

Time to be smarter in business

A busy schedule can leave you rushed off your feet at work. Clare Evans suggests a few simple strategies to improve your productivity – and work/life balance

Clare Evans

Published: 4:08PM BST 22 Oct 2009

In business, most people wish they had more hours in the day: there's just never enough time to get everything done. The day-to-day running of your business seems to take up enough time – even before you start dealing with crises or planning growth and strategy in order to keep pace with changing opportunities.

But managing time is critical to keeping on top of your business. According to a 2007 survey by Proudfoot Consulting, wasted time costs UK businesses £80bn per year. But while time itself can't be managed, you can manage the way you use your time, and the choices you make. There's no one solution, but here are a few strategies to help you work smarter:



Cometh the hour...getting to grips with time management is one of the smartest things you can do

Related Articles

[Start smart with a good business plan](/sponsored/technology/smarthinking/smartworking/6268532/Start-smart-with-a-good-business-plan.html) (/sponsored/technology/smarthinking/smartworking/6268532/Start-smart-with-a-good-business-plan.html)

[Develop the smart, idea-friendly office](/sponsored/technology/smarthinking/smartworking/6337072/Develop-the-smart-idea-friendly-office.html) (/sponsored/technology/smarthinking/smartworking/6337072/Develop-the-smart-idea-friendly-office.html)

[How to read between the lines](/sponsored/technology/smarthinking/6461338/HP-How-to-read-between-the-lines.html) (/sponsored/technology/smarthinking/6461338/HP-How-to-read-between-the-lines.html)

[Barack Obama's defining moment](/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/6054443/Barack-Obamas-defining-moment.html) (/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/6054443/Barack-Obamas-defining-moment.html)

[UK heritage: Britain's noblest piers](/travel/destinations/europe/uk/6065508/UK-heritage-Britains-noblest-piers.html) (/travel/destinations/europe/uk/6065508/UK-heritage-Britains-noblest-piers.html)

[What's keeping the British out of France?](/travel/destinations/europe/france/6029762/Whats-keeping-the-British-out-of-France.html) (/travel/destinations/europe/france/6029762/Whats-keeping-the-British-out-of-France.html)

- **Plan** To make the biggest difference to your productivity, plan your time. You'll ensure you focus on the right things and use your time more effectively. Ten minutes spent planning your day will save hours in the long run. You'll no longer be wasting time by just reacting to work.
- **Prioritise** Make smarter use of your time by focusing on what's important and organising tasks in order of priority. Don't waste it on low priority, unimportant tasks. If you're often reacting to "urgent" tasks, find out why. What causes the urgency – lack of time, poor prioritisation, or other people's deadlines?

- **Organise** Create systems to make life easier. Use files and folders to organise email and paperwork. Create a smarter structure to your working day, scheduling in regular tasks. Write things down, so you know what you're doing and when. Document business processes, and create checklists and worksheets to keep track of activities and projects.

- **Delegate** The busier you are the more you need to delegate. Spend time on important tasks no one else can do, rather than day-to-day tasks.

Hand over routine tasks outside your main skill. Delegate tasks someone can do quicker, better and more cost-effectively than you. Delegate your time and free up more time for yourself and your business.

- **Keep focused** New York researchers say we waste around two hours a day on distractions and interruptions – from email, phone calls or people. Reduce these and increase how much you get done.

Switch off the phone – use the answer machine or voicemail. Don't allow impromptu meetings – encourage people to make an appointment.

Think smart – if you're interrupted, arrange a time to talk later, or set a time limit if you can't avoid dealing with it there and then.

- **Email** can be one of the biggest time drains. Unless critical, emails rarely need an immediate response. Only check email once or twice a day.

Block out time in the day to respond to emails and limit the amount of time you spend. Switch off alerts for new messages, and DON'T check your email throughout the day.

- **Set boundaries** It's really important to have clear boundaries and expectations right from the start – otherwise they can become blurred and misunderstandings may occur as work spills over into your personal time.

- **Let people know** what you want. Don't let other people's inefficiency create added effort and pressure for you. This includes clients and customers: let them know when you're available, what they can expect and when.

- **Say "No"** Busy people often say "Yes" too often. Learning to say "No" can be a smart way of getting back in control of your time. Be clear and direct. Don't say "Yes" immediately, when you don't know what's involved. Say: "I'll get back to you – I need to check my diary first." Keep saying "Yes," and you'll be under pressure, overwhelmed and likely to end up working late just to fit everything in.

In all, you need to organise your time and take control if you want to be more productive. Fit the work into your hours and not hours into your work. It's your time – and your choice how and where you spend it.

- Clare Evans is the author of Time Management for Dummies. She is a personal and business coach, working with individuals and business owners. See www.clareevans.co.uk (<http://www.clareevans.co.uk/>)

TIME TO WORK SMARTER

In today's business, time is a precious asset. When you buy office supplies, for example, you want to be sure that it will work out of the box, first-time – with no fiddling about or unnecessary distractions.

Happily, if you choose an Original HP Cartridge for your HP printer, there's almost no chance it will fail, says a study for HP by Innovationstechnik. But use a non-HP cartridge, and there's a better than one in five chance that it will be dead on arrival or fail prematurely – wasting your precious time.

But that's not all. Original HP Cartridges can print 34 per cent more pages than refilled ones, the same study shows. So, Original HP Cartridges are great value for your time – and also your money.

www.hp.com/uk/supplies (<http://welcome.hp.com/gms/uk/en/sz4/laser-toner-ink-cartridges.html>)

[Click here to download "Techniques to try in your working day".pdf](#)

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/telegraph/multimedia/archive/01508/techniques-to-try-_1508118a.pdf

External Links

[Click here to download "Techniques to try in your working day" pdf](#)

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/telegraph/multimedia/archive/01508/techniques-to-try-_1508118a.pdf

© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2010