

# Time Tamers

By ROBIN FOGEL

**D**o you ever feel like your whole day has slipped by without getting anything done? Do you ever wish you had a few more hours in the day? Business owners and sole practitioners tell me that at the end of their workday they often wonder where the day went. More importantly they worry about work that did not get done.

When I work with clients on issues of time management and priority setting we put a process in place that I call APAPS-Attitude, Priorities, Analyze, Plan, and Schedule.

## Attitude

Do you believe you have control over your time or are you at the mercy of your environment? Do you think your workload is manageable or overwhelming? Do you have a “can do” attitude? Your attitude is critical.

Time management is really self-management. For some people, considerable time is wasted procrastinating. Have you ever spent time thinking about doing something instead of just doing it? Or, do you have trouble getting started, especially if it is something you don't want to do? If you believe you can do something, you'll find a way - attitude is key.

## Priorities

Decide what is important. It is a fact of modern day life that you will never have time for everything. But, if you are clear about your priorities you can spend your time effectively. Remember, 80% of value comes from 20% of your effort. It's a fact of life that we spend too much time reacting to others' priorities or doing busy work. Learn to identify your high value 20% and concentrate your effort there. Don't let the trivial stuff take over your work or your life.

## Analyze

Figure out where your time is going. Guessing is not very effective. Keep a time log. Before you can control your time you have to understand how it is being used. Are those activities where you spend your time consistent with your priorities? How much time do you spend answering phone calls or emails? Do you spend more time than necessary on projects? How much

time do you spend on interruptions or on someone else's priorities. Analyze your schedule-what is working? What isn't?

## Plan

Everyone admits that planning is important but most people don't spend the time to set up a plan. Planning is deciding what to do. Planning is a habit. Planning is a way to control as much of your time as possible while recognizing that not everything is in your control.

Good planning includes some of the questions you asked yourself in trying to understand where your time went: How much time does this activity take? Do you regularly underestimate how long something takes to complete? Does this activity have a starting and ending time? How much flexibility is needed for the unexpected — things you cannot control? Ask yourself: Is this one of my top priorities? Is this the best use of my time?

---

## Meetings can be time wasters... before attending clarify the purpose

---

The most common planning tool most people use is the daily to-do list but weekly planning is even more important. This gives you a longer perspective and allows for more options. Use a planner that best suits you - paper, electronic, some combination —write everything down — appointments, meetings, calls, errands.

## Schedule

Nothing happens unless there is a space in your day for it to happen. Scheduling is deciding when to do something. It is picking the best time for the activity. The most effective time managers know how to accurately calculate how long a task will take. I tell clients that this is an art and not a science and it takes practice. If you rou-

tinely underestimate the time a task will take, double the time and follow these steps:

- Schedule the most important activities for each day - pick a specific time. Things that are scheduled are more likely to happen.
- Set time limits for everything you do. Determine how much time you can reasonably devote to this task.
- Group related items and actions whenever possible.
- And know what your best time of the day is, when you are most effective. Set this time aside for important projects.

## Three final time tamers:

The single most useful piece of information is to identify who or what is interrupting you and how much time it is taking. If, for example, telephone calls and emails are eating your day, set aside specific times to make and respond to these calls and emails. And, at the same time ask yourself if these are truly interruptions or if they are part of the business that you need to plan for.

Meetings can be time wasters or an effective use of your time. Before attending or scheduling a meeting, clarify the purpose of the meeting and stick to it. Have an agenda, have a start and ending time and come prepared. Paperwork can be a problem (and a huge time drain) unless you develop a system for dealing with it. It's been said that there are only three things to do with paper- dump it, delegate it or act on it. So, analyze your paperwork, screen and sort, develop criteria for what to keep and what to dump, use tickler files and schedule time to deal with your paperwork.

Take control of your time, and remember, you have to spend time to make time. Understand where your time is going and how that fits with your priorities, spend the time each day or week to plan for what needs to get done and when to do it. And you'll be amazed by the result. n

**Ms. Fogel is the president of Robin Fogel & Associates, LLC. She is a career and life coach dedicated to helping individuals and small business owners stay focused and achieve their goals.**