

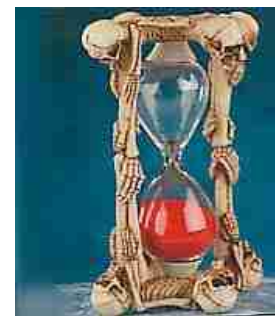


Wasted time is wasted money - Time Management is the key

Time Is Of The Essence. In business, time is a precious commodity. Like any commodity it needs to be controlled in order to reach its full value and provide a good return.

"Like sands through the hourglass, so are the 'Days of Our Lives'." Famous words from a non-too-famous American soap opera. Nonetheless, the saying holds true for many in any industry.

The ultimate irony of time and time management is that while numerous courses are run to show business people how to manage their time, few have the time to actually attend.



Prioritising

Wasted time is wasted money; so all improvements will save your business money. One of the first things that time management courses point out is prioritising. Literally all people in business and administration receive incoming communications and generate outgoing correspondence and reports in some form or another. A mistake that is often made is not dealing with incoming mail in a correct sequence. Whoever shouts the loudest is the order in which many respond. There is often a tendency towards replying to people who are perceived as problem creators - those who 'kick up a stink' if they are not listened to, regardless of what they have to say. This is a common error and leads to inefficient use of working time.

As a task arrives it is best to prioritise it and then work on clearing top priority items first. Prioritising your tasks at the start of every day, or at least twice a week, is usually the best method. In this way items rise up the priority scale and are eventually dealt with. A 'to do' list placed in a prominent position is also very helpful. Once prioritising is mastered, deadlines will be met more often and a sense of order is established.

Delegate. Don't procrastinate

A timewaster that many of us are guilty of is procrastinating or putting off doing things. The problem with procrastination is that it only increases stress. Most of us set out to conquer the most demanding matters first, but more often than not, by doing so we put off tackling some problematic items too. The main reason this happens is that the task is unpleasant, overwhelming or unclear; the fear of failure leads to the delay. The solution is simple; get it out of the way straight away - by working longer hours or delegating the task to someone else (my editor's favourite!).



It's not always good to talk



With many people owning mobile phones "it's good to talk", especially if you are the phone company collecting the bill. However, the telephone in its many forms can be a devious timewaster and needs to be controlled during working hours.

Cut out any social chitchat that is not helpful to your business. It's all too easy to be drawn into a discussion on the FA cup or the cost of shopping these days.

Another good idea is to bullet point items that you wish to cover in the conversation before you ring, and when someone rings you, ensure that you control the conversation.

While mobile phones remain more expensive (though costs are coming down) call times are not so lengthy, so use of a mobile can, in the long run, save both time and money. Try not to get involved in telephone tennis; when someone rings you and you're away, then you ring him or her and he or she is away, and so on. Simply wait for them to ring again. If it is important, they will.

If you find yourself with too many tasks or one you simply can't handle then say so, and give a reason why - "I can't be bothered" is not advisable. Failure to do this can give rise to heightened tensions.

Organise

Organisation is something else that can be done to give you more time to run your business. Losing things, apart from being frustrating, squanders time. A quick sort of your desk save hours of time looking for phone numbers or vital papers that are hidden under layers of documents.

Start a diary, preferably one that shows all seven days of the week when open. To benefit from the diary it's best if it remains on your desk, so that you can see what you have to do at a glance. When you have completed a task, tick it off to prevent you doing it twice.

Robbie Burns said in his poem Tam O' Shanter "No man can tether time or tide", so until a time machine is invented time will remain a lost entity. Make sure you don't lose too much of yours. Or you could lose your business with it.



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