



Top Tips: Manage your time.

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Top Tips: Get the most out of your day.

Because there are only so many hours in the day, we can't get everything done that we might like to. If you're the sort of person who plans everything like a military operation, you may already have everything well under control. If you're not so good at managing your time, then here are a few tips to help.

1. **Daily Planning.** In order to make the most of your time, you need to spend it in the most productive way. Planning your time is the best way to ensure you make the most of the time you have.

First thing every Monday morning (or Sunday evening if you prefer) spend 15-30 minutes planning what you need to do that week to keep you focused and on track. What actions **MUST** you take each day/week. Spend the first 10-15 minutes each morning planning your tasks and actions for the day. When are you going to do these? Block out time in your diary and make an appointment with yourself for when you're going to write a report, make those phone calls.

2. **One diary.** Don't have one diary for home and one diary at work or one for personal and one for business. Whether it's paper-based or electronic, keep all your personal and business appointments in one place. That way you will have all important dates and events available when you're planning your time and booking appointments - include birthday's, anniversaries, children's activities, school events, social gatherings etc.

Electronic personal organisers, such as the Palm Pilot, iPAQ and Psion ,are a useful tool. They can automatically synchronise with your calendaring tool on your computer such as Outlook and can then be carried with you when you're away from your desk or out of the office enabling you to check your diary at anytime. If you have one family calendar at home check this each week and update your diary.

3. **Do Important things first.** In order to make the most effective use of your time you need to focus on what's important. Prioritise your tasks and actions in order of importance or urgency. Ensure you spend most of your time focusing on the important to avoid them becoming urgent later on. Get the high priority tasks done first and break larger tasks down into smaller ones.

What **MUST** get done today? What else needs to be done? Be realistic about what you can achieve each day - don't set yourself up with a massive to-do list and only achieve a few things. Start small and build from success. Be aware of 'time-wasters'.

4. **Delegate.** One way to make the most of your time is to get someone else to do the tasks that don't absolutely need your attention. Do you really need to do everything? Who else could help you out? If someone else has the skills to do a task then ask them to do it. It will give you time to focus on the more important things and the tasks that only you can do.

The busier you are the more you need to be able to delegate. Train someone up to do some of your tasks and share your workload. Give someone else the opportunity to learn and grow. Cleaning, gardening, paperwork – get someone else to do these or help you out.

Create your own virtual 'team' – a book-keeper to do your books, your accountant to do your accounts, a virtual assistant (VA) to do your admin tasks, invoicing and mailings – you may not be able to afford staff full-time but you can make better use of your time by hiring people when you need them.



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- 5. Avoid interruptions.** Sometimes we'd be so much more effective if we didn't get constantly interrupted. What are your main interrupters? Email, phone calls, people?

If you have work to do and need some undisturbed time – switch the phone through to the answer machine or voice-mail. Switch it off – as long as you remember to switch it back on when you're finished!

Ignore incoming emails – if you get an alert each time you receive a new email, switch it off and check your emails 2-3 times a day ONLY!

If you're at work, book a meeting room or use an empty office for a couple of hours and shut yourself away. If you are able to – work from home for the day – that way you get less interruption from people just 'dropping by' and interrupting you at your desk. If you have an office educate people that when the door is closed you're not to be disturbed.

- 6. Give yourself a break.** Make sure you take breaks throughout the day – even if it's just for a few minutes. The brain is only able to concentrate effectively for short periods of time. The longer you spend doing one thing, the more ineffective you will become. Sitting in one position for long periods of time doesn't do you any good physically or mentally. Some people can concentrate for hours when they're totally absorbed in a task, in general you should take a break at least once every two hours. You will be fresher and better able to concentrate. Get up and stretch, take a few deep breaths, get yourself a drink of water.

Always try to take a proper lunch break – you deserve it and your body needs it! If you can, get some fresh air and exercise. Don't rely on stimulants such as coffee and chocolate to give you a boost when you're flagging. The majority of people don't drink enough water throughout the day. If you're dehydrated you will get tired more easily and be less able to concentrate. If you're thirsty, you're already dehydrated!

- 7. Learn to say "No".** Eager to please and to be seen to be helpful, we often take on things we'd rather not do or don't really have time for. Learning to say "No" can be useful to stop yourself from getting overwhelmed or feeling guilty. Be clear and direct. Your time is yours, you are entitled to a say in how you spend it. Don't be misled by other people's expectations – whether that's a family, friends, your boss or work colleague. Be realistic about what you are able to achieve. What are you losing by saying, "Yes", what are you gaining by saying "No"? By saying "Yes" what are you saying "No" to? By saying "Yes" to getting that report done by the end of the day I am saying "No" to leaving work on time, I'm saying "No" to spending time with the children/my partner ... Can someone else do it? Can you negotiate to suit your timeframe?

- 8. Make use of slack time.** We all have times of the day when we're sitting waiting. Make use of this time by doing something productive. Carry a book with you so that you always have something to read. If someone cancels an appointment see it as a gift and use that time to do some admin, clear some files, make a few phone calls.

- 9. Reward yourself.** Don't forget to reward yourself at the end of a busy and productive day or when you've completed a particular project. Include it in your plan - how will you treat yourself?

If you'd like help in putting some structure in place to organise your time more effectively and get the most out of your day – contact me for a consultation on info@clareevans.co.uk.