw out (without reading) any item which has not been retrieved in the previous 12 months.
- List your file; use a card or spreadsheet system for easy reference.



9 - Our Personal Habits

The third aspect of Time Management to tackle involves our **personal habits**.

We have all become accustomed to acting and reacting in certain ways. Many of these habits are very effective, but we all have some which are counter productive. Three of the most common are:

- Procrastination**
- Reacting to crisis**
- Dealing with other people**

Procrastination

There is no point in having a beautiful plan if you simply do not do the things that you set out to do. Procrastination is very often subconscious. Not only do others not realise you are doing it, you probably do not realise it yourself.

Once you are busy, you will feel fairly righteous about what you are doing. The problem is that you may not be doing what you ought to be doing. The **To do list** can help here. Before rushing off on a relatively unimportant task, you should consult the list. That way, it should be far more difficult to waste time.

Remember, we usually procrastinate by doing the wrong thing rather than doing nothing.

So the first thing to ask yourself is whether what you are currently doing is actually the best use of your time.

There are three phases of dealing with procrastination:

- Identify the sort of things you put off**
- Note your common delay tactic and "excuses"**
- Experiment with solutions that work for you**

Procrastination is a habit and changing it has a lot in common with losing weight or stopping smoking. The solution is partly psychological and always very personal.



Very often we procrastinate because of fear. This is not an overt terror, but a subconscious reluctance to tackle a task. This fear may be of the unknown, fear of failure, fear of looking ridiculous or fear of other people's response. Fear of starting is another common reason for procrastination. Whatever the source of the fear, start by defining what you think you are afraid of and writing down the worst case scenario.

It is usually not as dramatic as you think. Then experiment with solutions. Bear in mind your own personality and don't try to do more than you are comfortable with. Whatever solutions you try, remember that changing a habit takes time. Therefore set your goals realistically and achieve them gradually. Some approaches to procrastination:

Subdivide that big tough task into small pieces that can be done one at a time.

If you don't know where to start, start somewhere, anywhere.

Start with an easy or enjoyable piece.

For a small number of people, the opposite works better; starting with the most difficult piece.

Get someone to work with you.

Working on something you don't want to can be very lonely and a little support may be all that's needed.

Make a commitment to someone else.

This is a pressure tactic to get you moving.

Reward yourself.

Take a break.

Block out distractions.

Quiet time is helpful here.

Have everything you need before you start.

Don't use this as an excuse for not starting.



Reacting to crisis

People often rush at solving crises without stopping to think. But the effect of that is to disrupt whatever else is going on. The first decision to make is whether to react at all. It may be that the cost of ignoring the problem will be smaller than the benefit you will gain from trying to solve it.

If you have to react, the next decision to make is, what the minimum effort you can deploy to solve the crisis. It is worth asking yourself these questions:

Can you delegate the problem?

Can you arrange for someone outside the organisation to deal with it?

Is it really your problem at all?

Should you be assertive with someone else in the organisation who really should be sorting it out?



10 - Dealing with Other People

Most of us deal with many people every day; it's part of our job and one which many find enjoyable and satisfying. However, these interactions with others can also represent the biggest source of wasted time. Managing our time inevitably involves managing other people's as well and this is the final section of our course.

It is well worth investigating our handling of the people we encounter every day.

Saying no

We find it so difficult to say "no" that we have developed many words and phrases which mean the same thing. We say "I'll do my best", "I'll see what I can do" etc. In most cases we mean "no".

Not being able to refuse to take things on can lead to overload and being dumped on. It is important to be able to refuse to take things on, but in a way which does not harm your career prospects nor appear negative.

The first option is to give a straight "no". This is applicable where it is definitely not your job or where it would be unreasonable for the person to expect you to do the task.

If you are working to well defined priorities and have a good To do list, ask the person to justify the priority of what they are asking you to do. This is particularly appropriate for people senior to you.

Give realistic deadlines. This also requires that you are managing your priorities well and tells the other person that the item they are asking you to do is not a high priority for you. A negotiation on an agreed deadline usually follows.

Point out to the person the impact of what they are asking you to do. This should be in items of the important tasks which will have to be delayed or put aside to accommodate their request.



The Monkey

If you have staff reporting to you, delegating upwards can be a problem. This occurs when a member of your staff gets you to do something which they should have done themselves.

It usually happens like this:

A staff member has a problem with a task and comes to you seeking help. There is usually a piece of paper involved and when they meet you the piece of paper joins all the others on your desk. Some time later, the staff member pokes their head around the door and asks how you are getting on with the task they have given you.

Not only has the staff member managed to allocate work for you to do, he or she is also supervising you to make sure you do it! The monkey has jumped from their back to yours!

The only reliable way to prevent the monkey jumping is to prevent that piece of paper from moving on to your desk. Of course you are willing and available to help them with a task, but you are not willing to do it for them.

Schedule a meeting to discuss the item and send them away to do it themselves. (With the piece of paper).



11 - Managing Interactions

You need to interact with other people; they are a prime source of information, feedback and social contact. However, you also need to keep those interactions reasonably efficient and that means restricting the amount of time you allow others to take up.

This is a delicate balancing act as you have no desire to discourage people from dealing with you. You just want them to deal with you in a way which doesn't waste time - yours or theirs.

Every interaction has three parts

1 Hello!

The initial part of any interaction involves greetings, acknowledgement and social niceties. This is essential for the building and maintenance of good relationships. It can also get out of hand so you should judge what is the appropriate length of time and then finish this first part of the conversation with a phrase like "What can I do for you"? This provides a natural transition to the next part of the conversation.

2 What do you want?

The main part of any conversation should be taken up with finding out what the other person wants. This should be a series of structured questions which elicits the information you need in the order in which you need it. It will normally start with an open question and proceed with a series of probing, closed and open questions. The important thing is that you control the conversation.

3 Good-bye

Once the information has been exchanged, it is time to end the conversation. The easiest and most effective way of doing this is to summarise. A summary confirms your understanding of the conversation and provides a natural ending.

Your **objective** is to shorten each interaction in a way which is compatible with your relationships with these people and with your business. If you could make each interaction slightly more efficient without upsetting anyone, the time you saved would be available for other important aspects of your job.



12 - Dealing With Interruptions

The reason interruptions are so disruptive is that they blow you off course. Most people feel they are interrupted all the time. But if they added up all the time they are actually being interrupted, it would probably only add up to a small part of the day. The main problem, then, is not the interruption itself, but the effect on your flow of work.

The **To Do List** will help you get back on track after each interruption. Scheduling is also a powerful weapon against interruptions. If you schedule a certain period for a certain task, you can reasonably refuse to accept interruptions while you are working on that task.

But you must let people know when you are available to be interrupted again, or they may not respect what you are doing.

Keep interruptions short

Since interruptions are a part of life, and indeed they may also be an essential part of your business, you need to come to terms with them. But you will be much more effective if you can keep interruptions as short as possible.

Stick to the point

Many interruptions are much longer than they should be simply because they wander off the point. If you are interrupted, or if you are interrupting, you should make sure that you deal only with the purpose of the interruption and do not go on to discuss other things.

Postpone Interruptions

Very often you can put off an interruption to the benefit of both yourself and the person interrupting. If someone asks if you have a minute, try to schedule a short meeting at a later time.

This has two effects. It stops you getting side-tracked at an important moment, and it communicates to the interrupter that you are very busy and the meeting later had better be short and to the point.



It also enables you to focus on the issue when you do meet. This technique works particularly well for those people who interrupt frequently e.g. your boss. A regular meeting once or twice a day can reduce the interruptions in both directions.

Put a time limit on the interruption

There is nothing wrong with saying "I can only spare 5 minutes now, so if this is going to take longer, could we schedule it for later"

As long as you are courteous, people will not be offended.

Stand up

Some people are chronic or inconsiderate time wasters. Standing up when such people come into your work area, and then not sitting down again can have an effect of shortening the interruption. Once they have sat down, you may be in for a long session.

Continue to look busy

Another tip for dealing with the time wasting type of interrupter is to keep your pen poised over the paper, or your hands on the keyboard, or say, "Do you mind if I keep working, I'm a bit swamped at the moment"

Visit the interrupter

If someone wants to see you, go and see them. If you are in their office or work area, it is much easier to leave when you have had enough than it is to kick them out of your area.

Use the internal telephone

Speaking to people on the internal phone is usually much less time consuming than meeting them face-to-face. For a start, there is no travelling time as you walk around the office. Also people tend not to chat on the phone the way they do face to face.

Nothing annoys busy people more than suggesting that you are too busy or important to talk to them. The interrupter may be desperately busy too, and only have come along to interrupt with the greatest reluctance because he or she simply cannot proceed without getting some piece of input from you. Anything that suggests you regard them as a nuisance will go down badly. So be courteous at all times and respect other people's needs.



13 - Tools of the Trade

Effective time management has a number of practical tools which you should use as appropriate. Whatever tools you select, experiment with different formats, different styles until you come up with a set which suits you and your job.

- **To Do List**
As discussed earlier
- **Diary**
Best used by those who have lots of irregular, scheduled items e.g. Sales calls. If you find that you have a lot of empty pages in your diary, consider using a planner instead. Only schedule as much as your job can take. If you schedule too much, you will end up unable to complete the maintenance tasks and the scheduled items.
- **Planners**
From weekly to annual. Weekly planners can easily replace a diary for someone whose job is fairly routine and where most activities are scheduled. Month and year planners are only for full day scheduling.
- **Time log**
Every 3 to 6 months, record and analyse your time usage. This will give you vital information as to where you should be concentrating your efforts.



14 - Conclusion

Time Management is a difficult task for most people. It involves facing up to what you do and comparing that to what you should be doing. An essential part of this is carefully considering what you are trying to achieve and planning how to get there.

However logically you consider Time Management, there is always that unpredictable element in your personality. You have developed a set of time usage habits over your lifetime. Some of these, like procrastination, are not very productive.

Changing them is a slow and painful process. It has taken many years to develop these habits and it will take time and effort to change them.

The techniques, tools and tips in this course are intended to help you to do just that. However, they only work if you apply them.

Time Management is a skill. And like any other skill you have to work at it to become good at it.

Remember - time is your responsibility. If you do not control it. someone else will.

