



How to get control of your time and your life...and your desk

People begin to become successful the minute they decide to be.

-Harvey Mackey

Control Starts With Planning

“I have so much to do; there’s just not enough time for me to do it.”

Control starts with planning. Everyone makes plans: what movie to see Friday night, where to vacation next summer, big plans, little plans, realistic plans and playful plans.

Most people plan haphazardly. They usually do it when they feel forced to do. If you only plan this way you run the risk of not planning when you really most need to.

The occasional time planner gets a fuzzy shot at his goal, and may even miss the mark entirely. He’s uncomfortable with the results; they seem hardly worth the effort. He

concludes he’s not a good planner and gives up.

Many people seem to have difficulty planning because they regard it only as “thinking”—which all too often translates into “staring into space.” It is much better to conceive of planning as “writing” than as “thinking.”

Call the time when you plan “Decision Time,” because that’s what planning is all about—making decisions as to what and when and, if necessary, how.

Use The ABC Priority System

Write a capital letter “A” to the left of those items on the list that have a high value; a “B” for those with medium value; and a “C” for those with low value.

Items marked A should be those that yield the most value. You get the most out of your time by doing the A’s first, and saving B’s and C’s for later. Taking account of the time of day and the urgency of the items, you can break them down further so that A-items become A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4...

Who’s Got Time For Planning

No matter how busy you are, you should always take the time to plan. The less time you feel you have to spare, the more important it is to plan your time carefully. Spend only ten minutes at the beginning or end of the day planning, and it will repay your efforts many times over.

Sometimes you will be so busy that you feel you really don’t have time to plan. OK, maybe you don’t have time to plan and do absolutely everything else you’d like to get out of the way. But think about this: By failing to plan, you will free very little time, if any, and by failing to plan, you will almost certainly fail to discriminate among the ABCs. Even if you are confining yourself to the A’s, you still might not do the best A’s.

Therefore, although you think you never have time to plan when you are busy, you always come out ahead by investing time in planning anyway. Exactly because we lack time to plan, we should take time to plan.

Planning is usually done best first thing in the morning or at the end of the day. There are many advantages to planning in the morning when you are fresh. You gain momentum as you go along. Having just thought about what you have to do, you move easily to getting it done. With the day’s priorities clearly in mind you are less likely to be sidetracked as you go along.

The advantage of planning in the evening is that you know where you have come from

and this perspective helps you select activities for tomorrow. Also, if you have your day all set when you arrive the next morning, you don't have to debate what to do and consequently waste time. Another advantage is that your unconscious can work overnight on developing ideas so that you arrive at work all primed for action.

How To Block Out A-Time

One of the main planning tools is scheduling. But scheduling means more than just fitting into the hours available all the things you must do. It means making time for the things you need and want to do.

In laying out a weekly schedule the key is to block out time for the A's that require a lot of time. Schedule large enough blocks of time to build up momentum. Reserve particular days of the week for major projects. Even if your day is fragmented by interruptions, you can still attempt to keep blocks of time intact for the high-value A's.

Try blocking A-time horizontally on a weekly calendar—at the same time each day. You can also block vertically one day a week, or so, to handle this week's A-project.

Another important aspect of scheduling is "prime" time. Internal prime time is the time you work best—morning, afternoon or evening. External prime time is the best time to attend to other people—those you have to deal with in your job, your social life, and at home.

Internal prime time is the time when you concentrate best. If you had to pick the two hours of the day when you think most clearly, which would you pick? The two hours that you select are probably your own internal prime time, but during the next two weeks you might check to see whether your concentration is really best during those hours.

Try to save all your internal prime time for prime projects.

Most business people pick the first couple of hours at work as their internal prime time, yet

Use Friday afternoon for reviewing the week, planning the following week's projects in a general way but those you'll do on Monday in detail. Use Monday morning for refining your plan and starting your A-goals of the week.

this is usually the time they check their email, answer routine mail, get yesterday's unanswered telephone calls out of the way, and talk to colleagues. It's much better to save such routine tasks for non-prime hours.

External prime time is when external resources (usually people) are most readily available for decisions, inquiries, and information.

Flexibility is needed to accommodate whatever situation may arise. If you fill up every moment in advance without any breaks except for lunch, you are bound to go home frustrated, nervous and tense.

The unexpected happenings need their time, to. Even with a light schedule, the incoming mail, visitors, and telephone may put enough demands on your time to create an overload. Experience will tell you that although you may not be able to anticipate specifics, there will be interruptions and distractions during the day that will take up your time. You need some slack time to handle whatever unexpected crises and opportunities come your way during the day.

Therefore, always reserve at least an hour a day of uncommitted time. Leave holes in your schedule for recovery from a long interview, and set enough to read the mail and catch up on paperwork. Try to get absolute musts out of the way early in the day so you will feel less frantic about interruptions and distractions.

A proper balance of scheduled and unscheduled time carefully planned and then used well will help you get your life flowing more smoothly with fewer fits and starts.