

Time Management Tools

Effective time management – regardless if used personally or professionally – is important to helping you achieve that sense of accomplishment at the end of the day. Here is a complementary list of time management tools utilized throughout the business world. Some are more traditional in the sense that they have been around longer, while others are more contemporary. And yet others are extensions of the original tools modified to specific industries that you may or may not have seen before. – *Colleen Atwood*

ABCD Analysis

- A = Tasks are perceived as being urgent and important
- B = Tasks that are important but not urgent
- C = Tasks that are not important but urgent
- D = Tasks that are not important and not urgent

Important (your definition) _____

Urgent (your definition) _____

Airplane Days

One (1) hour of uninterrupted work during an airplane flight yields three (3) hours of work in a normal work environment. However, depending on the flight and which area you are in (Economy, Business, or First Class), this may be difficult to achieve.

David Allen's "Two-Minute Rule"

- If the task takes less than 2-minutes to complete, do it now
- If the task takes longer than 2-minutes, postpone or defer it until a later time

The difficulty some find with this method is two-fold. First, when is the proper time to complete the 2-minute method? And second, what happens if something you *thought* would take 2-minutes ends up taking longer? What do you do then?

First, the 2-minute rule should be completed when you are processing specific areas of your day. For example, if you are working on clearing out your email for the day, if you believe the answer to an email will take 2-minutes or less to complete, do it right then. However, if you know the response will take longer, postpone the answer to another time but don't forget about it (this is where an electronic to-do list within your email will help).

Second, if you find that 2-minutes is either too long or short to complete something, then adjust accordingly. Returning to the email example, if your responses to a typical email are somewhere in the 2-5-minute range, then it would be best to respond right away rather than postpone for a later time.

The biggest thing to remember with this method is that there is not 'right' or 'wrong' way to do this. We're dealing more with guidelines here, so adjusting the method to whichever way works best for you is ideal.

Determine Your Peak and Low Times of the Day

Every 90 – 120 minutes, your body completes a natural rhythm. This means that when you are feeling your energy level at its highest – and only you can determine that – you will want to make sure you are working on something that requires a high degree of attention. When your body is feeling drained, trying to work during this time is not recommended. Occupy yourself with something that isn't as intense as your important work.

Getting Things Done (GTD)

David Allen – productivity guru known around the world – has designed a system known as Getting Things Done (GTD). In order to avoid suffering from information overload (which occurs when too many things are happening at one time or you receive too much information within a very short period), you should complete the smaller tasks first. This gets them off your radar, allowing you to concentrate on the bigger tasks – which are subdivided into smaller tasks that you can schedule and start working on now.

However, GTD *does* have a reputation for being complicated. This reason for this is there is no one right or wrong way to complete it. However, the premise is that once you begin using GTD, you will find that over time your productivity increases.

There are five steps to the GTD method:

1. Capture
2. Clarify
3. Organize
4. Reflect
5. Engage

First, you want to capture everything you need to complete. This is where you write down all the tasks you can think of – from the smallest to largest – and get everything down on paper (or your favorite electronic application). This will clear your head and give you an unencumbered idea of what needs to be complete – both in the short- and long-term.

Second, you will want to clarify larger projects. Most tasks we handle during the day have various steps that must be complete. If you can identify those steps, it may be easier to tackle those smaller tasks rather than feel overwhelmed when looking at the bigger picture. For example, if a normal task you complete during the week has four steps, write down each of those steps. This way they are down on paper and you can schedule them accordingly.

Third, you will want to organize everything according to priority. Use one of the other methods discussed here to help with this. Once you have determined the priority of each task, then you can begin the process of assigning them to your calendar.

Fourth, you want to set aside time each week to look over (or reflect on) your to-do list and make sure your tasks are being completed in a timely manner. If you create your to-do list, prioritize it, and then fail to use it (i.e., reflect), then you've wasted your time and it is likely your tasks aren't being completed in a timely manner.

I have found that once a day (usually within the first half-hour) for about 10 minutes gives me an overall picture of how the day should go and what should be completed. Then, I also carve out time at the end of the week to review what has been completed and what has not. This gives me a very good idea of what I am spending too much time on and what needs more time for completion.

And finally, when you apply the system on a consistent basis, you will begin to learn how to best adjust it to the way that works best for you. There is no right or wrong way – as previously mentioned – and how you approach the system will vary. For example, some people prefer to use an electronic application to help them organize their to-do list. Others find using a work-version of the bullet journal works best for them. The best recommendation I can give is to try different methods and use what feels most comfortable for you.

“Must, Should, Want” Method

There are three questions you can ask yourself:

1. What *must* you do today?
2. What *should* you do today?
3. What do you *want* to do today?

The answers to these questions can help you determine what is most important to get done and what can be postponed for a later time. Obviously, you do not want to postpone an important task or project, so make sure to look at these questions with a critical eye. You will learn soon enough if your answers aren't producing the results you are looking for.

No Meeting Days

Some companies thrive on this method. They set aside one day each week where meetings are not allowed. This allows for less distractions and more time to complete your work.

Pomodoro Technique

This method is very simple: divide your day into periods of work and rest. For example, within a 30-minute period, you would work for 25 minutes and rest for 5. The ideal Pomodoro is said to be 20 – 35 minutes long. This allows your brain to reboot without becoming overwhelmed or distracted after long periods.

POSEC Method

The POSEC method is a template that accentuates an individuals' immediate need of emotional and economic security. While I find this more appealing to use on a personal level, some individuals use it for helping them with work priorities.

- **Prioritize** – your time and define your life by goals
- **Organize** – things you must regularly to be successful
 - i.e., family and finances
- **Streamline** – things you may not like to do but must do
 - i.e., work and household tasks
- **Economize** – things you should do or may like to do but are not pressingly urgent
 - i.e., hobbies and socialize
- **Contribute** – by paying attention to the few remaining things that make a difference
 - i.e., social responsibilities

Sunday Check-Ins

For someone who enjoys having their weekend free of work responsibilities (those days are gone for anyone who owns their own business), a Sunday check-in might not sound appealing. However, this is a good method to adopt both personally and professionally.

First, if you are part of a team working on a larger project, a quick 30-minute meeting (via Skype or another method) can help in making sure everyone is on the same page for the upcoming week. It gives everyone an idea of what is expected, what new things have come up, and deadlines that are upcoming.

Second, on a personal level, doing a quick review of the upcoming week will give your brain an idea of what is coming up soon and allows you to prepare yourself accordingly.

The “Done List”

Funky sounding but a good idea. When you complete a task, write it down on a list specifically created to show what you've accomplished. This way, if you need a quick motivator, you have something specific to look at.

The “Big Rock System”

This system has been shown in a variety of movies over the years. Usually, it's a professor or high school teacher with a mason jar in hand. First, they put larger rocks in the jar and explain the larger rocks are your more important things in life (in our instance, your most important priorities). Then, they fill the remaining area in the jar with smaller pebbles or sand. These pebbles or sand are the smaller (or less important) tasks you need to complete. This way, you can accomplish both your larger and smaller responsibilities.