



Time Management Tips

Everyone is given exactly the same amount of time each day. It is up to us to manage this time as we would any other precious, nonrenewable asset. In the world of commission sales, time is indeed money! Time management is at the very core of being a successful professional. Effective people know how to concentrate on results while ineffective people concentrate on just being busy. Counting time is not nearly as important as making time count. Effective professionals focus on task achievement rather than tension relieving diversions. By incorporating the use of proven time management techniques into your daily routine, you will earn more money and experience less stress in your life. Avoid procrastination in all of its attractive forms. Learn to separate the important from the unimportant and develop a “Do it NOW” attitude. People manage time by managing their activities and managing activities begins with planning. Effective time managers understand the importance of “planning their work and then working their plan.”

It is up to us to respect time and give it both meaning and value. If you want to know the value of a year, ask a P.O.W. that has lost his freedom. If you want to know the value of a month, ask a mother that has given birth to a premature baby. If you want to know the value of a week, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper. If you want to know the value of a day, ask a schoolboy on the last day before summer vacation. If you want to know the value of an hour, ask a criminal sentenced to death. If you want to know the value of a minute, ask a person that just missed their fight. If you want to know the value of a second, ask a person that just avoided a serious car accident. If you want to know the value of a millisecond, ask an Olympic silver medalist.

Time management is always at the top of the list of frequently requested trainings. In fact, however, time management is not a **training** issue it is a planning and coaching issue. Poor time management is not an intellectual problem; rather it is a poor habit. To break this habit requires a commitment to change and a resolve to modify habits. The “process” of good time management is fairly simple and consists of about 5 simple steps:

- **WHAT:** establish goals
- **HOW:** identify strategies
- **WHEN:** break the goals and strategies into manageable “Chunks”
- **WHICH:** Identify & Prioritize tactics
- **HOW LONG:** Allocate time to priority tasks

Effective time management simply stated is the ability to align ones actions with ones goals.

A goal is a purpose, an intention or an end point, whereas strategy is an elaborate and systematic plan of action. A tactic is a maneuver or an action and prioritization is the act of arranging in order of importance.

Why is it then that we have such difficulty with such an intellectual process? The issue of time management is rooted in our inability to focus and stay the course despite adversity. Focus and dealing with adversity are much more difficult challenges than the intellectual process laid out below. Many of us lack the discipline to plan and even more of us lack the resolve to stay the course.

Some of the things that derail time management are:

- People operate in a manner consistent with their comfort zone; that is we do what we LIKE to do before that which we NEED to do.
- Interruptions take us off our task, causing us to lose focus. Understand that “Focus is the ability to say NO to good opportunities. Why, because there are better ones”
- We lack an ability to connect the longer term with the mid-term and the midterm with the present. Lacking this connection causes us to lack concentration on those immediate things that which we must do to be effective.

Let’s look at the 5 steps to better time management

Goal setting:

Goal setting is the cornerstone to effective time management, yet it is documented that only 3% of the US population has written goals. A 1979 Harvard MBA study shows that people with written goals had out earned those with no written goals by a 10:1 margin when resurveyed 10 years later. Time management without written goals will lead to a frenetic amount of busy work, with very few tangible results. How long term should your goals be? Well it starts with lifetime goals in which you determine the outcome in advance. After you have clearly identified those goals, you must now break those goals into shorter “Chunks of time” or interim goals, say 10 years, 5 years, 3 years and annually. Determine what it is you wish to achieve and then identify in specific terms, precisely what that consists of. We have all heard of S.M.A.R.T. goals. At the risk of repetition, this acronym defines goals which are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound Start with defining goals in several critical areas of your life; Family, Spiritual, Work, Social, Health, Education, Financial. Each of these life roles requires a specific written set of goals if we expect to reach our potential in each.

Identify strategies:

If goals are the WHAT which we want to achieve, then strategies define HOW we intend to achieve those goals. The strategy is the plan which connects our objectives with actions. Many paths can be taken to reach a destination. Many Paths may be taken but some are better than others. Once a goal is established, alternatives to achieving those objectives must be evaluated in order to select the best process used in achieving your goals. Some of those paths are expeditious; getting you to your goal faster, others may be less risky while still others may achieve a better long term result. The strategy will determine which path you choose along with the milestones, timing, and priorities along the way. The strategy must be carefully created and frequently monitored as it becomes the primary tool by which you navigate the journey to the end goal. Typically execution of the strategy is where time management first falters.

“Chunking the strategy”

“A Journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”
Confucius

This well known quote is used often when we consider a large, complex task which seems overwhelming at the outset. The enormity of the task seems unattainable until we can break it down to manageable components. Perspective occurs when we are able to determine the milestones and piece parts that must be accomplished. Unfortunately, many people are in a frenetic mode of acting with very little forethought. The result is wasted efforts and missteps that cause us to be ineffective. With a constant eye on the goal, we must be able to reverse engineer the strategy and break it down into realistic, manageable chunks and assign timelines and sub goals to accomplishing those strategies. A good example of this “chunking is a sales plan which can be broken into annual, quarterly, monthly and weekly strategic chunks. Only now can we have confidence that what we do in the shorter term will align with our longer term objective.

Identify and Prioritize tactics:

Once we have determined our strategic focus, we turn our attention to specific tactical ACTIONS which will drive results. To do this we must define our Key Performance Indicators (KPI); the smallest discernible and measurable activity that will lead to our goal. An example of a KPI can be: conducting a 1 on 1 with an employee, a face to face meeting with a sales prospect, talk time by a service rep, orders shipped with zero defects, average time to resolve a customer complaint, etc. Great managers spend a great deal of effort making sure these metrics are correct, and align with the corporate and divisional goals. It is important to get the KPI's right because they are the best way to achieve focus. When done right, they affect an employee's behaviors and allow you to inspect that which you expect. Management Scorecards are derived from combining the top KPI's and establishing acceptable performance standards.

Allocate time to priority tasks

Each and every day, BEFORE the day begins, we must have a vision as to the key initiatives to be accomplished. Generally, you can expect to gain ten minutes for every one minute you invest in planning. Make planning a part of your daily tasks, in fact make it your greatest priority, and do it first thing each day (or make it the last thing you do before leaving for the day) This planning should be done at all major strategic “Chunks: In business I recommend Annually, Quarterly, Monthly, Weekly and Daily chunks. There are diminishing returns, so do not paralyze yourself into a state of constant planning. The longer the “Chunk” clearly the more time will be needed in the planning process. You should consider allowing the following timeframes for planning:

Annually	8-12 hours
Quarterly:	2-3 hours
Monthly:	1 hour
Weekly:	15-30 minutes
Daily:	10-15 minutes

When you plan a chunk of time, you must look at the goal as well as the surrounding “chunks.” For example, if you are planning a month;

- View the end goal, (which should be someplace very accessible at all times).
- View the larger chunk of time, in this case the quarterly objectives (these too should be very accessible at all times)
- Next, View the chunk which you are planning, in this example the current month.
- Chunk that timeframe into the next smaller chunk (in this case weekly)
- Establish your goals strategy and tactics week over week
- Finally, PRIORITIZE those Key tasks which will drive success
 - A’s must be done
 - B’s are important, but less so than A’s
 - C’s are “white noise” and will not contribute to your objectives
- Commit to NEVER do a “C “ before a “B” or a “B” before an “A”
- Make sure you do not have too many priorities, try to assign 3 A’s 6 B’s and anything left over is a C
- BLOCK off time in your calendar to get the priorities accomplished

While the above outlines the steps to effective time management, your effectiveness will falter if you do not have the discipline to follow the steps. Most importantly, distinguish yourself through setting goals and then be fair to yourself by planning each and every day. You must divorce yourself from the self talk that causes you to operate in your comfort zone, and be committed to continually expanding that comfort zone.

I have compiled some tips on Time management below as well as some great reads:

1. Plan your day the night before. List and **prioritize** the top five objectives you desire to accomplish when you get to the office. Start with the number one item on your list and stay with it until it is complete. Try to do the most difficult tasks first.
2. Your first priority as a salesperson is to make appointments. If you do not have an appointment with a prospect, then get on the phone and make one. I recommend you make your phone calls in the morning when you are fresh and alert.
3. Let your friends and co-workers know when you do not want to be disturbed. Close your office door and stay focused on the task at hand. An open door invites continuous distractions.
4. Get to the office early. You will never be successful in the sales profession if you get into the habit of coming to work at the “crack of noon.”
5. Avoid long personal phone calls, lunches and coffee breaks. How much of your day do you spend with a client or actively prospecting for new business? You may want to start an activity log and track how you spend your time.
6. Delegate, delegate, delegate. Avoid the temptation of doing administrative duties and paperwork. Salespeople historically tend to hide behind their paperwork. Focus your efforts on the things that you are licensed or hired to do and consider employing someone else to handle your paperwork. If you have any doubt, ask yourself **“What is the best use of my time right now?”**
7. Manage Email and Voice mail. Set aside 2 or 3 specific times each day when you will check your emails and voice mails. Turn your alert off on your computer. Let phone calls go to voice mail. Return calls and emails at a pre-determined time each day.
8. Chunk your time. Block off chunks of time on your calendar for important tasks. Recognize that activity will grow to the time which is allotted to it. Schedule the proper amount of time required to complete your most important priorities.

Recommended reads:

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People	Stephen R. Covey
First Things First	Stephen R. Covey
Feel the Fear, and Do It Anyway	Susan Jeffers
Time Traps: Proven Strategies for Swamped Sales People	Todd Duncan