

How to Become a Pro (or at Least Get Better) at Time Management

Resource Type: Articles

Topic: HR Risk and Employment Practices

Do you struggle to meet deadlines and complete tasks? Almost everyone can get better at time management, and even small investments can yield big rewards. Your work will improve, you'll be less stressed, and you'll have more time to work on the things that interest you most—or to focus on the rest of your life. These simple steps can help you get better at time management.

Learn how long tasks take you, and allot the time they require. Many of us underestimate how long it takes to complete a task. Look back at the past to see how much time your major tasks take you. Then block the time you need on your calendar to get those tasks done.

Make your own stricter deadlines. Have a big project due on the 15th? Give yourself a deadline of the 12th. If life happens and you don't finish on the 12th, you can still finish on time. If you finish on the 12th, give your project an extra proofread, set it aside and look at it again to see if any final great ideas occur to you. Or use that extra time to ask a colleague who brings a different lens and perspective to take a look!

Do one thing at a time. Multitasking is a myth. Even if you can only focus on a particular task for a short block of time, you'll do better work and finish faster than if you juggled it with other things.

Eat the frog. This phrase has become time-management shorthand. Whatever your hardest or most demanding task is, dive into it first thing in the morning and make some progress before you jump into other things.

If you can't do a lot, do a little. For those tasks you hate or find stressful, schedule short sprints where you work your hardest for 15 to 25 minutes. This will help you make progress and avoid procrastination. Greg McKeown, author of *Essentialism*, reminds us that "Research has shown that of all forms of human motivation the most effective one is progress. Why? Because a small, concrete win creates momentum and affirms our faith in our further success."

Do similar tasks in chunks. This could mean setting aside one day a week to meet with constituents, or pulling data for several reports at once. To learn how to "chunk" risk management tasks, see ["Chunk Change: Ask for Less to Get More."](#)

Don't get sucked into constantly responding to messages. Check email only at designated times, not all day. Even if you can limit looking at your inbox to every half hour, it will make a huge difference. Go longer if you can.

Take breaks between tasks. Step out for a brisk walk, even just around your office building or yard; turn away from your screen and look out the window or at a piece of art in the room or in a book; pause to listen to music; or do anything else that clears your head. Taking a break between tasks will help you focus more effectively on your next to-do.

Use a reminder system. Track when tasks need to be done through electronic calendar reminders, or in a

paper planner if analog reminders work best for you. Pick one system and stick to it—if you juggle both paper and digital reminders, things can fall through the cracks.

Did you know that time is your most valuable resource? It's the only asset that can't be regenerated. We can rebuild a sullied reputation and repair fractured friendships, but we can't go back in time and re-do yesterday. Investing in time management skills is a wonderful way to steward your most valuable resource!

Resources

- [10 Tips for Mastering Time Management at Work - Slack](#)
- [Time Management - Corporate Finance Institute](#)
- [Time Management Is About More Than Life Hacks - Harvard Business Review](#)
- [How to Make the Most of Your Workday - New York Times](#)