

Just get on with it

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Learn the 4Ps of effective time management to get better results

HAVING determined your goals, you know that time management will bring about improved performance. Being committed to your goals, you now want to wholeheartedly apply techniques that will realise results.

Time is a bit like money. You can get it, spend it, save it, invest it and even waste it. Unlike money, however, you can never change the amount you receive. You get the same 24 hours as everyone else, each

and every day.

Given that constraint, being productive means investing your finite time resources in areas that will bring you the best returns.

Formulating your time management strategy thus becomes a simple task. Identify where you spend it now and think what are the best things to spend it on in the future.

Once you know where and what you use your time on, you can then make choices as to how to spend it more wisely.

In your strategy for time mastery, there are the 4Ps to keep in mind: Procrastinating, prioritising, processing and practising.

1 Procrastinating

When I was a child, I was taught to swim. I recall vividly the day I was taught to tread water. Time and tide instantly stood still. What was the point, I wondered? Wouldn't it be better, I thought at the time, to just get us to swim off to somewhere else?

So think about your work today, the tasks you tackle, and whether it sometimes feels like you are treading water. When you realise that you regularly put things off to another day, you recognise that you are procrastinating.

Procrastinating is probably your number one horror and all-time time waster. That said, most people do it a little at some stage. They would rather moan and gripe about something, rather than just getting on with it.

This inevitably leads to missed deadlines, rushed work and a consequent loss of quality, all with high potential for impact on other deadlines.

It is better to just start, and soon enough, your task will be completed.

2 Prioritising

Once you start moving, you can begin to get productive. The trick is in knowing which task to tackle next. Productive people make choices as to where they spend

their time, to maximise their returns. When they do this, they are prioritising.

Restaurants segment their menu into courses – starters, mains and desserts – because they know that when customers dine, their time is limited. The menu structure helps customers to prioritise their choices based on time, taste and cost considerations.

Prioritising tasks uses exactly the same principles and allows you to focus on moving towards your goals. Doing the most important tasks first gives you the biggest payback in time investment, taking you along the path towards time mastery.

3 Processing

You have chosen to move forward, and have begun focusing on important tasks, and things are starting to fall into a groove for you. Yet, overcoming procrastination and prioritising tasks only begin the processing activities that occupy us for most of the day.

Albert Einstein once cautioned that insanity is “doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting different results”. So, beware of the hidden traps of processing.

A considerable amount of the work people do today is service-oriented, often involving a series of connected processes. Some steps during the course of processing may be leaching your time away, like air leaking out of a punctured tyre, while others can yield some big-time gains.

Processing is where you can begin to recognise both time pains and time gains. So when you are doing something that is

an established routine, be mindful that there may be ways to improve it. Spotting these can often save you considerable time and save your company sizeable costs.

4 Practising

If your ambitions include progressing in your career and building wealth for your family, you already know you need to become a decision-maker.

Cartoonist Scott Adams' Dilbert, everyone's favourite cubicle-dweller, insightfully said: “Decisions are made by people who have time, not people who have talent.”

I would further add that those decision-makers who have time, probably started out just like you, but with much less of it. The difference is that they began practising good time management techniques.

If you really want to improve your business productivity and personal effectiveness, reduce stress surrounding you and bring a little balance into your life, befriend good time management practices and see positive changes.

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