



Sample Article

Time Management Tips

I nearly had to cancel my last Time Management training: I didn't have time for it. Ironic as it sounds, it was true. I enjoy working under pressure and getting things done last minute, but it started to get out of hand. So, off I went to the training.

It was a complete waste of time. The training kicked off with a "get to know one another" session where we were asked to describe ourselves as a domestic appliance and give reasons for our choice. It was a moment straight out of Ricky Gervais's *The Office*! I compared myself to a dishwasher. At the time, I was working as a copywriter for a college, and my reasons to comparing myself to this machine was because I too cannot operate without input from various people. It made sense at the time. One person was a Hoover, another a washing machine; there was a tumble dryer, and even a washing line (yes, there's always one who bends the rules).

As this session took quite a lot of time, we ended up rushing through the rest of the training. The course overran. Brilliant: a Time Management course that runs out of time!

The one benefit of the course was that it made me stop and think about how I can manage my time more efficiently. For one, stop going to ludicrous training sessions! I have made seven changes to my working day since then, and been rewarded by an extra two hours a day on average. I am no magician; I just make a lot more use of my time. My seven Time Management tips are:

1. Plan

Whatever it is you do, plan and be prepared. Before you do anything at the start of your day, pause and decide what you want to achieve. I write a list and a guesstimate next to each one on how long it will take to complete. If it is an essay or

report you have to do, writing a plan which outlines your key points along with order and structure will save heaps of time in the long run.

2. Organise

The best ways I stay organised are by filing and keeping To Do lists. I used to think filing was another word for creating-great-piles-of-documents-and-leave-them-where-you-find-them. Suffice to say I wasted a lot of time trying to find the right document when I wanted it! Now, I file once a week which means I know where stuff is and can get to it quickly. With regard to To Do lists, I would recommend doing this in Word as it allows you to add to it and mark off completed tasks. Plus if you work for yourself, keeping track of what you have done each day will help keep you motivated and efficient. Back in the day, I swore by Post-It notes, I absolutely loved them! I would jot down on them merrily, which resulted in a pile of Post-It notes. And there was always one or two rogue Post-It that would stick itself to the underside of a book and be lost forever. I'm sure my winning lottery numbers were on one of these rogues... Word is the time-saving, er, word, these days.

3. Five minute jobs

Whenever something comes along that merely entails a quick conversation or email, do it immediately. I used to jot these down on my then-trusted Post-Its but actually it is so much quicker to complete these than document them.

4. Emails

I still struggle to be disciplined with emails. I think it's only human to check the inbox with the thought "this will be something exciting". It never is. Or if it is, you have to come back to it later, doubling the time spent on it. So I try (very hard) now to only check my emails four times a day: first thing in the morning, lunchtime, around 4pm and then around 8pm. This way, I can get lots done in between but mostly it means I can respond straightaway and clear my inbox each time.

5. Prioritise

This one may seem obvious, but unfortunately it did not come naturally to me. I used to work on the assignments that most appealed, that I was the best at or had the most knowledge for. And then I would have a pile of tricky numbers left over; or have to rush to hit a deadline. Now, when I plan my day, I decide which items are urgent and important, and do these first. Next are the important items, then urgent. And

finally the non-urgent and unimportant tasks such as filing. Of course, life can only be planned to a certain extent as things crop up which we have to work around, but prioritising will help you stay in control and manage for these eventualities.

6. Delegate

I've heard people talk of this fabulous D-word, and it sounds sublime. Sadly, as a freelance copywriter and editor I have no one apart from me to delegate to, so this is not an option. However, if you are a manager, this is one of the most effective time-saving strategies. And even if you are not a manager, you can still delegate: I've had my share of poor managers who would ask me to do things that were illogical given my role, and I became good at handing these back or speaking to colleagues who had the skills set for such tasks.

7. Perfectionism

Time does not always allow us to be perfectionists all day, every day. Depending on your job role, it may be that you can deliver 95% on certain reports and essays, especially when the alternative is aiming for perfectionism and missing the deadline. I am not suggesting you become sloppy in your work, at all, but there are times when checking a piece of work twice is sufficient (if you are a perfectionist, you will know how hard this is!)

These seven steps to gaining a bit more time, work for me. Try them and see what suits your lifestyle. After all, what have you got to lose? I can only tell you what you have to gain: time.