

How to Get More Out of Your Day

If only there were only more hours in the day. Everyone wants more time but it is finite resource, making the goal to be as efficient as possible with the time we have. Finding practical ways to make your day easier and be more productive is a big task. There are plenty of tips and tricks available but which ones will work for you? Over the years, we've utilized various time management techniques and have found some strategies that work for our office that we'd like to share.

One popular time management approach is the Pomodoro Technique, named after the Italian word for tomato, because the inventor used a tomato timer to track the day. The Pomodoro technique encourages you to work at a task for 25 minutes then take a 5-minute break and after 100 minutes, which is 4 rounds, you take a 20-minute break. You can [click here](#) for a link to an online Pomodoro Technique timer. We use this strategy to get a large project done, such as a report or cleaning out the garage. When you take those breaks from the task at hand, make sure the breaks relax your mind and your body. If your task is physical, your break should be relaxing, like drinking a lemonade. If your task is mental, then take a walk. Breaking up tasks into short time blocks tricks your brain into thinking the task is easier and less daunting than trying to complete it start to finish.

You do not have to commit to such a strict schedule to stay on top of your day. Another technique called Time Blocking is a great way to maximize efficiency. Time Blocking is the process of assigning specific activities to certain times of the day. We all use this technique in some way or another, often without realizing it. For example, you probably shower and get dressed right after you wake up, make personal calls on your lunch break, or spend time reading before bed. Purposefully using this strategy throughout your day can make you more efficient for those busy days, or just give you more down time daily.

We use Time Blocking in the office regularly. On a daily basis, mornings are committed to client service work and investment trading, leaving afternoons available for large projects. On a weekly basis, we set aside Mondays and Wednesdays for meeting with clients and meeting preparation. Tuesdays and Thursdays are dedicated to meeting follow-up and research for clients. We also devote those days to consulting with client's attorneys, CPAs, and other professionals. Fridays are more flexible in order to accommodate busy schedules and special requests.

Time Blocking is also useful to avoid distractions. Often right when you're making good strides on a project the phone rings or an email arrives and catches your attention. Immediately responding to

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calls and emails can side-track your progress. To keep you on task, close your email programs or social media accounts and turned off alerts throughout your day, checking the programs on a schedule. This allows you to allocate appropriate time to not only the project at hand, but also makes sure the emails or messages that need your response are given adequate time.

In addition to phone and email distractions, your environment can be a distraction too. Disorganization and clutter can cause you to lose focus and delay tasks. Our office has a “clean desk” policy and is working to go paperless. Not dealing with mountains of paper can not only save you time and space but also money, since certain companies will now charge for sending paper documents. Use a scanner and save interesting documents as PDFs. You can print the item later if needed and save them in easy to create folders on your computer. Consider getting rid of things you have not used in 12-18 months and designate a home for every belonging. When you purchase a new item, ask yourself, ‘where will this live’ and if you cannot see a space in your home for that item, reconsider the purchase.

We live in the age of technology and while it can be a time-waster it can also be a time-saver. Online shopping services are not only convenient, but sometimes can save you money. If you can wait a day or two for a product, you may find it online for less than in a brick and mortar store. Beyond online shopping, services such as auto pay, auto deposit or automatic renewals can free up time spent writing checks or logging in to pay bills. Utilizing technology properly can also help with time management. There are applications available that can sync between numerous devices allowing you and other family members to share information such as calendars, grocery lists, home repairs, clothing sizes, etc. Making technology work for you is a great way to create efficiency for your family.

When organizing your personal and professional life remember no matter what time management technique you choose the key is to make it a habit. It is important to know when you’ve reached your limit and that it is ok to say “no.” When you value your time, others will do the same. Staying organized and managing our time not only improves our professional life, but improves our quality of life. We hope you’ve found some of the techniques our office uses helpful.

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