Want To Increase Your Productivity? Take Control Of Your Time!

A friend of mine recently told me about a problem she was having at work. "I usually think I have enough time to get things done, but something always comes up and then I'm behind schedule on projects," she said. "My boss spoke to me about this, and I'm worried that if it happens again she'll include it as a negative comment in my next performance appraisal. Any ideas on how I can better manage my time at work?"

I explained to her that the key to becoming good at time management is to understand where your time actually goes. I had my friend document what she did every hour of each day at work for a week, so she could visualize it. When we sat down to chat afterwards, she was surprised.

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"I can't believe how much time I spend checking my email every day!" she said, shaking her head. "I also didn't think I spent much time chatting with co-workers. It doesn't seem like a lot of time when I look at it on a daily basis, but when you add up the total time for the week, I'm shocked."

Sound familiar? You'd be surprised how many people I coach realize the same thing happens to them when tracking where their time actually goes. Here are my tips for taking back control of your time and increasing your productivity:

Find out where your time goes. Track your time for one week and then analyze the results.

Plan ahead. At the end of each week, sit down in a quiet location for 15-20 minutes and plan out your week ahead. Write down all of the key projects and tasks you need to accomplish.

Prioritize. Prioritize your list from most important to least important activities and projects, and then block out uninterrupted time to accomplish your most important items. Don't let others schedule meetings on top of the time you've blocked for your key projects.

Eliminate the non-essential. Use any remaining time on your calendar to schedule lesser important activities. Ask yourself, "Is this activity actually important or is it unnecessary?" then, cut out non-essential activities.

Set goals. When you get up each morning, set goals for yourself as to what you plan to accomplish that day.

Carve out email time. Set aside specific times for checking your email, such as at the beginning of your workday, right before or after lunch and at the end of the day. Refrain from checking email except during these allocated times.

Avoid multi-tasking. It took me a long time to learn to focus on one activity or project at a time and then when that one is complete, move on the next (instead of trying to multi-task). I found that if I use laser-like focus in everything I do, I can dramatically increase my overall productivity.

Act like a consultant. Pretend you're a consultant who must track and account for every hour of every day as if you were billing someone for your services – this will force you to think carefully on how you allocate your time during the day. Are you spending the majority of your time on activities that would be considered "billable" or "non-billable"?

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Just say, "No." Learn to say, "No" more. If you understand what you need to accomplish every day of each week then you'll be in a better position to say, "I'm sorry. I can't help you with that this week because I have four very important projects I need to finish first." This will keep you from over-committing your time.

As my friend found out, the more she got into the habit of managing her time, the more disciplined she became and the easier it was to accomplish her professional goals. By taking back control of your time, the same can happen for you.

Murray here:

Great article by Lisa!

My daughter can't seem to understand that she can get her homework done in 10% of the time if she would just turn off the TV, cell phone texting, YouTube videos and put away the shoe catalogs! Do all kids think they have to multi-task? Is this a product of our society today? jeesh...

But I have my own issues too: time management is one of my biggest challenges. How welll do you manage your time? I hope you find this content useful. I'd like to hear your thoughts...please leave a comment below.

Lisa Quast writes about career topics, helping people maximize their potential. She is a career coach, business consultant and former Fortune 500 executive. Now that she have "been there, done that" with more than 20 years of experience climbing the corporate ladder, She's sharing the career advice you need to excel and standout in your profession as a leader. She have also authored the recent award-winning book "Your Career, Your Way," and She's blogging for Forbes and The Seattle Times. This original article appeared at:
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