

Chapter 1

Setting Yourself Up for Success

In This Chapter

- ▶ Tapping into your time-management strengths
 - ▶ Building a solid system of time management
 - ▶ Facing up to time management's biggest challenges
 - ▶ Addressing issues with others
 - ▶ Applying time-management skills to all facets of your life
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Time is the great equalizer — everyone has the same amount in a day. No matter who you are, where you live, and what you do, you clock the same 24-hour cycle as the next person. One person may be wealthier than another, but that doesn't earn him a minute more than the poorest people on the planet.

If that simple fact seems a bit discouraging, think of it this way: You may not have the power to get yourself more time, but you *do* have the power to make the most of it. You can take your 365 days a year, seven days a week, and 1,440 minutes in a day and invest them in such a way that you reap a return that fulfills your life and attracts the success you dream of.

That's what this book is about: taking control of how you spend your time to make sure you're using it how you really want to. You really are in control of your time, even though you don't always feel like it — even if you have a job that demands overtime; even if you have kids who keep you in the carpool loop; even if you have dreams and goals that involve developing new skills or furthering your education.

All in all, discovering how to manage your time well is part mental restructuring and part creating a system. Effective time management requires a little introspection, some good habits and organizational skills, and more than a few logistical and tactical tools. But all are achievable, and all are covered in this book. So if you have the time — and I assure you that you do — get ready for a journey that's certain to, if not buy you more time, show you how to make the absolute most of the 24 hours in your day.

Getting to Know Yourself

Although everyone gets the same number of hours to work with each day, what people don't have in equal amounts are other valuable assets: skill, intelligence, money, ambition, energy, passion, attitude, even looks. All these unique reserves play into your best use of time. So the better you understand yourself — your strengths, weaknesses, goals, values, and motivations — the easier it is to manage your time effectively. In this section, you look at your strengths and goals, think about how much your time is worth, and observe personal energy and behavior patterns that affect your focus throughout the day.

Assessing your strengths and weaknesses



As a young man, I thought I was good — okay, I admit it; I thought I was *great* — at a much larger group of skills, tasks, and jobs than I do today. In fact, the older I get, the more I realize the list of what I'm *not* good at dwarfs the lists of things I *am* good at. Being consciously competent at those few, however, gets me a lot further than being unconsciously incompetent, as I once was. Despite my poor academic record in high school, as a young adult, I was a quick study at what I needed to do to be as successful in life as I wanted to be. At some point, I saw the light and realized I needed to face up to what I had to do to get where I wanted to go.

First, I took stock of my assets: I tallied up my strengths, skills, and even my weaknesses. And I identified things I needed to work on and things I needed to leverage. That's when I realized that although some people were smarter, were more educated, had more money, and knew more influential people than I did, I had the same amount of time as anyone else. And if I wanted to get ahead, it was up to me to harness my time and invest it in such a way to get a greater return. My willingness to invest more time to gain the edge helped equalize the playing field for me and help me achieve the success I enjoy today.

Chances are that by this point in your life, you've discovered some skills that you come to naturally or perhaps have worked hard to acquire. Maybe you're a master negotiator. Or a whiz with numbers. You may be a good writer. Or you may have a silver tongue. Whatever your strengths, developing the handful that brings you the most return on your efforts, propelling you forward to attain your goals, is a more productive course of action than trying to be the best at everything. For most people, these strengths typically number no more than a half-dozen.

In addition to pinpointing your strengths, you need to identify the areas where your skills are lackluster. Then figure out which tasks are essential for meeting the goals you want to accomplish, and build those skills. Invest time in honing and maintaining your strengths, and improve the weaknesses that you need to overcome to reach your goals. **Remember:** To be successful, you need to be selective.

Throwing money away

I once saw a woman in a parking lot throw pennies on the ground. When I asked her what she was doing, she told me she'd just read about a multimillionaire who had calculated his worth, and based on the value of an hour of his time, he determined that it wasn't worth the few seconds it'd take for him to pick up a dollar bill from the sidewalk. She, however, had decided that although it was worth her time to pick up a dollar, she could afford to part with a few pennies.

I think she missed the point, but there's a lesson in this experience: You're always on the clock. Time *is* money, and yours has a value. Giving away your precious time without a sense of its value is like throwing money on the sidewalk. By knowing what your time is worth, you can prioritize those tasks that yield the greatest return, delegating or eliminating those tasks that provide little to no return on your time investment.

Naming goals to give you direction

You know how it is: When you're working toward something, keeping your focus is much easier. A woman may want to lose weight, for example, but perhaps she struggles to stick to a diet or exercise plan. But if her son's wedding is looming three months away on her calendar, she may be more inspired to stay on track, cutting back on second helpings and getting in workouts.



Your goals can serve as inspiration in adopting good time-management skills. After all, managing your time isn't really a benefit in and of itself, but managing your time so you can spend more of it doing what's important to you *is* — whether you're saving for a retirement of travel and adventure or buying the house in the perfect neighborhood.

Using your aspirations to fire up your time management success means you have to identify your goals and keep them in the front of your mind. Pinning down what's most important to you may require some soul searching. Write down your goals — all of them — and follow these guidelines:



- ✓ **Cast a wide net.** Go for the big goals, such as joining the Peace Corps, as well as the not-so-big ones, such as getting an energy-efficient car next year.
- ✓ **Think big.** Don't rein in your dreams because they seem unrealistic.
- ✓ **Be as descriptive as possible.** Instead of "build my dream house," flesh it out: Where is this house? How big? What features does it have? What does it look like? When do you want to move in?
- ✓ **Don't limit goals to a single category.** Think about goals for your career, your personal life, your social situation, your financial status, and any other facet of life that's important to you.

The process of goal-seeking can be a fun and energizing experience, and it's one you can explore at length in Chapter 2. You also see how your current time use can affect the forecast for your future.

Assigning your time a monetary worth to guide your priorities

Most people think about the value of their time as it relates to on-the-job activity. The fast-food worker knows he earns a minimum wage per hour. The freelance artist advertises a per-hour rate. The massage therapist charges for her services in half-hour and hour increments. But to be truly aware of the value of your time, you need to carry this concept into your personal life as well. The value of time in your personal life is at least as valuable as your work life time. In some cases, personal time is priceless.

REMEMBER

One of the most important points to remember as you work through this book is that it's okay not to get everything done. What's critical is making sure that the *important* things are getting done. By assigning value to your time and using the skills you acquire from this book, you can clearly identify what's important and make conscious, wise choices. For example, if you need to save another \$200 per month because you want to start an account for your children's college education, you may determine that putting in an extra shift at work may not be worth the loss of time with your family, even at time-and-a-half pay. Or if you really detest yard work, then paying someone else \$50 to cut your grass may be a fair trade for the extra two hours of time watching the game.

ANECDOTE

Breakout! Sharpening your focus with time off

About ten years ago, as I was evaluating my sales results, I puzzled over a drop in my numbers at the ninth week when I'd been working without a break. It didn't take me long to realize that my lower results reflected my drop in focus. And it's a pattern I could see in previous months. I realized the best course of action, rather than gutting it out, was to get out. I needed a vacation.

I also found that I didn't need a full week's vacation to return to work revitalized and refreshed.

I simply needed a mini-break, about four days over the course of a long weekend to step away from the work routine and see the world through another lens, whether holing up with my family or making an escape to the beach.

To this day, I lay out my whole year in advance, based on this rhythm. As I've aged, I see the need for a break every eight weeks, and as I approach the next decade of my career, I anticipate it shrinking to seven weeks. The recharge number is still four days.

In Chapter 3, I help you calculate what an hour of your time is worth — regardless of whether you're on the clock at work — so you can figure out where to invest the most time. And in Chapter 4, I introduce you to the universal truth that 20 percent of your efforts produce 80 percent of the results. So after you uncover which efforts produce that return, you can crank up those efforts to increase your results. Most success comes from prioritizing activities that produce results and giving them the focus they warrant, so anything you can do to increase your powers of concentration serves you well.

Identifying your rhythm to get in the zone

Athletes talk about being *in the zone*, a place where positive results seem to stick like a magnet. Well, I'm here to tell you that the zone isn't some magical place where wishes come true. Anybody can get there, without a lucky token or fairy dust. What it takes is focus, singular focus.



As an ex-professional athlete in racquetball in the 1980s, I can say I've been in the zone a number of times. And I've experienced that same distillation of focus and electric energy on work projects as well — times when my volume and quality of work was bordering on unbelievable. If you can get your focus under control, you can visit the zone every day and make great things happen.

If you know your rhythms — when you're most on, what times of day you're best equipped to undertake certain tasks — you can perform your most important activities when you're in the zone. Everyone works to a unique pace, and recognizing that rhythm is one of the most valuable personal discoveries you can make. Some of the aspects you need to explore include the following:

- ✓ How many hours can you work at a high level each day?
- ✓ What's your most productive time of the day?
- ✓ How many weeks can you work at high intensity without a break?
- ✓ How long of a break do you need so you can come back focused and intense?

Chapter 25 offers advice on attaining focus, including ten easy-to-adopt habits that nurture success.

Following a System

Effective time management requires more than good intent and self-knowledge. To keep your time under careful control, you need a framework. In your arsenal of time-management ammunition, you want to stock

organizational skills, technology that helps keep you on track, and planning tools that help you keep the reins on your time, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, and so forth.

Establishing a solid system you can replicate is a key to succeeding in managing your time. Systems, standards, strategies, and rules protect your time and allow you to use it to your best advantage. These skills are applicable whether you're the company CEO, a salesperson, a midlevel manager, an executive, or an administrative assistant. No matter your work or your work environment, time management is of universal value. (Visit Part V for chapters that spell out particulars for your job situation.)

Scheduling your time and creating a routine

Sticking to a time-scheduling system can't guarantee the return of your long-lost vacation days, but by regularly tracking your meetings, appointments, and obligations, you reduce your odds of double-booking and scheduling appointments too close. And by planning ahead, you make sure to make time for all the important things first.

For years, I've followed the time blocking system, which I detail in Chapter 4. The system ensures that you put your priorities first (starting with routines and then moving to individual tasks/activities) before scheduling in commitments and activities of lesser importance.

Such time-management techniques are just as applicable to the other spheres of your life. There's a reason why I advise you to plug in your personal commitments first when filling in your time-blocking schedule: Your personal time is worthy of protection, and you can further enhance that time by applying time-management principles.

Organizing your surroundings

A good system of time management requires order and organization. Creating order in your world saves time wasted searching for stuff, from important phone numbers to your shoes. But even more, physical order creates mental order and helps you perform more efficiently.

Yes, your workspace should be clean and orderly, with papers and folders arranged in some sort of sequence that makes items easy and quick to find. Your desk should be cleared off, providing space to work. Your important tools — phone, computer, calculator — ought to be within reach. And your

day planner, of course, should be at your fingertips. Your briefcase, your meeting planner, even your closet has an impact on your time management success. (For more on keeping your office in order, read Chapter 5.)

Using time-saving technology

Organization extends beyond your work area: Not only should your computer be nearby, but the files, documents, and contact information on that computer should be ordered for quick access. The computer stores your address list, tracks your correspondence, and contains your calendar and upcoming appointments.

But that's just the beginning. Today's teleconferencing and videoconferencing equipment means you can hold weekly meetings with your colleagues who live on the other side of the globe without anyone having to turn in a travel expense report. Cellphones and PDAs mean you can conduct business on the road without having to pull off to find a phone booth.

The schedule will set you free

Too many people feel that all this structure is too restrictive. They think the freedom they seek with their schedules and their lives is contained in a more flexible environment. They're afraid establishing a routine will keep them wrapped in the chains of time.

However, most people waste too much time figuring out each individual day on the fly. They react to the day rather than respond. *Reacting* is a reflex action that turns over your agenda to others, and that can't possibly lead to freedom. *Responding* is a disciplined act of planning that determines where and how you'll invest your time.

For example, suppose you have a set place in your schedule to respond to phone calls and problems. You've established the routine of dealing with these issues in predetermined time slots. You can hold off on your response until later — when you're calmer, more focused, and in a problem-solving mentality — instead

of reacting because you're dealing with the issue now.

Planning how to spend your time, which at first glance seems opposed to freedom, is the only pathway to the true mastery of time. With the right routine come simplicity, productivity, and freedom. The "what am I going to work on today?" or "what's my schedule today?" never happens. And when you get the important work out of the way, you free yourself to do what you really enjoy.

If you're a free spirit and what I'm suggesting just fried your circuits, start with a small amount of routine. Ask yourself, "Can I establish a daily routine to try it out? What can I do without having it send me into withdrawal?" Then implement a new routine every week. You'll add more than 50 new pieces of structure to your schedule in a normal work year and see a significant improvement in your freedom.

In fact, technology is advancing at such a rapid pace that it's a struggle to keep up with all the advances. In Chapter 6, I present an overview of the many technologies at your disposal to help you make the best use of your time. And Chapter 24 names some of my favorite time-saving devices.

Overcoming Time-Management Obstacles

Anyone can conquer time management, but it's not always easy. If your experience is anything like mine, sometimes your days feel like a video game, where you're in constant threat of being gobbled up on your course to the finish line. But instead of cartoon threats, your obstacles are your own shortcomings (poor communication skills, procrastination, and the inability to make wise and quick decisions), time-wasting co-workers and bosses, phone and people interruptions, and unproductive meetings.

Communicating effectively

Communicating effectively is one of the best ways to maximize your time. One of the biggest time-wasters on company time is, no surprise, talking with co-workers. But what may be a surprise is that the abuse *isn't* a function of weekend catch-up discussions that take place at the water cooler or the gossip circle at the copy machine. Rather, it's the banter at the weekly staff status reports, the drawn-out updates of projects that never seem to conclude, the sales presentations that get off-track. It's all the meetings that could be as brief as 10 minutes but somehow take an hour or more.

At your disposal, however, is an amazing weapon for taming these misbehaving encounters: your words. With a few deft remarks, you have the power to bring these meetings to a productive close.

In Chapter 10, I provide specific insight on which types of situations are most appropriate for each of the primary communication methods — face-to-face, verbal only, and written — and I present plenty of ideas for communicating your message and posing questions strategically, succinctly, and successfully so your communication ends in results, action, and decisions — whether you're leading a meeting or simply attending it.

Circumventing interruptions

Interruptions creep into your workday in all sorts of insidious manners. Besides the pesky co-worker stepping into your office with “Got a sec?” interruptions come in the form of unproductive meetings, phone calls, hall

conversations that drift into your office and distract you, even the “you’ve got mail” icon that creeps onto the lower corner of your computer monitor.

Additionally, most poor time managers interrupt themselves by trying to do too much at once. Study after study supports that multitasking isn’t the most effective work style. The constant stops and starts disrupt a project, requiring startup time each time you turn back to the task.

I explore a number of these interruptions in Chapter 11, and I offer plenty of advice on preempting such disruptions, as well as cutting them short so you can get your train of thought back on the track.

Getting procrastination under control

Sometimes, it’s tempting to use interruptions as an excuse to postpone a project or a task. How nice to have someone else to blame for not getting started! And before you know it, you’ve found so many good reasons not to do something that you’ve backed yourself into a really tight eleventh-hour corner, and the pressure’s on.

Say you’re writing a 400-page book and you have 10 months to complete the project. You have almost a year to put this thing together. Looking forward, your task requires you to complete 40 pages per month — little more than a page a day. That’s too easy! You can afford to put it off for a while. Wait for a couple of months, and then you’ll need to produce 50 pages a month. Still doable. But at some point, *doable* starts to morph into *impossible*. But when? When you’re down to four months and pressured to crank out 100 pages per month? Or do you wait until the last minute and find yourself struggling to complete nearly 15 pages per day?

Procrastination has a lot of causes, but most of the reasons to procrastinate leave you headed for trouble. Chapter 12 addresses the perils of putting things off and offers secrets to overcoming that all-too-human tendency to postpone until tomorrow what you could’ve done today.

Making decisions: Just do it

One of the easiest things to put off is making a decision. Even sidestepping the smallest decisions can lead to giant time-consumption. Think about it: You scroll through your e-mail and save one to ponder and respond to later. You revisit a few times and still can’t bring yourself to a commitment. So you get more e-mail from the sender. To stave off making a decision, you ask a couple of questions, which requires more time and attention. By the time the issue is resolved and put to bed, you may have invested five times more attention than if you’d handled it at once.

Many factors create the confusion and uncertainty that prevents you from making sound but quick decisions. Often, part of the struggle is having too many options. Most people have a tough enough time choosing between pumpkin and apple pie at the Thanksgiving table. But every day, you're forced to make decisions from choices as abundant as a home-style cafeteria line. Having options is usually a good thing, but too much choice is overwhelming, even paralyzing.

In Chapter 13, I offer some advice to help you narrow your options for a quicker, right-on decision. I also reveal a little-known technique for successful decision-making: using and blending your natural behavioral style with your decision-making system.

Garnering Support While Establishing Your Boundaries

Sometimes your family, friends, and co-workers are your biggest challenge to managing your time successfully. Whose phone calls interrupt your train of thought when you're on a roll? Who expects you home for dinner, despite a pressing proposal deadline? For whose meetings do you have to take a break from your critical research?

Yet despite all the challenges they throw your way, these same folks can also serve as your allies as you pursue the quest of better time use. Getting them on board and perceiving them as comrades in shared goals is a great way to offset the interruptions that they also inevitably bring to the table.

Balancing work and time with family and friends

All work and no play, as they say, means something is askew with your life balance. Recognize that although your job and career are critical components of who you are, they're also a means to support aspects of your life that, I suspect, are more important to you: your personal life, which includes your family, your friends, your community, and your leisure and social activities.



If you find yourself constantly putting in long hours at work for months on end, something's off-kilter: Either you're not managing your time effectively, or something's wrong with your job. No one — not even Wall Street lawyers — should be putting in 70-hour weeks on a regular basis. A 70-hour work week leaves little time for sleep, recreation, family, or relationships.

Still, getting the support of family members is critical for success. There's no doubt that my family comes before my job, but that doesn't mean I can drop work whenever I want. So my wife, Joan, and even my two children, six-year-old Wesley and two-year-old Annabelle, are my supporters, and we all work together to manage our time so we have more of it together.

See Chapter 5 for tips on managing your time when working in a home office and Chapter 3 for info on putting a value on personal time.

Streamlining interactions with co-workers and customers

Most people find themselves in a work environment in which they regularly interact with others, whether co-workers, business associations, or customers. The workday is rife with opportunities for interruption, distraction, and time-wasting. In addition to the phone calls and cubicle pop-ins, you have business appointments, associates who keep you waiting, or meetings that are unfocused and poorly run.

Maintaining control of your time at work requires you to develop some ways to manage meetings, appointments, and other work interactions so they're as efficient and productive as possible. In Chapters 15 and 16, I explore tactics for planning, setting, leading, or just plain attending such gatherings. Whether you initiate the interaction or you're merely a participant, you can have some control over the meeting.

Ah, but what if you're in sales or a customer service capacity? In such positions, taking control of your time is a little more challenging. To make the sale, you want to take as much time as your prospect wants. And when addressing a service issue, your most important objective is to make the customer happy. But you can be successful in sales and serve your clients well and still keep control of your time. In fact, in Chapter 16, I show you how to speed up the decision-making process during sales so you get a positive answer sooner.

Keeping your boss on track

Trying to keep co-workers from impinging on your productive time is ticklish enough; things get even more sensitive when you have to tell your boss that you don't have time to waste. But your supervisor is often the one who throws the most curveballs your way when it comes to using your time in the most productive way. How do you deal with the boss who waits to the last minute to drop a big project on your desk that needs to be done yesterday?

When trying to keep a rein on a time-wasting boss, you need to be prepared to summon up all your powers of diplomacy. You also need to be more direct from the outset. You may even have to suggest some of the time-management tips and tools from this chapter and others. I show you how to help your boss stay on track in Chapter 14.

Keeping Motivation High

According to Earl Nightingale, the dean of the personal development industry, “Success is the progressive realization of a worthy goal or worthy ideal.” His definition doesn’t confine achievement to a fixed point but instead presents success as a journey. Like most goals, mastering your time-management skills isn’t something that happens overnight.



Throughout the process of working to improve the way you manage your time, you’ll occasionally encounter points where you start feeling disappointed, wondering whether your efforts are paying off. Whenever you hit those lows — and you will — remember to give yourself credit for every step you make in the right direction. One great way to stay motivated is to link incentive to inducement: In other words, reward yourself. For example, if you complete certain actions that tie to your goals, give yourself Friday afternoon off. Or savor an evening on the couch with a good movie or dinner at a favorite restaurant. Do whatever serves as an enticing reward.

Take motivation to the next level by involving others in the reward. Let your spouse know that an evening out awaits if you fulfill your week’s goals before deadline. Tell the kids that if you spend the next couple of evenings at the office, you can all head for the amusement park on Saturday. I guarantee this strategy is a sure-fire way to supercharge your motivation.

As you work through this difficult but worthy bout of self-improvement, keep your mind on the positive side and remember two simple truths:

- ✓ You’re human.
- ✓ Work always expands to fill the time you allow for it.

No matter how productive I am, whether I have just a couple things to accomplish or a sky-high pile on my desk, and whether I leave work on time or stay late, there’s always something that doesn’t get done. So I don’t get hung up on those things I don’t accomplish — I just keep my eyes on the goal, prioritize accordingly, delegate what I can, and protect my boundaries carefully so I take on only as much as I know I can handle while still remaining satisfied with all parts of my life. When you start to get frustrated about the never-ending flow of work that comes your way, remind yourself that you’re blessed with more opportunities than time — and that’s not a bad place to be.