

## Time Management & office and etiquette

*Time management isn't always about doing more, but it is about doing what is right and necessary to accomplish our goals and God's desires.*

### **Why should we learn to manage time?**

The Bible tells us to number our days (Psa 90:12)—to recognize how short life is and how precious every day is. *That should lead us to make full use of our time. Numbering our days includes evaluating the use and management of our time.*

The apostle Paul encouraged us to “walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16).

Psalms 39:4-5, “Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of days; let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; and the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure.

God wants us to recognize that every minute counts and should be used in a godly way. God is diligent, and He wants us to learn diligence and avoid laziness (Proverbs 12:24, 27; 13:4).

### **Practical Tips:**

**1: Assume Responsibility.** The first key is assuming responsibility for your use of time. The Bible challenges us to redeem the time, which means to make the most of the time God has given us and for us to do that we need to take responsibility for the time in our hands. *Choose to take charge of your time to the best of your ability.* If you don't manage your time, somebody else will. *E.g. If a colleague stops at your desk for longer than appropriate for a chat, taking up your time for work, you need to gently remind them that you have to get back to work.*

**2: Set Priorities.** *This means determining what is important and needs to come first.* There's always more to do than time to do it, and so we need to set priorities so that we can sieve through all that needs to be done and focus on what needs to come first, the most important task.

#### **a). Do Important Tasks, Not Just Urgent Ones**

We so often get wrapped up in doing urgent things and not important ones. This does not mean you shouldn't take care of the urgent matters that come up, but don't let them derail you. *Sometimes urgent items are important, but many times they are not.*

Often an urgent matter is caused because someone else did not take care of the important tasks in their own work flow.

**b). Eliminate the Unimportant.** Write on a sheet of paper all the important things you need to do tomorrow and list them in order of their priority. As number one, put the most important thing you should do tomorrow. As number two, put the second most important thing you should do, and so forth. Then when you go into work in the morning, start with the first thing on your list and stick with it until you finish it. Then move on to number two, and so forth. You more than likely will not be able to accomplish all the things on your list in a given day, but you will have accomplished the most important thing on your list or at least made a major effort regarding it. Then tomorrow night, make a new list for the upcoming day.

*As you set your priorities, please be realistic. One of the keys to success is creating realistic goals that can be achieved in a reasonable amount of time.*

**c). Write Things Down**

*Have a way to capture ideas that come to you. If you don't capture and remember what it is you want to accomplish, there is no way to guarantee you will do them.*

“To master time management is to set priorities among your goals. There is never enough time to do everything, but there is always enough time to do what is important,” says leadership expert Lolly Daskal (“Master Time Management From Inside Out”).

**3: Have a Schedule.** The Bible reveals a God who is a Planner – in His creative order as well as everything else, really. How and when He dealt with His people etc .*Take time to think and plan.* Months can go by without your making any progress toward the fulfillment of your goals if you don't plan your schedule and set your goals and dreams into the context of deadlines. Once you receive your JD, draft a schedule, which is basically a plan of how you will execute the tasks you are assigned. Include timelines, which tasks will happen when and in what order.

a). As a rule, **Schedule the most important tasks first.** If you tackle your most important tasks first it will be much easier to find time for less important ones. If you allow yourself to get sidetracked on unimportant tasks or busywork, chances are you will never get to the things that really matter.

**b). Schedule less.** *If you cram too much into your schedule you will always feel rushed and frustrated, and in the end you won't get much done.* Try to be realistic about how many things you schedule into your day. An ounce of accomplishment is better than a pound of frustration.

c). *As you make a schedule, **remember to plan for your quiet time**.* Some people find it easiest and most productive to spend time with the Lord first thing in the morning. Others find their best prayer and Bible-reading time is after all other family members have gone to bed. There is no set rule. Do what works for you!

**d). You can't do everything, live with it!** *Focus on activities that yield important results.* For other activities that simply need to be done, see if you can spend less time on them. It may be possible to put some of these off for days, or even weeks, while you focus on the things that really matter. Assign as much time as possible to the activities that contribute the most to reaching your goals. Realise that you cannot do everything and ask for help. It is ok to let your supervisor know that your plate is quite full and you're not able to take on other tasks, or to ask for help.

It is also ok to courteously decline taking on more responsibilities e.g. you may be receiving jobs from different people/departments within an organization, simply because one person is not

*Planning our time "is not about filling every moment with busy work, but rather organizing our time around what is important. ... Planning for how to spend your time enables you to work far more efficiently than figuring it out as you go. What is planned happens, because planning leads to action."*

The best priorities and plans in the world, though, are worthless if they aren't put into practice.

**4: Pick your time carefully.** *One of the keys to getting things done effectively is to schedule the most challenging work for the time of day when you are most energetic and alert.* I like to do my most challenging tasks early in the day because that's when it's easier for me to focus. I save the mindless and mundane for later in the afternoon after the most important things have already been accomplished.

*Organize your time for maximum productivity and efficiency.* If mornings are your most productive hours, set aside those times for work directly related to your goals. *Put your greatest concentration and effort into those hours.*

**5: Stay Organized.** Continually searching for missing documents or items is a waste of time. Stay organized as you work. Recognize that your definition of being organized may be different from that of others. *Have a tidy work space/desk.*

Ask the Lord to help you remove the clutter from your life - the things that detract and pull you away from your God-given purpose and goals. *Clutter includes time clutter - the things that clutter your schedule with unimportant activities and obligations.*

**6. Keep track of your time.** To find out where your time is going, try keeping a time log for a week or two. How much time is being lost on unimportant activities? Where do most of your interruptions come from? Do they occur during certain time periods or on specific days of the week? Once you have this information it will be easier to eliminate time wasting activities along with distractions and interruptions.

- **Minimize interruptions.** Block off portions of the day during which you are not to be interrupted unless it is an absolute necessity. Whenever possible, turn off your phone, pop-ups, instant messenger, twitter notifications, and anything else that tends to grab your focus away from the project at hand. *Learn to focus on a single task. Facebook, Twitter and other social media are a real threat here.*

**8. Do the most unpleasant tasks as soon as possible.** Rather than postponing things you don't really want to do, get them out of the way as soon as you can. Once they are done you will feel more energized and free to focus on the things you really want to do.

**9. Expect the unexpected.** Sometimes unexpected things happen. If you schedule yourself so tight that you don't allow for the unexpected, you dramatically raise your chances of feeling frantic throughout your day. If you need to be somewhere and you think you can make it in 15 minutes, allow 25. Leave little blocks of time throughout the day unscheduled so you have a buffer against the unexpected.

**10. Avoid getting overwhelmed.**

**a). Take periodic breaks.** When you need to relax and catch a breath, take a short break, go for a walk. It helps clear your head and relax so you can come back and focus on the task at hand.

**b). Don't be a perfectionist.** It's important that we know when it is time to move on to the next activity. *Learn to let good be good enough.*

**11. Be flexible.** These are only suggestions; they are not hard and fast rules. Experiment, find out what works for you personally, and don't be afraid to customize the ideas to fit your individual circumstances and needs. Some of these may work for you and some of them may not, but you'll never know until you give them a try.

**12. Review Your Day.** *At the close of a day, review the way in which you have spent your time. Evaluate your schedule. Compare what you did with what you intended to do. Ask yourself: Did I make good use of my time? Did I procrastinate? Was I able to maintain my concentration? Did I engage in activities that truly were priorities? Did I make progress (even a little) toward the accomplishment of my God-given goals?*

*Don't give up on the pursuit of your goals! Make adjustments, learn from your mistakes, and begin the next day with fresh enthusiasm and courage.*

### **Office Etiquette**

Office etiquette is also called office manners and is about conducting yourself respectfully or courteously in the office or workplace. At all times and with all people. *We all know about table etiquette or table manners.* These are similar guidelines to help us in our workplaces.

1. **Be punctual.** Being punctual is very important, especially if you have an appointment. *It shows that you respect the time of your colleagues and in turn it will compel them to respect your time too.*
  - Avoid turning up later than your boss when you're a junior. At the entry stage of a job, sending a clear message that you're eager and already working is vital.
2. **Dress appropriately.** Most offices have a predefined dress code that has to be followed strictly. *However, if you do have the privilege of working at a place which does not define a dress code, then it's up to you to dress appropriately. Remember that the office is not a party place and you will have to dress in a way that commands respect both from your colleagues and clients.* Dress professionally, or in the manner expected at your particular work site. Do not wear very casual, provocative or evening attire. Even if your office/workplace is quite relaxed in dress codes, be clean, smart and presentable.

- Have appropriate shoes as well, hair styles, appropriate make up if any etc.
3. **Stay away from gossip.** Office gossip *can cause a lot of unnecessary stress which should be avoided at all costs.* Limit your comments about coworkers to positive ones only. Office grapevines can be faster than the speed of lightning; anything negative you say will get around and may reflect poorly on you, or possibly label you as the company gossip.
- You may overhear the conversations of others. Be good and forget you ever heard them and apply the "so what" rule. Don't refer to what you've overheard and definitely don't add your own advice!
4. **Ask before borrowing.** If you're at good terms with your colleague, then it may appear all right if you borrowed a stapler or a marker from their desk without asking. Well, the fact of the matter is that it is not all right. *It is imperative that you ask first and then borrow.* This attitude of yours will ensure that people also treat your things with the same respect and your things are not missing (read borrowed) when you get back to your seat after a meeting.
5. **Always say please and thank you.** A few nice words can keep the mood of the office uplifting. *When you pass co-workers in the hallway and this person isn't particularly your friend, smile or nod. Acknowledge that they are there.* You don't have to run over and hug them but just say hello. Think about what kind of message you send when you look the other way to purposely avoid contact.
- It is polite to say hi to people in your vicinity when you come in every morning. Even if others don't make the effort, be the example for everyone else to let them know it's not only okay but expected.
  - Watch your language. When interacting with others at the office remember that profanity offends some people. Also avoid innuendos or jokes at the expense of other people. **Let Ephesians 4: 29-31 be your guide** <sup>9</sup>*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*
  - In line with this, also be honest and truthful at all times.

6. **Don't consistently interrupt people.** Doing so will suggest that your time or opinion is more important than theirs. If your co-worker is on the phone but you need to ask a question, don't linger. Tap them on the shoulder and whisper that you need them for a minute (or leave a quick note in front of them) and ask them to call or see you when they are done. If your co-worker is having a work related conversation don't interrupt - just wait for them to finish or ask them to see you when they are through.
  
7. **Refrain from being loud.** For those without an office door to close, the most frequent complaint made is about noise from other people in the work environment. *Keeping your voice down should be a priority in all work interactions:*
  - Whether you're on the phone or talking to a colleague, avoid being loud.
  - Use your handset or headset--not a speakerphone--to take all calls, unless you're behind closed doors.
  - If you receive a call on your cell phone, it's a good idea to take a walk down to the corridor or to find a room with a door you can shut to take the rest of the call if you're likely to disturb others. ***This is especially recommended if it's a personal call or one that's likely to take some time.***
  - Avoid speaking in a loud or argumentative manner. Aggressive or increasingly loud vocalizations upset people and even those who are not the target of the aggression will be left with a sense of unease and discomfort.
  - Turn off your personal cell phone during business hours; use its vibrating feature if you need to leave it on. Avoid making personal calls at your workstation.
  - If you listen to a radio or stream music, keep it low or wear a headset.
  - Be especially quiet in areas where coworkers are on business calls or in conversations with other coworkers. Don't engage in long conversations in shared office space; if a topic requires more than a couple minutes' discussion, find a conference room to avoid distracting your co-workers.
  - Be considerate around meeting rooms, even if you're not sure whether or not a meeting is in progress – always assume there is one and be on the safe side.
  
8. **Be sensitive to others' need for privacy.** Don't read someone else's emails, mail or computer screens. And remember that when you send emails, never write anything that would be a problem if forwarded; simply by virtue of the fact that anyone *can* forward an email, you need to be alert to this potential.

- If you need to discuss anything sensitive or private with another colleague, find a room where you can shut the door and nobody else can overhear you. Personal issues and work performance reviews are not for the ears of anyone other than the recipient.
- Only use a speaker phone behind closed doors. When working in open areas, use your handset or headset for all calls.

9. **Avoid being a source of odors.** Eating odorous food at your desk, removing your shoes or applying perfume or air freshener during the day can upset those sensitive to odors. Nobody wants a whiff of smelly feet no matter how much *you* think you can't smell them and the odor of lunch is a very personal thing, so don't assume it's as delightful to someone else's nose as it is to yours. Besides, just what are you doing eating at your desk anyway? Go out and get some fresh air!

10. **Keep your work area tidy.** Try not to be messy. A messy cubicle or desk shows how confused and careless you are, and that you're not clear about yourself. Don't let people think that you're always an unorganized person. *Keep your cubicle tidy and decorative (with relevant material only, for example, some charts or articles etc.).*

- If you like adding a personal touch, such as photos or trinkets, choose only a few decent ones. Don't overload the space as if it's a collector's corner. ***Not only does having too many personal effects make it appear that you're rather territorial and sentimental but it can make it hard for others to take you as seriously in the work context.*** Moreover, if you're shifted frequently, it's just more stuff to keep moving about with you.
- If you have a communal kitchen area keeping it clean is vitally important. If you spill it, wipe it clean. If you drop it, pick it up.

11. Avoid chewing gum

12. Knock before entering into offices.

13. Be helpful and cooperative

14. Hold your mouth while coughing or sneezing

15. Take responsibility for your mistakes and apologize.

16. Be thoughtful when interacting with colleagues e.g. when serving lunch, let others go first, or serve smaller portions so everybody can have some, etc.