

HOW TO STAY ON TOP OF YOUR WORKLOAD

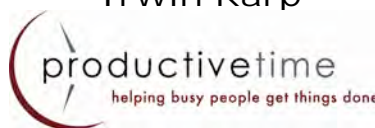
Practical Time Management for
Family Support Officials

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HOW TO STAY ON TOP OF YOUR WORKLOAD

Practical Time Management for Family Support Officials

AGENDA

- Planning Your Workload and Determining Your Priorities
- Focus is the Key to Productivity
- How to Overcome Time Traps
- Effective Communications
- Develop Your Personal Action Plan

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Key concerns based on call with conference organizers...

- Managing multiple competing demands
- Prioritization of tasks
- Coordinated planning – dependencies
- Using technology correctly
 - E-mail management
 - Stay on top of professional reading
- Effective meetings

What we will cover this morning:

- **What you need to get done**
 - planning your workload
 - juggling your multiple priorities
- **How you get things done - Focus**
 - Managing time traps
 - The perils of multitasking
 - Managing e-mail & your smart phone
 - Overcoming procrastination
- **Communications**
 - Importance of clarity
 - Effective meetings
- **Develop your Personal Action Plan**

What does it mean to be Organized:

- Find documents in 1-2 min.
- Everything has a home
- Know status of active projects
- Know you role in project & time frames
- On time for appointments
- Spend time effectively
- Use systems

**What is
TIME MANAGEMENT?**

- Use time wisely
- Weigh competing priorities
- Effective decisions
- Establish systems
- SELF-MANAGEMENT
- ATTENTION MANAGEMENT
- Mindfulness

**Turn “Due Date”
into “DO DATES”**

[The Project Management Process]

WORKFLOW:

The sequence of tasks, or necessary steps, that comprise a child support process.

Involves time, information, tasks, priorities and where you and others fit in.

If any link in this workflow chain is broken, timely completion, quality of work, quality of service & staff morale can be adversely affected.

**Stages of the
Project Management Process**

1. Establish purpose & end result
2. Set final deadline
3. Break work down - tasks & subtasks
4. Organize tasks in specific order
5. Set interim deadlines [estimate time]
6. Delegate assignments
7. Communicate
8. Monitor progress
9. Close (evaluate)

**Management by Crisis
Last Minute "Rushes"**

- Crisis interferes with priorities
- Genuine crisis = unanticipated event
- Lack of planning - not a true crisis

PLANNING – break project into tasks and subtasks

- Define all necessary steps
- Write it all down – see missing steps
- Delegate certain tasks

ORGANIZE TASKS in sequence

- Develop order of action – tasks & subtasks
- Show interdependencies
- Communicate to others where they fit in

SET INTERIM DEADLINES

- Estimate time
- Set deadlines for tasks
- Schedule time to do the work
 - Turn “DUE” dates into “DO” dates
 - Accountability
- Set review dates – progress
- Build in paperwork time

The most effective time management tool & the key to productivity is
FOCUS

Planning
[what do you focus on?]

- Write things down
- Master List of projects
- Tasks & schedule for each project
- Monthly planning
- Weekly review – weekly planning
- Daily Action Plan (“to do” list)

Weekly Review

- Review progress & accomplishments
- Where need to catch up
- What worked well and what didn't
- NEXT ACTION?
- "To do" list is not a commitment
- Block out time to do the work
- Make time to keep up on reading

PRIORITIZE YOUR TIME

Ask Yourself:

WHAT IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE USE OF MY TIME RIGHT NOW?

- Considerations:
 - Don't need to do now
 - "Tyranny of the Urgent"
 - Can I give this to someone else
 - Know your "prime time"

How does FOCUS relate to MULTI-TASKING?

Psychologists say that what we call multi-tasking is actually "TASK SWITCHING"

["Continuous Partial Attention"]

Three Major Types of Multitaskers

Dr. David Meyer (Psychology Prof - Univ. of Michigan)

- **DESPERATE**
– ex: speaking on phone while researching on internet is only way to keep up.
- **IMPULSIVE**
– ex: stop drafting in mid-sentence to check e-mail without thinking about consequences.
- **DELUSIONAL**
– ex: multitask with pride; you actually believe you're good at it.

Manage the Telephone

- Bell's first act on inventing phone
- Manage phone – don't take calls when "unavailable"
- Return calls in bunches
- Develop a mini-agenda for phone calls

Interruptions / Drop-in visitors:

- "Have a minute?" - Consider: "No"
[But wait a minute: Who is asking?
Know your audience]
- Make appointment for later
- Put time limit on the visit
- Explain situation – alternative
- Visitor – save up your questions

How to Overcome Procrastination

- Psych yourself – attitude – positive self-talk
- Focus on best use of your time
- Weekly Review - block off time
- Break large project down into small pieces
- Stop whining – just do it
- Work on it for 15 minutes – may get on a roll

Impact of poor communications on quality

- Wasted time
- Doing things over
- Running out of time
- No improvement for future
- Frustration
- Stress
- Poor relationships
- Effect on clients

Need Clear Communications

- Miscommunication wastes time
- Assume nothing
- Style appropriate for the other person
- Explain up front & listen
- Successful only when understood by receiver
- Use a Feedback loop
 - *Brief back & get confirmation*

What makes for an Effective Meeting ...

- Clarity about purpose & objectives.
- Set an agenda and stick to it.
- Start & stop on time.
- Conduct of the meeting.
 - Keep it moving.
 - Keep it on point & in line w/ objectives.
- Purpose of meeting is accomplished.
- Outcome & tasks summarized.

Staying on Time:

- Start & stop meeting on time
- Stay on time w/ agenda items
- Recognize when consensus reached, decision made, or item thoroughly discussed & close the item
- Develop ground rules – time limit for each speaker

Signs of E-mail Overload:

- High volume
- **Full in-box** – use as “to do” list
- Can't find the due date
- Unanswered e-mails
- Large attachments
- No system for follow-up
- Gnawing sense of anxiety - miss something

How to cope with the e-mail deluge

- Frequent checking of e-mail is a big time waster – why?
 - Diverts your attention – disconnects from focus
 - You may not deal with it then, and it piles up in your in-box
 - You need to get back to where you were.

Check e-mail at regular intervals

- Check immediately
- Check on a periodic basis (hourly? more often?)
- Check in transitions & triage
- What is appropriate for your job?
- Discuss culture / discuss expectations

Communicate w/ clients & colleagues on use of tools

- Discuss expectations
- Seek advice
- Reach mutually agreeable way of working

What is the proper response time?

How to FOCUS
(Rather than Multitask)

- Manage your technology
- Create boundaries
- Turn things off
- Exercise self control
- Check messages in transition
- Prioritize – action plan
- Set aside blocks of time for priorities
- Pay attention to your attention
- Stay in the moment

COPING WITH STRESS

- Planning / Control
- Breathe
- Keep perspective
- Get exercise
- Take time for leisure
- Don't take yourself too seriously
- Laugh heartily and often

Summary Review:

- Write things down & plan your week
- Focus by blocking out time
- Eliminate or manage time wasters
- Take charge of your attitude & reactions
- Communicate status on projects
- Don't keep others waiting
- Ask: "what's the most effective use of my time right now?"
- Take some time to laugh & relax

HOW TO STAY ON TOP OF YOUR WORKLOAD
Practical Time Management for Family Support Officials

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PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATION & TIME MANAGEMENT

Did you ever get to the end of the day, after you've been working really hard, and feel like you really didn't accomplish your most important tasks? Where did the time go? Chances are it was snatched away by time wasters that reduced your productivity without you even realizing it. These time wasters have either eaten away at your effectiveness or required you to work longer days to meet your looming deadlines.

We're all so busy, with so much to do – we need good time management skills. But “time management” is a misnomer because we can't really manage time. It flows on irrevocably. When it's gone, it's gone. We can only manage ourselves in relation to time. So, we're really talking about self-management -- how we use our available time.

What it means to be organized:

*“Organizing is what you do before you do something,
so when you do it, it's not all messed up.”*

- Christopher Robin in Winnie-the-Pooh

- You can find things that you need, when you need them
- Everything has a home
- You know the status of your active projects
- You are on time for appointments
- You spend your time effectively
- You use systems that work for you
- Be only as organized as you need to be to work effectively
- Good organization is the foundation of good time management

What is this skill that we call Time Management?

*"Time is the scarcest resource,
and unless it is managed
nothing else can be managed."*

- Peter F. Drucker

- It's a matter of managing yourself with respect to time
- It involves planning & assessment
- It's a process of weighing competing priorities & making choices
- It requires effective decision-making
- It requires establishing systems that work for you
- It requires controlling interruptions & time wasters
- It requires organization

Prioritize how you spend your time:

*“You will never find time for anything.
If you want time, you must make it.”*

- Charles Buxton

- Ask: “What is the most effective use of my time right now?”
- What am I doing that does not have to be done now?
- Beware the “tyranny of the urgent.”
- What could I give to someone else?
- Am I using my “prime time” for the most important tasks?

The goal of this workshop is to help you learn ways to get organized, to plan and schedule your work, and to get things done. Practice of the techniques in this workshop will result in increased productivity, reduced stress and more control over how you spend your time.

For County Counsel lawyers, the Minnesota Rules of Professional Conduct address the issue of work flow management.

RULE 1-3: Diligence

“A lawyer shall act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing a client.”

Comment:

[2] “A lawyer’s work load should be controlled so that each matter can be handled adequately.” (emphasis added).

DETERMINING YOUR PRIORITIES and PLANNING YOUR WORKLOAD

Where does your time go?

What are the three most important things that you need to complete when you are back in the office later this week?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are three sources of interruptions that make it difficult to focus on those most important tasks?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are three things that you do that you consider to be time wasters?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Planning all the things you need to get done

Juggling Multiple Projects

You can only do one task at a time. Therefore, at any point in time there will be a backlog of work. You need to be clear about all your projects in viewable formats: master lists, project plans and schedules, and daily action plans. Even after your priorities are initially established, you will be in a continuous process of renegotiating your time commitments to yourself and others.

➤ **WRITE IT ALL DOWN.**

- Learn to get things down in writing. Do not rely on memory.
- Planning is pre-determining a course of events in writing.

➤ **MASTER LIST OF ALL YOUR ACTIVITIES.**

- Keep a master list of everything you need to do and want to do (business, personal, and family) in a notebook or on the computer as a word processing document or on the task list in Outlook. (Keep it in a binder or on a clipboard. Keep it handy & look at it during periodic planning sessions.)
- Include project lists, delegation log, long-range planning calendar & index to your files.

➤ **PROJECT LISTS.**

- Set up a separate list for each project using project management techniques – think things through on paper.
- Include tasks, subtasks, personnel & schedules for each project.
- Add key contacts to your project lists.
- Use forms or checklists for similar matters.
- Keep a delegation log if you delegate work.

➤ **MONTHLY REVIEW.**

- This is a big picture planning session.
- Allows you to determine where you may need help on projects.
- When will you catch up on professional reading?
- See if you can make some time for creative time, when you can think about longer-term goals or strategic planning for future direction.

➤ **WEEKLY PLANNING SESSION – The “Weekly Review.”**

This is the time to see how you are doing – are you on track? Review your progress and accomplishments; evaluate what worked and what didn't work in the previous week.

- Determine what you want to accomplish in the upcoming week and sketch out a schedule for the week. Include meetings, conferences and priority tasks.
- Block out time for “**Planned Unavailability**” to work on those important tasks.
- Don't over-schedule. Try to make a realistic estimate of time for completing each task.

➤ **DAILY ACTION PLAN.**

- A “to-do” list is not really a commitment to do anything. Work through your weekly plan & block time for appointments & tasks.
- Make your daily list a **Work Action Plan** for the day's activities.
- At the end of each day, review the day and prepare your work action plan for the next day.

List three major projects that you are working on:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Select one of the projects & note the purpose & desired result:

List major tasks needed to complete that project:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Determine if any of the tasks can be delegated and, if so, to whom:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Estimate how much time is needed for each task, and set an interim deadline for completion of the task:

- | <u>Task:</u> | <u>Date:</u> |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. _____ | _____ |
| 2. _____ | _____ |
| 3. _____ | _____ |
| 4. _____ | _____ |
| 5. _____ | _____ |

MATTERS PENDING – Week of _____

<i>WEEKEND</i>	<i>This Week</i>
<i>MONDAY</i>	
<i>TUESDAY</i>	<i>Next Week</i>
<i>WEDNESDAY</i>	<i>Pending</i>
<i>THURSDAY</i>	
<i>FRIDAY</i>	

<u><i>Assignment from County Counsel A:</i></u>	<u><i>Delegation from Supervisor:</i></u>
<u><i>Delegation to Staff:</i></u>	<u><i>Assignment to CSO:</i></u>
<u><i>Personal:</i></u>	<u><i>Still kickin' around:</i></u>
<u><i>Waiting for response:</i></u>	

MASTER LIST OF PROJECTS & TASKS

MAINTAINING FOCUS – THE KEY TO PRODUCTIVITY

Focus:

The most important time management tool is FOCUS. So, we need to learn how to manage & control the myriad interruptions that will chip away at our day if we let them. If you feel that you must answer your phone whenever it rings, if you have an open door policy at all times, if you check e-mail whenever your message light flashes, then you will need to change habits. You can't do the same thing you've been doing over and over again and expect to get different results. It takes time and practice to break old habits and develop new habits. And small changes, over time, can make a big difference.

Time Management = Self-Management.

How to Achieve Focus:

- Focus is the greatest time management (self management) tool there is.
- Set aside multiple times during the course of the day when you will process your incoming information. At these times, check your voice mail, check your e-mail and check your in-box. Each individual needs to determine the appropriate number of times in his or her job to allow for staying on top of information while not interrupting periods of focused concentration.
- Use “Time Blocking” – make an appointment with yourself to complete an important task and write it in your calendar. This will be the period of the day when you are unavailable – period!
- Hold calls, keep your door closed, do not accept drop-in visitors, do not check e-mail, and try not to daydream.
- Schedule approximately 60 minutes of uninterrupted time. If you do this the first thing in the morning, it is done. The day will not slip away from you. At least you know the scheduled task will get done.
- Try to determine the times of the day when you are most productive and schedule your periods of “Planned Unavailability” during those times when possible.
- “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” Always ask yourself: “Is what I am doing or about to do helping to achieve the goals and objectives of my job?” Justify all of your activities based on achieving those objectives.
- If you get pulled off a task or need to switch gears, do a one-minute focus on priorities. Ask yourself: “What is the best use of my time right now?”

OVERCOMING TIME TRAPS and MANAGING TIME WASTERS

No amount of prioritizing will work if you allow time wasters to creep into your day!
We need to manage the time wasters that steal project time and interfere with focus.

Blocks to effective time management

There are three areas of impediments to effective time management. These are the major time wasters:

How we manage ourselves:

- Disorganization and clutter
- Trying to do too much
- Inability to say NO
- Perfectionism
- Procrastination
- Old habits
- Inattentiveness – Lack of focus

How we manage our relationships:

- Telephone conversations
- Interruptions
- Voice mail & E-mail
- Lack of clear communication
- Missing information
- Drop-in visitors
- Failure to delegate

How we manage our tasks:

- Failure to set goals and prioritize
- Ineffective systems
- Failure to schedule time for important tasks.
- Responding to repeated crises (putting out fires)
- Ineffective meetings

- **The “Tyranny of the Urgent”**

- This is the smaller stuff that interferes with the big picture, high priority items. It’s all the little things that can knock your priority system off task and eat up your day.
- However, you must monitor these low priority items to see if they have resolved themselves, been taken care of by others or still need attention. Be sure that you do not neglect the less important tasks so long that they become urgent.

Telephone

Alexander Graham Bell's first official act with the telephone, at the very moment that he perfected his invention, was to interrupt his co-worker: "Watson, come here, I need you." The telephone has been interrupting our flow ever since. What if Watson had been focusing on a priority task at the time of Bell's phone call?

- The phone can derail you if you let it. The phone generally rings at an unexpected time & interrupts the project you are working on.
- Manage the phone; don't let it manage you:
 - Just because the phone rings does not mean that you have to answer it at that moment. If you have made an appointment with yourself – keep it. Remember, this is "planned unavailability."
 - Think of all the times that you do not answer the phone (when you are out). Don't answer it when you are busy & focused.
 - Screen calls when you are "unavailable" through your secretary or voice mail.
- Managing your telephone interruptions does not mean ignoring them – you must return phone calls in a timely manner. Batch your calls and schedule several times during the day to return calls.
- Use voice mail with specific information:
 - Leave voice mail with a detailed inquiry and ask for detailed information back
 - Schedule appointments for calls to avoid telephone tag.
- Develop a written mini-agenda for phone calls – prepare before you call; it keeps you on track and shortens the call.

Drop-in visitors

- "Have a minute?" If you are busy and say, "What's up?" it's all over. Say, "No, not right now." However, be smart about who is at your door. There are times when it is prudent to accept the interruption.
- Be clear & polite; explain your situation; suggest an alternative.
- Make an appointment to discuss the issue at a later time. You must eventually get back to the visitor. (Sometimes, however, the problem solves itself).
- If you don't get back in a timely fashion, you increase the urgency and the other party may not take no for an answer the next time.
- If you accept an interruption, put a time limit around it. If an interrupter enters your office, stand up. They will not sit and you can slowly edge toward the door. When you've answered, end by asking if there's anything else.
- Pre-empt the regular visitors by going to their office first.
- Sometimes we interrupt our co-workers with frequent, sequential visits. Try to bunch requests and assignments, so their flow is not interrupted.

Management by crisis

- “Emergencies” that come about because of failure to plan are not true crises.
- A genuine crisis is an unanticipated event
- Determine real deadlines before you react
- Leave some cushion every day for unanticipated situations
- Follow-up: what lessons can you learn to prevent reoccurrence in the future?
- Be prepared through back-up plans, realistic timetables & deadlines, improved communications and periodic project status review.

Overcoming E-mail Overload

- Checking e-mail frequently is one of the biggest time-wasters. Do not check e-mail every time the bell rings or an envelope pops up on your screen (better yet, turn off the signal)
- Check e-mail multiple times during the day at regular intervals or when making the transition from one task to another (determine what is appropriate for your practice). Discuss appropriate response time with colleagues and clients.
- Process your e-mail when you check your inbox: respond; delete; “tickle” for a later response in a pending folder.
- Set up a system of substantive folders, to parallel your word processing documents and paper filing system. Move informational messages to appropriate folders. You don’t want an inbox cluttered with unresolved e-mails.
- Don't send messages simply because it's easy. And limit the number of copies – would you send so many if it was paper? Messages beget messages.
- Try to get your message down in the first 3 lines – be direct & brief and ask for a specific response.
- Remove yourself from multiple information lists.

Become familiar with the tools in your e-mail program. Enlist the assistance of your in-house IT staff to review the tools in your program

Overcoming Procrastination

For County Counsel lawyers, the Minnesota Rules of Professional Conduct address the issue of procrastination.

RULE 1.3: DILIGENCE

“A lawyer shall act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing a client.”
(emphasis added)

Comment

“[3] Perhaps no professional shortcoming is more widely resented than procrastination. Even when the client’s interests are not affected in substance, however, unreasonable delay can cause a client needless anxiety and undermine confidence in the lawyer’s trustworthiness....”
(emphasis added).

While not applicable as a rule of professional responsibility to CSOs and collections officials, the sentiments are equally applicable. Procrastination is resented by team members who rely on you and such delay can undermine confidence in your trustworthiness. This is a two-way street.

Dr. Laura Sapadin, a psychologist, wrote a book called It’s About Time analyzing different styles of procrastination and suggesting methods for overcoming procrastination. She posits six separate styles of procrastination, and the rationale we create for each:

1. *The Perfectionist* – “I’d like to finish, but I want it to be perfect.”
2. *The Dreamer* – “I’d like to start, but I hate all these bothersome details.”
3. *The Worrier* – “I could do it, but I’m afraid.”
4. *The Defier* – “I could do it, but why should I have to do it?”
5. *The Crisis-Maker* – “I could do it now, but I get motivated at the last minute.”
6. *The Overdoer* – “I’d do it now, but I have so many other things to do.”

Dr. Sapadin notes that more than one of these styles are usually present in procrastinators in various combinations. She believes that overcoming procrastination is not just a matter of implementing better time-management techniques, but also requires an understanding of the psychological underpinning of procrastinators. The psychology is beyond the scope of this workshop.

Procrastination becomes a habit and we find artful excuses to indulge the habit regardless of its effect on our clients, co-workers and ourselves. Have you ever fretted over a task,

while it lurked in the back of your mind until you finally sat down to do the task and it didn't seem so bad? Procrastination can be caused by, among other things, the fear of success, fear of failure, perfectionism and the ever-popular "I work best under pressure" syndrome. While we leave the psychology for another time and place, we need to explore some self-management techniques to overcome procrastination:

- Psych yourself up with a good attitude – exercise positive self-talk
- Focus on the best use of your time (Ask yourself: "What's the best use of my time right now?").
- Start somewhere (anywhere) when a task seems daunting. Any little bit of progress tends to spur you on.
- Break the project down into tasks and subtasks. Break a large task down into small chunks and start work on one of the chunks – the project isn't so daunting if it's broken down into small pieces. This is where the project management process can help in overcoming procrastination.
- Create time limits for completion of a task.
- Visualize the outcome.
- Schedule time on your calendar to work on a task that you have been postponing.
- Make yourself work for just 15 minutes; set a timer (if you're on a roll keep going). Any little bit of progress tends to spur you on.
- Give in & do nothing. – stare at the file for 15 minutes and see if the discomfort causes you to get started.
- Stop thinking about it – just do it! Start somewhere.
- Build in rewards (e.g., chocolate).
- Be decisive. Overload can make us indecisive. Get information you need and get on with it. Avoid paralysis by analysis.
- Strive for excellence, not perfection. Nothing will ever be perfect – don't "overwork" a task (don't spend more time & energy than is commensurate with the task)

How to Overcome Procrastination

Identify the causes of your procrastination:

- When do you procrastinate?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- How do you procrastinate?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- Why do you procrastinate?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- What's the downside of procrastination?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS IN YOUR OFFICE

Team Approach to Work Requires Clear Communications

- Consider management, County Counsel, Child Support Officers, Collections staff and the administrative support staff as a team with common goals and purposes. Being part of a team requires clear communication.
- Clear communication saves time. There is a direct relationship between high performance and clear communication. Make sure that information flows in all directions so people have the facts and context necessary to do their jobs effectively.
- Everyone needs to be “in the loop” on projects in which they are involved. Create a context for all work.
- Poor and unclear communication can cause both wasted time and frustration. Poor communication takes various forms:
 - Indecision can lead to delay or taking the wrong path.
 - Poor articulation of tasks: sometimes the task-giver has not provided clear instructions. Always repeat the task back to secure the concurrence of the boss.
 - Likewise, the support staff needs to be clear about conflicting priorities and deadlines or conflicts between the needs of the different folks they support – bring up workload problems sooner rather than later.
 - Poor listening: can misunderstand instructions; may have to do things over. When you are given an assignment or a task, repeat it back and get confirmation. Seek further clarification when necessary.
- Elements of clear & effective communication and involvement for a team approach to work:
 - Share information. Tell people why things are being done. Put the job in context so people know what’s going on and where the various tasks fit into the overall picture.
 - Provide clear directions.
 - Seek participation – seek input.
 - Check in - verify cooperation & understanding.
 - Keep people informed of progress.
 - Criticize privately if necessary.
 - Give reinforcement and recognition for a job well done.

- Multiple Tasks / Multiple Teams:
 - Brief frequent meetings will help everyone understand each other's workload – will require each team member to plan with the other members' workloads in mind.
 - Clarify expectations and make necessary adjustments.
 - Monitor schedule to keep on track.

- Plan to complete your work without creating an undue burden on others. How you perform your work “trickles” in several directions:
 - *Trickle up* – review time.
 - *Trickle down* – secretaries, those producing the documents; computer assistance.
 - *Trickle across* – when a crisis is created by delay, those who completed their work on time may get bumped so the organization can respond to the crisis. The situation escalates because it has now created a new crisis for a project that was previously under control.

How to Run Effective & Productive Meetings

Preparation of the Agenda

- Determining what goes on the agenda: purpose & objectives of the meeting
- Relative importance of items.
 - Non-controversial items first (e.g., easy announcements)
 - Place items of greatest concern near beginning
 - Place items that require concentration or creativity near beginning
 - Place controversial items in the middle
 - Finish meeting with something more positive – e.g., discussion item; some positive news or recognition
- Realistic allocation of time to each agenda item.
- Distribute agenda in advance.
 - Clarifies purpose so attendees understand topics & objectives
 - Helps participants think about what they may want to say
 - Provides focus for the discussions
- Review agenda before meeting.
 - The agenda is your “script” for the meeting
 - Refresh yourself on the goals
 - Visualize how you would like the meeting to proceed
 - Ask if anything could go wrong. How could it be prevented?

Staying on Time

- Starting & stopping on time
 - Start meetings at the appointed time
 - Starting late sends message that it’s ok to be late
 - Close the door so it’s more apparent when stragglers enter
 - Do not repeat information for latecomers
 - End at the appointed time unless there’s consensus of group to continue [option – put the item on agenda for next meeting].
- Staying on time with the agenda items
 - Purpose of item – information; decision; brainstorming; discussion.
 - Close each item before moving on to next item
 - Make sure that participants understand what has to be accomplished within the allocated times for each item
 - For discussion item, allow participants time to talk things through
 - Recognize when consensus has been reached and move on.
 - Use the agenda as a guide throughout the meeting
 - Refer back to agenda when things get off track.

Keeping discussions on track

- Staying focused on the matter at hand
 - In ground rules, state that each person will have a time limit (for example, two minutes) to state their views.
- Avoiding tangents
 - Facilitator should keep focus on agenda
 - Be gentle, but firm with people who ramble off the subject
 - Say, for example: “That’s a valid point, but it’s not part of this discussion. Let’s park it for a future meeting.
 - Ideas that are not related to current agenda item can be written on a separate flip chart sheet and “stored,” “parked” or “held” for a future meeting. Then, get right back to the point while the scribe writes the item on the flip chart.

Record Keeping

- Recording viewpoints during discussion
 - Scribe should record opinions or ideas on flip chart – can then ask someone who seems to be repeating one of those points – “Does #3 state your position?” or, “So you agree with #5?”
- Recording decisions
 - Summarize resolution or decision on each agenda item before moving on to next

Closing the meeting

- Leader should summarize results of the meeting
 - Review decisions & implementation assignments
 - List unresolved or new issues for future meetings
 - Clarify whether flip chart notes need to be typed up & distributed (if so, by whom & when)
- Create an action plan to implement decisions
 - action items, responsible person & due date

Agenda Planning Worksheet

What is the overall purpose of the meeting?

To: _____

What are the desired outcomes / objectives of the meeting? (examples):

To reach agreement on: _____

To decide on: _____

To develop an action plan for: _____

To get ideas for new programs: _____

To inform staff about: _____

To secure approval for: _____

[Note that “To discuss...” is not an objective because it can lead to tangents & lack of focus]

Agenda Item	Desired Outcome	Process	Responsible Participant	Time Allocated
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

End Notes

- **Take time for leisure and recreational activities that you truly enjoy.**
- **Take your work very seriously.**
- **Don't take yourself too seriously.
Laugh heartily and often.**

For additional information or assistance, contact:

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Your Personal Action Plan

List three time management (self-management) challenges on which you intend to focus. Determine why the particular issue is a problem for you. List three specific actions you can take to change your approach to each issue. Commit to taking these actions in one area for at least 21 days to develop new habits.

I

- Time challenge: _____
- Reasons this is a problem for you: _____

- Three actions you can take to change your approach:
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

II

- Time challenge: _____
- Reasons this is a problem for you: _____

- Three actions you can take to change your approach:
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

III

- Time challenge: _____
- Reasons this is a problem for you: _____

- Three actions you can take to change your approach:
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____



TIME MANAGEMENT & PRODUCTIVITY TIPS

- ✓ Write everything down – do not rely on your memory.
- ✓ Straighten papers and clear your desk at the end of every workday.
- ✓ Keep one calendar for all business and personal appointments. Check your calendar regularly to prevent surprises.
- ✓ Put your personal and professional goals in writing: family, career, financial, community, spiritual & recreational.
- ✓ Plan and prioritize. Conduct a weekly review of your projects. Determine what went well and what didn't – plan activities for the upcoming week.
- ✓ Make and refer to a daily "action plan" list. Prioritize action tasks on the list.
- ✓ Schedule time to complete priority action items. Make an appointment with yourself and block it out on your calendar. Eliminate interruptions during that time.
- ✓ Be aware of your "prime" work time and schedule important/priority activities during that time.
- ✓ Estimate the time you think it will take to complete a task and add 50% (some say double it).
- ✓ Don't keep piles of unread magazines. Scan the contents; tear out relevant articles; keep in a reading file; toss the rest of the magazine.
- ✓ Make a decision on each piece of paper you handle. Don't just shift paper from one pile to another.
- ✓ Break large projects down into small workable segments and begin somewhere.
- ✓ Use a tickler file system to hold paperwork in coordination with your calendar/planner.
- ✓ Set deadlines on tasks assigned to yourself or delegated to others.
- ✓ Eliminate or at least minimize procrastination. Develop the habit to "do it now." Delay rarely turns out to be beneficial.
- ✓ Get adequate sleep.
- ✓ Take time for leisure and recreational activities that you truly enjoy.
- ✓ Learn how to say no. Offer an alternative.

- ✓ Delegate anything that can be delegated.
- ✓ Work on one project or task at a time.
- ✓ Leave some unscheduled time in your day for the unexpected, unavoidable question, phone call, interruption, meeting or crisis.
- ✓ Do one task each day that you do not like to do.
- ✓ Get organized. Keep your desk and office free of clutter.
- ✓ Open your mail over a wastebasket or recycling bin.
- ✓ Hold meetings only when necessary. Prepare and distribute an agenda in advance to avoid tangential discussions.
- ✓ If you go into work early or stay late to catch up and the phone rings, do not answer it.
- ✓ Create checklists or forms for repetitive tasks.
- ✓ Prepare an agenda for phone calls – they will be completed faster.
- ✓ Schedule a half-hour a couple of times each week to catch up on reading.
- ✓ Check e-mail multiple times during the day or when making a transition from one task or project to another (do what's right for your practice). Determine appropriate response time for e-mails. Discuss response time with colleagues & clients.
- ✓ Make minor decisions quickly.
- ✓ Bundle time to return phone calls and respond to E-mails.
- ✓ Don't take yourself too seriously. Laugh heartily and often.

Productive Time provides training, in-house customized workshops, consulting and one-on-one coaching on workflow, paper flow, clutter control, overcoming e-mail overload, project management & time management.

To increase your productivity with less stress, contact:

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[*Note:* This article accompanied a program on
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MULTITASKING GONE MAD

Coping in a Wired, Demanding, Distracting World

By Irwin Karp, Productive Time

We all have more to do than we can possibly accomplish. That's just a fact of modern work life. It means that prioritizing your work and focusing on those priorities is essential to getting the most important things done. It requires that we manage our attention in our hyped-up world of electronic interruptions and reduced attention span.

Many of us start our day with several important matters to complete by the end of the day. Have you ever gotten to the end of that day and found that you didn't touch, let alone finish, your priority tasks? You could have been diverted by newer tasks, e-mail, phone calls, chats, instant messages, web surfing, drop-in visitors or a host of other workplace interruptions. In short, you attempted to multitask your way through the day, doing two or even three things at the same time. Multitasking has been defined as doing two or more things at the same time, none of them well.

More than 250 years ago, the Englishman Lord Chesterfield offered the following advice to his son: "There is time enough for everything in the course of the day, if you do but one thing at once, but there is not time enough in the year, if you will do two things at a time." As cited in an article in *The New Atlantis* entitled "The Myth of Multitasking," Chesterfield believed that single task focus is both a practical way of accomplishing one's priorities and a sign of a strong mind, whereas "hurry, bustle, and agitation are the never-failing symptoms of a weak and frivolous mind." In summing up the advice to his son, Lord Chesterfield went on to say, "The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character and will."

The need to pay attention and stay focused hasn't changed; it's just become more difficult. We live in a world that Dr. Edward Hallowell, in a book published a couple of years ago, described as *CrazyBusy – Overbooked, Overtaxed & About to Snap*. He terms it a world gone ADD. Dr. Hallowell should know – he wrote the definitive book on Attention Deficit Disorder, *Driven to Distraction*, over a decade ago. But, since most of us are not clinically diagnosed with ADD, he came up with a new term to describe the syndrome – ADT – "attention deficit trait."

ADT is a result of, or perhaps the cause of, multitasking. I am not talking about the idea that we all have multiple projects and will be working on more than one project in the course of any given day, perhaps any given hour. Multitasking for the purpose of this analysis is the concept of doing two or more things at the same time.

The term multitasking has been around since the dawn of the computer age – it describes the ability of computers to process two or more different things simultaneously. Watch your computer’s response time, however, when you have multiple programs open – it slows down.

Wikipedia now has separate entries for computer multitasking and human multitasking. We are concerned, deeply concerned, with the latter. While mothers have multitasked for centuries, and multitasking while driving started with the car radio (not cell phones), it’s the combination of heavy workloads & multiple priorities, information overload, technology, and the 24/7 always-on mentality that has created current cause for concern.

Articles on multitasking have been appeared in Time, Newsweek, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Time, Newsweek, The Atlantic and countless other newspapers, magazines, television news shows and the internet. It’s everywhere. About a decade ago, Linda Stone, then an executive with Microsoft, coined the term “continuous partial attention.”

Continuous partial attention (or CPA, which can lead to ADT) is defined as “A state in which most of one’s attention is on a primary task, but where one is also monitoring several background tasks just in case something more important or interesting comes up.” (from WordSpy). As a result, a recent article in *The Atlantic* noted that researching on the internet and a steady stream of e-mails have the cumulative effect of “chipping away” at our “capacity for concentration and contemplation.” I recently spotted yet another description, which appeared in the *Sacramento Bee* a few weeks ago, describing our tendency to multitask as “simultaneous engagement”!

The impact of multitasking

The late Peter Drucker, one of the nation’s foremost management gurus, said, “to be effective, every knowledge worker ... needs to dispose of time in fairly large chunks. To have small dribs and drabs of time at his disposal will not be sufficient even if the total is an impressive number of hours.” That was written more than forty years ago, in *The Effective Executive*, long before e-mail and the BlackBerry impacted our attention and our work styles and the concept of multitasking entered our jargon.

So if we are all multitasking, we need to ask what it is doing to the quality of our work, our focus (or lack thereof) and, perhaps most important, our health & well-being.

While it may seem as if you are accomplishing more things when you attempt to do two or more tasks at the same time, all of the research and literature on the subject finds that doing so is less efficient than single tasking. Multitasking is a more complicated way of working, and we are more error-prone as we try to run two parallel threads. It can be crazy-making as well as inefficient and stressful.

A study of a group of Microsoft employees a couple of years ago noted how easily people were distracted by e-mail and how long it took to get back to work on a task after an interruption. The study found that it took an average of 15 minutes to return to “serious mental tasks” such as report writing after responding to e-mails. Other studies cited in

the media said that it could take up to 25 minutes of recovery time to get back on track. What happens once we are in cyberspace is a tendency to look at other e-mails, browse web sites, look at the news and get pulled in several, ultimately unproductive, directions. Dr. Hallowell calls that situation “screen-sucking.”

Multitasking is really task switching, as our brains cannot handle two simultaneous thought processes at precisely the same time. Hence, we flip back and forth with the attendant lag time as we switch gears and then switch back again. Because we are only partially paying attention to each task, we can miss things (such as when one checks e-mail while on a conference call), or make errors. Some of the adverse effects of multitasking are: lapses in attention and focus, loss of concentration, unclear communications, short-term memory loss, and stress.

The Wall Street Journal cut to the chase several years ago in an article proclaiming “multitasking makes you stupid.” WSJ cited numerous studies that demonstrated the pitfalls of doing too much at once.

This is your brain on multitasking

Psychiatrists, psychologists and neuroscientists have demonstrated that multitasking interferes with focus, reduces efficiency, causes stress, and creates a time lag between tasks. Since the brain does not allow us to do two complex tasks simultaneously, the back-and-forth transitions between the tasks eat up both time and energy.

An article in *The Atlantic* late in 2007 concluded, “Neuroscience is confirming what we all suspect: Multitasking is dumbing us down and driving us crazy.” Here are some of the main findings as reported in a host of articles from newspapers, magazines and web sites.

A study at Carnegie Mellon University’s Center for Cognitive Brain Imaging found that managing two mental tasks at once reduces the brain power available for either task. The Center director Dr. Marcel Just said, “It doesn’t mean that you can’t do several things at the same time. But we’re kidding ourselves if we think we can do so without cost.” A “core limitation” of the human brain “is an inability to concentrate on two things at once” according to Rene Marois, a Vanderbilt University neuroscientist.

Dr. David Meyer of the University of Michigan concluded that “multitasking is going to slow you down, increasing the chances of mistakes. Disruptions and interruptions are a bad deal from the standpoint of our ability to process information.” He identified the “executive control” processes associated with the brain’s prefrontal cortex and other neural regions of the brain. In a report published in the American Psychological Association’s *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, Dr. Meyer and his colleagues noted that time is lost when a person switches from one task to another. The more complex the tasks, the greater the time lag in making the switch from one to another.

According to the research, the executive control function occurs in two stages. The first is goal shifting when the brain is told to switch from task A to task B. The second is the cognitive rule activation for the particular task that essentially turns off the rules for

dealing with task A and turns on the rules for dealing with task B. This happens unconsciously and can take several tenths of a second. The time and energy involved adds up and it can actually take longer to complete both tasks than if they were handled sequentially to completion. So, those who multitask are actually less efficient than those who focus on one task at a time. According to the researchers, over time the loss in effectiveness can be as much as 20% to 40%.

The classic example is chatting on a cell phone while driving. The time that it takes for the executive control function to kick in when task switching can mean the difference between having or avoiding a collision when traveling at 65 miles per hour. A one second delay in response time at that speed could be fatal.

Even if you're just sitting at your desk, multitasking could be bad for your mind and body. Trying to do two important tasks at the same time is ultimately stressful. The brain responds by ordering adrenaline which provides energy in a fight or flight mode, but doesn't really make the tasks any easier. A repeated diet of stress hormones is simply not good for your health.

Why we keep multitasking despite its obvious drawbacks

As stated at the beginning, we're harried and generally have more to do than we can accomplish in a given day. So, we try to do several things at once to "save time." We really believe that we can accomplish more that way despite all the evidence to the contrary. That evidence shows that to be successful, actions requiring thought and analysis need to be done one at a time. Certain activities that are automatic and require no deliberative thought processes (such as walking or riding an exercise bike) can be done simultaneously with another activity requiring concentration (such as conversation or reading).

Multitasking gives the illusion of importance. The constant flow of electronic information is like one giant computer game. Let a few moments of silence go by and we click on "receive" to see if anyone sent us an e-mail. It is very compelling. It may make us feel needed and connected. Or, we may pay continuous partial attention so we don't miss an opportunity. We think that colleagues or clients expect instantaneous responses, even if we've never discussed expectations with them.

We simply can't resist. "It's fun," Dr. Hallowell says. But things that are fun over time can become habit forming or addictive. The term "crackberries" confirms the addictive nature of the device. Even when we know we shouldn't, the pull is so great. And then we get to the end of the day wondering why, after working hard all day, we haven't accomplished the priorities that we set forth at the beginning of the day. Take to heart a headline from *The Onion* – "Study Finds Working at Work Improves Productivity."

Get out of the multitasking rut and concentrate on concentrating

Staying focused is an ongoing struggle for most people. The pervasiveness of

multitasking only makes it harder. Being aware of and reducing your own multitasking habit could result in more time for thinking, greater productivity and more effective work habits.

Gadgets and inattentiveness, and the desire to move on to another opportunity, let you switch from task to task. How you manage the technology and your attention span, however, is ultimately up to you. Even if you get the external interruption under control, be wary of self-interruptions. For example, you might be working on a document for 10 or 15 minutes without any external interruption but then, for no apparent reason, you stop to check your e-mail or make a phone call. The ability to focus on a single task for a fixed period of time, and I do mean longer than 10 or 15 minutes, is the greatest way to get things done.

Here are some techniques for overcoming multitasking:

- Manage your technology (e-mail, smart phone, BlackBerry) instead of having it manage you. (See the attached article *How to Regain Control from Your BlackBerry*). Create boundaries for how often you check and when you turn things off.
- Write down all of the things that you need to do. Prioritize so the most important tasks become your action plan. Look at your calendar. Figure out when you will accomplish your priority tasks.
- Set aside blocks of time during the day to perform your priority tasks. Set time to focus for 20 minutes, or a half-hour, or even an hour if you can swing it. Don't allow yourself be interrupted during those times. Check the phone and messages in transitions between those blocks of time before starting work on your next single task.
- Pay attention to how you use your time and where your attention is focused. Throughout the day, ask yourself: "what is the most effective use of my time right now" and act accordingly. Manage your attention and try to stay focused.
- Exercise some self-control. Realize that you do not have to answer every phone call when it rings, nor do you have to check your e-mail all the time. Turn off ringers, beepers, pop-ups, buzzers, etc. and check your e-mail in transition after you have completed a discrete task.
- If you must entertain an interruption, make a note of where you were before dealing with it. That will help you to pick up again much more quickly.
- Try to stay in the moment and keep your focus. Exercise self-management of your attention. Put up a sign to remind yourself to stay focused.

Conclusion – get a grip

Dr. Edward Hallowell, the above-cited author of the terms "crazy busy," "attention deficit trait," and "screen-sucking," said, "In a futile attempt to do more than is possible, the brain paradoxically reduces its ability to think clearly."

Getting out of the multitasking trap will take some self-discipline. It will take a conscious mind to determine where you want to focus your attention. Ironically, you might actually get more done by doing less.



Speakers Biography – Irwin Karp

Irwin Karp is a productivity consultant with Productive Time in Sacramento, California. He is also an attorney, and was previously the managing partner of a small environmental law firm representing business for over 17 years. Irwin is a graduate of the George Washington University Law School where he was a member of the Order of the Coif and the Law Review.

For the past thirteen years, Irwin has conducted training programs and has consulted with business, government, bar associations, law firms and service professions on organizing and time management to increase productivity. He provides in-house customized workshops, consulting and one-on-one coaching on time management, e-mail overload, paper flow, workflow, clutter control, project management, delegation and effective meetings. He also presents Continuing Legal Education programs on lawyer productivity topics for bar associations around the US and Canada.

Irwin is a member of the State Bar of California and formerly served for over six years as a Special Advisor to the Executive Committee of the Law Practice Management & Technology Section. He was previously a member of the Association for Continuing Legal Education.

Irwin's purpose in creating Productive Time was to share his expertise in streamlining organizational and workload challenges in order to help busy individuals and firms get organized and get things done. His training programs and consulting offer effective, customized strategies and techniques for using your time wisely. Clients feel he is very practical, establishes rapport quickly, connects genuinely with people, is easy to talk to, engaging, and humorous in his work.

Irwin was formerly a professional white water river guide and now continues to raft on rivers in the west with his group of aging river buddies.

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