

TIME-MANAGEMENT FOR TECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS

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Annotation

Considers the problem of organization time for technicians.

Keywords

Time-management, technicians, technical professionals.

Time-management skills for most people are learned along the way, a necessary part of getting the job done. However, like most things, the more you invest in it, the greater the reward.

Time management is not very difficult as a concept, but it's surprisingly hard to do in practice. It requires the investment of a little time upfront to prioritise and organise yourself. But once done, you will find that with minor tweaks, your day, and indeed your week and month, fall into place in an orderly fashion, with time for everything you need to do.

To reach your short- or long-term goals, time management is critical for prioritizing tasks, scheduling appointments, emails, projects and so much more, not to mention family responsibilities. Steps to improve your time-management skills:

1. Planning is Key: Keep Lists and Use the Tools at your Disposal

The pace at which most of us work at these days is furious and documenting thoughts and tasks is the only way to make sure things don't fall through the cracks. When creating lists remember to record as much as you can--this will help get you back on track quicker when you revisit your task later. Most of us have a tablet, smartphone or laptop with us most of the day and night. Each of these has some form of time management tool built in or preinstalled, and chances are that the tools are being under-utilized.

Outlook, for example, has tasks, a way to keep, track and maintain lists and notes along with a calendar, a great tool for project planning, appointments and reminders. The iPad and Android both have notes and calendars built-in, as well as thousands of time management apps available from their app stores.

If you're old-school, carrying a notebook or small pad is always a good idea. Whatever the medium get your tasks and thoughts organized.

You can organize your day at the end of the work day. Reflect upon the day's events and thoughtfully plan your strategy for the coming day. Doing so can save you many sleepless nights.

2. Culture of Analytics: Good for People, Good for Business

When organizations have a culture of analytics, everyone has access to the right data and is encouraged to explore. Read more about the benefits of fostering an analytical culture.

Another option is to create a list that includes all your tasks, both personal and business. Once your list is complete, look it over and ask yourself these questions: Do you need to schedule appointments? Can you delegate any of these tasks? Is this meeting necessary?

Don't let your lists get too long or they will become unruly; these should be categorized and broken down before that happens, if possible. The important takeaway is getting your items documented somewhere so you can get them out of your head and focus on the task at hand.

3. Multi-tasking Doesn't Work

In a recent article from the Huffington Post, Zheng Wangs, a researcher and assistant professor of communication at Ohio State University, offered his thoughts on multi-tasking:

"There's this myth among some people that multitasking makes them more productive. But they seem to be misperceiving the positive feelings they get from multitasking. They are not being more productive -- they just feel more emotionally satisfied from their work."

People are most effective when they concentrate on one thing at a time. It's often said that it's better to finish one job then to start five.

4. Prioritize, Prioritize and Prioritize

Look at your lists and identify your top priorities. Tackle your most important or thought-heavy tasks at the point of your day where you are most mentally engaged and alert.

For many, that time is first thing in the morning, but for others it could be when everyone leaves the office at 5:30.

5. Set Goals and Deadlines

Tasks and projects need deadlines and goals--these are the way for you to measure your forward progress and success.

Deadlines are critical to the outcome of any project or task. If not set in a realistic timeframe and managed well they will become a major source of stress. Not giving you or your team enough time can result in extreme pressure on all parties involved.

Always give yourself a little more time than you think you may need in order to avoid unnecessary setbacks. Sticking to your deadlines will help you get more done faster.

Set both long- and short-term goals. It's easy to get lost in the microcosm of the daily--goals help keep things in context and help illustrate the bigger picture. Consider them the roadmap of your career and a necessary part of your day to day work. If you want to be successful you need to set and then strive to reach your goals. It gives you both direction and a focus on what's important.

The bottom line: always have clearly defined goals, objectives and deadlines.

6. Make the Most of the Time You Have

All of us have some time in the day that can be better used--for example, commuting, exercising or showering. Take this time to visualize your day, think about upcoming goals or projects. This is also a great time to prioritize some of the items on your list.

7. Monitor How Your Time is Spent

A big step towards great time management is to know how your time is spent. Take a day or two from your work week and document each activity and task you do. This sounds more difficult than it is.

There are many productivity apps out there that will do the trick for pretty much every platform. Once you have all the data laid out before you, it will be clear where time can be saved. People are often surprised by what this simple experiment will reveal.

8. Don't Procrastinate

Procrastination will literally get you nowhere, so don't put off important tasks or wait until the last minute to put together your presentation. As humans it is part of our nature to avoid unpleasant tasks--to avoid this, try using the reward system. Plan something fun or relaxing after a difficult task, like take a ten minute break and go for a walk or work on something that is more compelling to you.

9. Recharge Your Batteries

Eat right, exercise regularly and get enough sleep. When we're healthy and all is well this often is taken for granted--it sounds like a no-brainer yet so many of us find it difficult to do. Remember, too, that you and your health are important. Just because you have lots to do doesn't mean that doing some exercise, going for a 10-minute walk or making time to eat properly is not important. You should not ignore your physical or mental health in favour of more 'urgent' activities.

10. Eliminate Distractions

No matter where you work, distractions abound in the form of email, social media, meetings or coworkers wanting to chat about last night's episode of "The Newsroom," current events or their children.

What can you do to limit these distractions and concentrate on the task at hand? If you've taken the time to monitor how your day is spent you'll know right where to start, but some other things you can do include, putting your phone on silent during your work hours or setting up specific intervals for the checking of email. Some people use noise-cancelling headphones or listen to music to drown out the other office sounds, while others use a do not disturb sign on their office or cube.

11. Delegate Responsibilities

Failure to delegate properly can be a career-limiting factor. There are 24 hours in the day and each of us is only one person. Founder of Virgin Group and billionaire adventurer Richard Branson had

this to say, "I learned to delegate from a young age. Actually removing myself from the office has helped me look for the next big venture." Regardless whether or not you think you can do it better, some things need to be delegated so you can focus on your top priorities or take on new responsibilities.

Delegating is not a set-and-forget process, it requires thought and follow-through.

Delegating is a daily part of IT management and core to better time management, offering a huge increase in your productivity.

12. Know Yourself

A large part of time management is about becoming aware of your behavior patterns. Once you become more aware of the things that get in the way of your productivity, you will find your own ways of dealing with them.

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