

An Antidote to Feeling Time-Starved

Are you feeling stressed? Overwhelmed by the amount of e-mail you have to contend with each day? Do you find you have less time for the important things or that you feel rushed when making key decisions?

If so, you're not alone. Despite what the song lyrics say, these days time is *not* on your side. The pace of life is much faster today than it was 10 years ago, in large part because we're ensconced in technologies that enable us to research, communicate, and respond faster than ever before. Those same technologies set the expectations of our clients, our team members, and our business partners. The result is that we often feel stretched to the max and ready to snap.

One common denominator among most successful people is their ability to manage their time. Unless you make time-management a priority, the symptoms described above will just get worse.

But good time-management skills aren't something you're born with; like carpentry, they have to be learned and practiced. Time management is not merely a set of techniques to make you more efficient; it's a program for changing how you think about the way you spend your time. Here are some suggestions to get you started on a path to better managing your time.

JUST SAY NO

Most remodelers are people-oriented problem solvers, so it's difficult for them to say no to clients, co-workers, and business partners. But being selective about which activities you participate in and saying no to those that aren't of real value to you is one way to regain valuable time.

The first step is to keep track of how you presently spend your time each day. Do this for a week—or, better yet, for a month—then analyze the results. Group similar activities into categories such as sales calls, jobsite emergencies, trade partner supervision, employee issues, planning, and paperwork. Then compare where you spent your time to how productive or meaningful the

outcome was. I guarantee that you'll be surprised by what you discover. More importantly, you will have a "map" of activities that you can use to decide what can be delegated, what should be elevated to a priority, and what can simply be eliminated from your schedule.

SET TIME LIMITS

You may have heard the expression, "Work expands to fill the available time." Most successful people turn this on its head and don't start an activity without setting a limit on the amount of time they want to spend on it.

For example, if you have a call with the plumber to address an estimate or a client request, begin by establishing the amount of time for the call and then try to stick to it. The call might start something like this: "Bob, I have about 20 minutes to discuss this issue now. Do you think that will be sufficient to accomplish what we need?" If Bob says yes, then proceed and stick to that time frame. Setting parameters allows you both to pace yourselves to accomplish the task appropriately.

CONTROL THE PACE

Controlling the number of activities and the amount of time you spend on each will make a big difference, but one of the best ways to reduce your stress level is to control the speed at which you work. Some activities are best accomplished quickly; others require a more leisurely pace.

One place where this can really make a difference is in meetings. You can set expectations for

the pace of a one-on-one or group meeting just by carefully choosing your words. For example, when asking for input from a team member, set expectations by saying, "I'd like to run an idea by you and get a quick reaction," or "Give me the CliffsNotes of your meeting with Mary." Couching your request this way makes it clear that you don't want to devote extensive time to the discussion.



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PLAN YOUR WORK, WORK YOUR PLAN

Your daily to-do list is not a plan, it's simply a checklist. A plan takes into account the time required. A plan prioritizes activities. A plan sets goals.

To-do lists are useful, but you can improve your ability to get things done efficiently and with less stress by prioritizing items on your list and assigning a time limit to each one. This transforms the to-do list into a blueprint for your day that specifies what comes first, what follows, and what is your time budget for each.

None of these suggestions will come to life if you don't invest real time to improve. And as with most investments, if you consistently apply these principles over time, you will see your efforts pay off. **PR**

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