

## Manage Your Time Without Losing Your Mind

By Theresa Rose

We all know about “Time Management”: that dreaded art/science where we are supposed to become productivity machines, getting as many high priority tasks accomplished as humanly possible. How’s that been working for you? Are you getting everything done you wanted? Are you spending your time wisely, or does it feel like it is being wasted? More importantly, are you spending your time joyfully?

Most of us have learned the traditional method of time management, where all items on our to-do lists get prioritized as high, medium or low, and we are instructed to attack the top of the list with gusto. While this approach looks good on paper, it doesn’t take into account one critical component of the human condition: We never do anything we don’t truly *want* to do. If we continually force ourselves to work when we don’t want to, we either collapse from fatigue or chuck the whole process and resign ourselves to never having “enough time.”

If you are tired of constantly running on the hamster wheel of life without much to show for your efforts, maybe a different approach is in order. Here are several ways you can do more with the hours in your day while maintaining a sense of balance and happiness:

1. **Get the juices flowing.** You will always be more productive if you move your body first. Consider starting each day with some form of movement, whether it’s light stretching and deep breathing, a brisk walk around the block, or a 90-minute killer kickboxing class at the local gym. By bringing some much-needed oxygen to your cells, you’ll find that you will stay healthier, think more clearly and have significantly more energy throughout the day.
2. **Honor your clock.** We each have a unique internal clock, and our productivity levels can dramatically shift depending on the hour of the day. If at all possible, schedule your most challenging tasks for the hours when you have the most energy. If you notice that your energy level dips in the afternoons, try to perform those activities that aren’t as mentally or physically challenging. Needless to say, crafting that all-important e-mail to your boss’s boss while in the depths of your mid-day slump is not an effective use of your time.
3. **Do the fun things first.** If you start your workday with the most joyful task, you will set a pleasant tone for the rest of the day. Whenever we experience pleasure, we automatically get a burst of serotonin secreted from our brains. Use that serotonin buzz to your advantage as you address subsequent items you dread.
4. **Reframe the Ugliers.** Unfortunately, there will always be odious things we have to perform at our jobs, such as creating budgets, completing expense reports, or writing status reports. Instead of incessantly complaining or

devising new and different tactics to avoid them, try viewing them through a different lens. All of those ugly tasks can also be seen as important and necessary elements to the employment you've *chosen*, and they don't need to rob you of your power any longer. Approach each task as if you *want* to do them instead of *have* to do them, because that is truly the case.

5. **Slow down.** We often cause errors or omissions when we operate at a fever pitch for an extended period of time. Instead of rushing through the day, try to savor each task. Spend just a few more moments with each one to make sure it is properly completed. Not only will you save time by avoiding mistakes, you will enjoy the process a great deal more.
6. **Choose healthy distractions.** Let's face it; there will be times when you just want to goof off. This desire to escape is a natural response to the intense work environment that has been cultivated over the years. Instead of wasting precious minutes surreptitiously watching YouTube, playing an online game, or surfing eBay, think about going to the kitchen to get a nutritious snack, take a walk for fifteen minutes, or simply step outside for a breath of fresh, non-corporate air. Getting away from your desk to clear your head can actually improve your productivity and provide clarity on issues you are struggling with.
7. **Celebrate victories.** When you finally complete that big project, pop the champagne! Oftentimes we jump so quickly from task to task that we don't stop to appreciate how much we accomplish every day. The next time you finish an assignment, take a few moments to reflect on your efforts and acknowledge your skill and determination. This will give you the fuel you need to tackle the next initiative.

When adopting this new approach, it is important to recognize and accept that there will never be a moment when you get everything done; there will always be undone items on the to-do list. Instead of perceiving your job as a constant battle between tasks and limited time, look at each new day as another opportunity to accomplish great things in a joyful manner. By incorporating these mindful techniques, you will find that you will get more done in a shorter period of time.

Ultimately, each of us wants to enjoy ourselves both personally and professionally, not work ourselves into an early grave. If you find yourself fixated on the elusive destination instead of enjoying the journey of your life, then maybe it is time to stop managing your time so rigidly and start managing your joy. In the end, happiness is a state of being we can all choose, whether our high priority items ever get done or not.

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