

Time Management

Own Your Time

Where does the time go?


For many of us, the days fly by. There are tasks to tackle, information to filter, and opportunities to seize.

We live in a world where busyness is a point of pride, a signal of a full life.

But where is the time going?

The “pings, dings, and rings” of devices condition us to respond immediately to minor tasks, but often crowd out more important work.

Busy does not equal effective.



Today, time management isn't about cramming more into your schedule. It's about making smarter, more purposeful choices with the hours you have.

To manage your time well, learn how to:

Harness energy and focus	Discover when you are mentally at your sharpest, and learn how to plan for and protect this “prime time.”
Defeat distractions	Recognize what takes you off track, and learn how to refocus quickly.
Take charge of your productivity	Develop a broad toolkit of productivity strategies.
Overcome time pressure	Build positive work-life habits and look out for others’ wellbeing.

Harness Energy and Focus

Boost your productivity by tackling the right tasks at the right time.

When are you most productive?

What creates a satisfying, productive day?

Often, **it's when your energy and workload are well matched.** You're tackling complex projects when you have a lot of mental horsepower, and checking off routine tasks when you're at lower ebb.

In other words, **you're working with your body clock—and it's powerful for productivity.**

When is your peak time?

I'm not sure when my best time is—I'm not bright-eyed at dawn or alert at midnight.



You're in good company! The majority of people are "intermediate" like this. They begin their peak hours sometime between 9 am and 11 am. Track yourself to see when your peak occurs. For a few days, rate yourself (1 to 5 scale) on mood, energy, and focus once each hour. Look for a pattern.

I struggle to get up in the morning, but I can stay up as late as it takes to get something done.



Excellent, you're a night owl, along with approximately 25% of your coworkers. Your biological peak starts much later in the day than others'. That means you can take the lead when others tire and be the one who gets the project across the finish line.


I'm alert first thing in the morning.



Great, you're an early bird, along with about 15 percent of people. Be the first to the office so you can relish those quiet hours and get vital work done before the office gets too busy.

Night owls among us

Although the traditional work day isn't structured for night owls, they are **roughly 1 in 4 office workers**.



Owls are slow to start but creative in the morning, slumping midday, and at their productive peak at night.

Too often, owls are subtly penalized for not fitting productivity stereotypes about go-getters and “early birds.” But that’s a mistake: **Work is global now, so all 24 hours count. There are real advantages to having some sharp minds in the evening.** If you manage an “owlish” team, don’t load up morning with meetings. Set deadlines that allow people the flexibility of finishing tasks after traditional office hours, if that is when they feel most focused and energetic

Optimize your peak time

Your peak hours are like gold—spend them wisely

Reserve your peak time for complex, important work. Don't squander it checking your email or sitting in meetings where you barely contribute.

Next, write down your top three goals. Keep them clear and brief—about the amount of text that would easily fit on a sticky note.

By writing three goals, you're setting peak time priorities for that day. You're not replacing a more complete to-do list or a project tracking system

WHAT IS
STRATEGICALLY
IMPORTANT?

WHAT CAN I DO
TO DRIVE FUTURE
RESULTS?

WHAT ACTIVITY
WILL FULFILL
ME?

Interested in examples of work that benefits from peak time?



- Writing, analyzing, and researching
- Reviewing complex data or documents
- Strategic planning or thinking
- Technically demanding processes
- Meeting with important clients
- Negotiating critical business
- Pitching and presenting
- Resolving difficult customer problems

Make the most of your second wind

Many people experience an afternoon slump, but there's good news: **Mood and energy begin climbing again in the late afternoon and early evening. Yes!**

The **late afternoon rebound** is a good time for important work that doesn't require a high degree of **precision**. Some research suggests you may even be more creative during this rebound period.



Tip

During your rebound period, revisit the three goals you wrote down for the day. Is there anything left to accomplish?

Defeat Distractions

Distractions from every direction

Do you get distracted—a lot?

It's natural, even healthy, to lose focus. **Our minds wander to relax, process information, and dream.**

But constant distraction is another matter altogether

Often, we aren't aware of our biggest sources of distraction—and that's why they consume so much time and energy.

Over the next couple of days, track what distracts you. Use these broad categories and put a check mark when you notice you've lost focus due to:

- Digital devices
- Coworker interruptions
- Office noise
- Frustration or worry
- Other

At the end of two days, tally up your totals. **Many people have an aha moment when they review their patterns.**

Minimize coworker interruptions

Whether they come via instant message or desk-side visit, coworker interruptions are really common.

They're not necessarily bad. Camaraderie and collaboration are vital for organizations.

But when interrupting becomes incessant, there's a real cost to the culture. Stress rises and productivity declines. People may end up coming in early or staying late just to get work done.

Most people don't realize how time-consuming interruptions actually are.

Don't let minor requests consume your time.

Here are three strategies to reduce interruptions:

Set expectations.	Let people know your availability in advance: "I'm on deadline until noon. Message me any questions and I will be back online after lunch to follow up."
Manage location.	<p>Make yourself scarce by reserving a conference room or relocating away from your team.</p> <p>If you can't relocate, use a "Do not disturb" sign, put on headphones, or position yourself with your back to the flow of office traffic.</p>
Don't reward the behavior.	<p>If you immediately resolve the issue, you'll just perpetuate interruptions.</p> <p>Respond briefly, such as: "Thank you—please put it on the team task board" or "Happy to chat after I'm off deadline. I'll message you."</p>

Focus through background noise

As open-plan offices have become increasingly common, distraction has risen.

About a third of workers say noisy, open offices make it hard to be productive.* *“Open-Plan Work Spaces Lower Productivity And Employee Morale,” by Jia Wertz. Forbes. June 2019*

Sound has a profound impact on concentration. Erratic sounds—such as personal conversations or a sudden loud ringtone—can rupture focus. In contrast, **soothing sounds can actually deepen concentration.**

Feelings can be distractions, too

Frustration and worry can also be highly distracting. It’s difficult to get work done when you’re mentally replaying a disagreement or fretting about an upcoming meeting.

Not only that, **worry and frustration can cloud judgment and increase errors.**

Instead, pause to:



- Label the emotion. (“I’m anxious.”)
- Diagnose the root cause. (“I’m worried about my leverage in this negotiation.”)
- Take action. (“I’ll check whether there is flexibility in our budget.”)

Beat procrastination

With distraction, you're pulled away from what you intend to do. **With procrastination, you are actively *avoiding* what you believe you should do.**

Everyone procrastinates at some point.

Often, procrastination is the **surface symptom of a bigger challenge**, so look for the root cause and then decide how to proceed.

Here are three simple strategies to help you start (and finish) that task on your list you just can't seem to get around to:



Tip

Procrastinate productively! Look at your to-do list and choose the next most difficult task you *do* feel capable of doing.

Take Charge of Your Productivity

Your instincts about productivity are wrong

I was busy all day, but what did I really accomplish?

It's a common frustration. Many people struggle to feel—or be—truly productive.

In fact, only 1 in 4 people say they often leave the office having done what they intended to do that day.

Why does this happen? **Often, it's because we have the wrong instincts about what truly makes us productive.**

Check your instincts. Click on the statement you agree with most first, then review the others.

I feel most productive when...

Be intentional with your time

We are productive when we are *purposeful*: when we make strategic choices about what work we'll pursue and figure out ways to do those tasks efficiently.
How can you do that?

Think about these four areas:

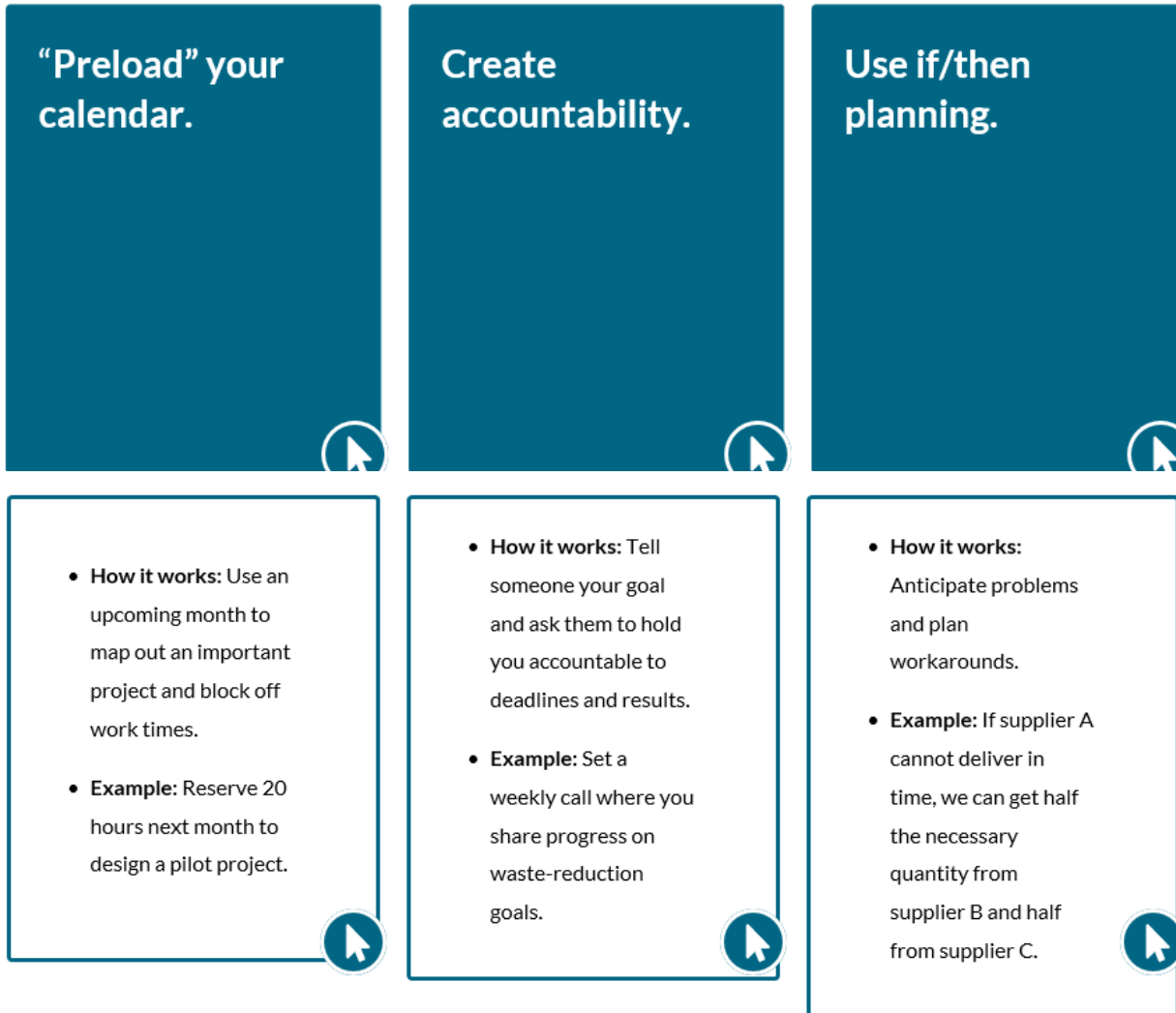
Make a habit of regularly stepping back and asking yourself: *What am I working toward?*

The greater clarity you have, the easier it will be to use your time well

Organizational strategy	How can I further the mission?
Team goals	Where do my team and I create value?
Career aspirations	What do I want to learn/achieve?
Personal payoffs	What makes life worthwhile?

Ace your top priorities

Important work often extends over days, weeks, or months, so it's important to **develop strategies that help you maintain focus, even when you don't have a deadline.**



Power through routine work

Every job—no matter the industry or level—comes with routine work.


Routine work consists of repeating tasks that need to be done to maintain the status quo. Routine work shouldn't consume too much time.

Often, administrative or maintenance tasks fall into the “routine work” category.

When you complete routine work efficiently, you free up time for important work that moves the business forward

Time to replace multitasking

No matter what kind of work you're doing, try to focus only on the matter at hand



“Multitasking” is a misnomer. You are actually switching tasks—and, in the process, you're doing each job slower and less well.

One study showed that task-switchers took 25% longer to finish their work.* *“Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time,”* by Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy. Harvard Business Publishing. October 2007

Find out why it pays to do one thing at a time, and how to do it.

Task-switching is so common today that we're often unaware how much we do it. How often do you check messages while on a conference call, for instance?

Instead of toggling rapidly back and forth between two things, interweave tasks of various sizes.

Create a to-do list of small tasks that can be slotted in when you have a gap in more significant pieces of work.

When your inbox is overflowing

Each day messages roll in like ocean surf—always more coming, never finished. Does this sound like your inbox?

Astoundingly, the average professional spends nearly a *third* of the work day on email.* *“How to Spend Way Less Time on Email Every Day,” by Matt Plummer. Harvard Business Publishing. January 2019* For all the time it consumes, email doesn’t create much value.

** For all the time it consumes, email doesn’t create much value.*

Many of us believe we need to follow our inboxes more closely than we actually do. In reality, most people are satisfied by a response within 24 hours.*

The power of No

Time is limited.

Even with productivity strategies in place, you won't be able to accomplish everything that's asked of you or pursue every opportunity.

To manage your time well, you need to be able to say no. We do our organizations no favors when we take on too much or pursue the wrong things.

Overcome Time Pressure

Challenge expectations about time

Leave your work at the office

Today, one of the biggest sources of stress is feeling “always on”—that you can never truly leave work at the office.

How are you wasting time?

Time is precious. It can be incredibly demoralizing when effort goes wasted, is duplicated, or gets undone without good reason.


There's a phrase for this: time sinks.

Time sinks happen when you or your team *repeatedly and avoidably* lose a lot of time on certain tasks.

In the workplace, there are three main types of time sinks:

Bad processes	Inefficient, wasteful, or outdated methods of work
Ineffective relationships	Miscommunications, lack of clarity, or rivalries
Low-value tasks	Work that's barely used, not valued, or tied to an outdated part of the business

Build a healthy day



When we feel good—physically and mentally—it's easier to manage time well.

When you have downtime

Every work cycle has peaks and valleys. **Peaks are for challenging yourself, while valleys offer time to restore and explore new ideas.**

When a gap between projects opens in your schedule, instead of immediately reloading your to-do list, take some time to:

Satisfied with how you spent your time?

"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."

—Annie Dillard, Pulitzer prize-winning author and naturalist

Time management advice is everywhere; your job is to identify what works for *you*. Reflection cements the insights that lead to behavior change.

Each day, reflect on how you spent your time:

**WHAT MADE YOU
HAPPIEST TODAY?**

**WHAT DO YOU
REGRET NOT
DOING TODAY?**

**WHAT DO YOU
WANT TO MAKE
TIME FOR
TOMORROW?**

End of module