TIME MANAGEMENT

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Work from Home Business – Time Management
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WHY IS TIME MANAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

Life in the twenty-first century is busy. No matter if you are a student, a businessman, a parent or a tradesman, time is a valuable commodity - one that needs to be managed and managed well. Everyone has deadlines to meet whether it's as mundane as getting to the bus on time or as important as finishing an assignment by the due date. Time pressures are always upon us. Yet so many waste time with procrastination, "I'll just have a cup of coffee before I start my work", or will fill their life with great time wasters such as checking emails constantly throughout the day.

Too often it seems like there aren't enough hours in the day to get through all that needs to be done. But is that really the case? Or is it that you aren't using your time effectively. You can't hold time in your hand and look at, but you do an awful lot of other things with time. Consider this for a moment, how many ways do you use the word time in your daily vocabulary? You keep time, you waste time, and you pass time. You also kill time, take time and buy time. There are many other references to time, yet how often do you really consider the minutes ticking by and if you are using them as effectively as possible? Managing time may not be something you feel you can act upon, yet it is probably the most constructive thing you can do with all that time on your hands!

Time management can be thought about in many different ways, indeed there are numerous techniques to effectively manage time. But keep this in mind, time passes no matter what. Realistically the only thing you can manage is how you use that time, how you self-manage yourself in a time constraint. Time management is all about increasing efficiency and being more productive.

Controlling this most valuable asset will give you exactly what you crave - more time! Wouldn't that be great? More time to do the fun things in life, more time to relax. Now that's something worth considering.

The importance of good time management cannot be under-valued. If you manage your time well you will achieve more each day, have more leisure time, reduce stress levels by achieving a more balanced life and be able to meet deadlines with a minimum of fuss. Do you think that's worth working towards? A life filled with more time and less stress. If those things are important to you, then it might be time to enlist a little bit of time management into your busy schedule.

WHO NEEDS TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS?

Do you have deadlines to meet? Then you need time management skills.

Do you have set goals you want to achieve, today, tomorrow, ten years from now? If so, then you need time management skills. Do you feel there aren't enough hours in the day? Then you too need time management skills. It seems that everyone needs time management skills. Most people are time poor at some stage in their lives.

The truth is, you could all spend your time a little more wisely. Most people could do with some more structure to their lives. Time management will help anyone get through the day more effectively and with less pressure. With organization, days will run smoother and you will function better. At the end of the day it would be nice to know that you have accomplished not only something, but that that something was the right thing.

If you want to get more things done is less time then time management is for you. If you have things you want to achieve in life, whether they are long-term goals or more immediate ones, then you need time management skills. Are you a procrastinator? Someone who puts off the big jobs and does the small and sometimes insignificant things first? You need time management skills. Are you a homemaker with children to organize, meals to cook, housework to be done and a husband to love? Then you too need time management skills. From Chief Executive Officer to Filing Clerk, from Elite Athlete to the U10 Soccer Coach, everyone needs a little (or a lot of) time management.

Still don't think time management is for you? You think writing a 'to do' list each day is a waste of time. You manage to get through all your jobs with a minimum of fuss, with plenty of time to spare. Time management sounds like a waste of time and effort to you. But do you have dreams? Dreams of where you like to be in say five, ten, twenty years. Everyone has dreams but there are those that make them come true and those that just, well, dream.

By using time management skills such as goal setting you are devising a plan of your life. A road map to point you in the direction you want to go. Goals can help you get through the day to day activities, but they also give you the road signs to reach your dreams

So is time management for you? If you are time poor, always wishing for more hours in the day or you have dreams, then yes - time management is for you.

IDENTIFYING THE TEN BIGGEST TIME WASTERS

The time thief is everywhere. Without even realizing it, time wasting is happening to us all. How many hours a week do you watch the television? How many times do you log into your inbox each day? How many minutes are wasted on phone calls that are not important? Too many, I bet. These examples are obvious time wasters, but some can be subtle, so hidden in amongst our daily life that we don't even know they are there, causing us to waste more of that valuable resource - time.

A time waster is any activity that doesn't make a worthwhile contribution to the work at hand or to the goal you are trying to achieve. Often you will drift into a time wasting activity without even realizing it. Some of the time, you'll find yourself doing an activity knowingly but really not wanting to be doing it at all!

Identifying your biggest time wasters can seem like a time wasting activity in itself. Do you want to spend all day, all week recording your activities? Do you really want to know what you've been up to? Probably not, but the first step to effective time management is to identify the ten biggest time wasters in your day.

There will be some time wasters that appear on everyone's list. Poor planning, procrastination and interruptions are troublesome to everyone. If you can identify those that waste the most time, you can then work toward eliminating them. Identifying the biggest time wasters will depend on what you do. If you are in the corporate world, meetings may be at the top of your 'ten biggest time wasters' list. Students might say chat rooms come in first whereas homemakers might regard phone calls or unannounced visitors as terrible time wasters. Below is a list of common time wasters. Do any (or all) of them relate to you?

- Poor planning

- Meetings
- Procrastination
- Interruptions - telephone
- Interruptions - personal visitors
- Tasks you should have delegated
- Sporadic dealing with correspondence
- Staff management
- Poor communication
- Unclear objectives and priorities
- Stress
- Inability to say "No"
- Disorganization
- Cluttered desk

Often stopping and asking yourself if you really want to be doing a certain task, will be a good way of identifying it as a time waster or not. Is there something else you could be doing instead of that activity? Something that is more productive or more enjoyable? If there is, then that activity is wasting your time. It is not helping you focus on the task at hand.

Once you've identified the time wasters, you can rank them in order, from one to ten, in reference to how much time they take away from what you want to achieve. And then you can go about the task of eliminating them.

So are you ready to identify your ten biggest time wasters? If so it's time to track your daily activities and discover where all that precious time is going.

TRACK THE USE OF YOUR TIME

Starting an activity log or time inventory table is the most logical way to track the use of your time. But the log must include everything you do. This can be quite confronting, especially if you need to report back on your findings. Do you really want your boss to know that you spent three hours reading and replying to emails or that you had six coffee breaks before lunchtime? And what if you work from home - just how much time do you spend doing housework instead of building your business? Finding the tasks that take you away from your main goals of the day can be very illuminating and a little bit scary.

There are many ways to track the use of your time. It's probably wise to write down each activity as you go, not rely on your memory at the end of the day. Follow these steps to set up an activity log:

1. Draw up a table with two columns and plenty of rows
2. Label each row in 15 or 30 minute slots starting from the time get up
3. Label the left hand column Activity Planned
4. Label the right-hand column Activity Carried Out

Now, fill in your activity log/time-sheet for the activities you want to carry out tomorrow. Not every minute will be planned so only note down things you know you have planned in the time slot you expect to carry them out. Go to bed and be prepared to track your time from when you get up the next day.

As you work through your day, fill in each activity you completed, in the Activity Carried Out column, whether it is planned or unplanned. Write down everything! Take note of how long it takes you to get ready for work, eat meals, commute to and from work, make calls, respond to emails, chat to colleagues, complete work activities, shop, cook, exercise, watch TV. Everything!

Do this for at least a week, remembering to fill out the planned activities for the following day before you go to bed. At the end of the week you can tally up how much of your time was spent on planned activities and how much on unscheduled activities.

Now you will know how much of your valuable time is spent on what you planned to do and you will be able to clearly see what your time wasters have been throughout the week. List them and start work on eliminating those time thieves. It's time to start managing your time better.

IDENTIFY AND LIST YOUR PRIORITIES

What has to get done today? What is important in your life to achieve a balance? Identifying and listing your priorities will be a huge step in your effective time management. Priorities are different from goals. Priorities are the more immediate tasks, things that you should do or are required to do. Goals are the steps you use to reach your dreams.

Setting priorities will depend on a number of variables such as tasks with time limits, other people involved in the task and daily routines which must be adhered to. Identify, define and prioritize your workload and daily needs. What needs to be done immediately? What can realistically wait another day? What appointments (work and family) have been scheduled in for the day? All these variables must be taken into account.

Making a 'To Do' list can be helpful at this stage. It will enable you to focus on your immediate priorities, alerting you to what is possible for you to achieve that day. Your To Do list is a reminder of the path you've set yourself. Include everything on it that you wish to carry out today, including personal activities. Do you need to make a dental appointment, pick up milk on the way home, advise your boss of your vacation dates, finish writing a report or chair a meeting? Write it all down.

Hang on! Every item on your list is screaming at you that it is the most important thing to do that day! You can only do one thing at a time. How are you going to handle this crisis? Easy - you must rate your priorities. Are they urgent, important or a combination of these qualities? Those tasks that are urgent AND important should be high on your priority list, whereas those that are neither urgent nor important should be a long way down the list (are these possibly time wasters?).

Now you have your priorities for the day written in front of you. Is it possible to achieve all that in one day? Is there anything that can wait until tomorrow? Can you delegate any of your priorities? Some lists may need revising throughout the day, but try and stick to your plan as much as possible. If you have eliminated your time-wasters, getting through your daily To Do list should seem easier than before. You are managing your time effectively. You know what your priorities are.

Going one better than a list is a quadrant. Draw a large cross on a blank piece of paper. Label the top right of the quadrant "Important, but Not Urgent", the bottom left "Urgent, but not Important", the bottom right "Not Important and Not Urgent" and the top left of the quadrant "Important and Urgent". Then start filling in your quadrant and you will soon start to prioritise everything much more clearly. Here is a diagram below to give you the idea-

Important and Urgent	Important, Not Urgent
Urgent, Not Important	Not Important, Not Urgent
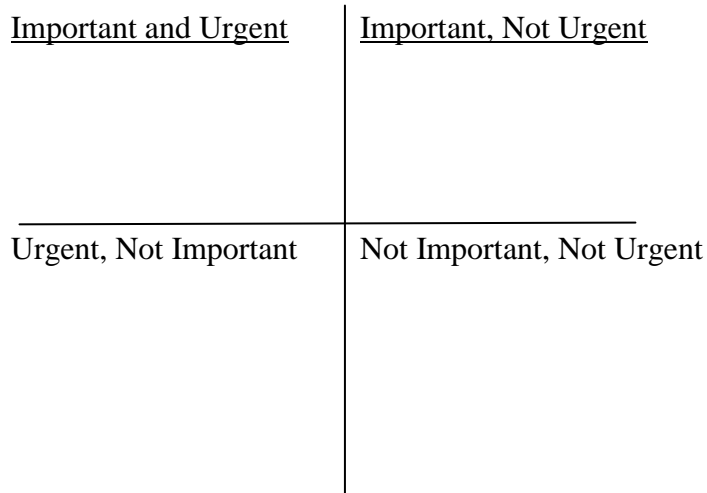
IDENTIFY AND LIST YOUR GOALS

What do you want to get out of life? Where are you headed? Do you have a vague idea or is your life plan set in concrete? Goals are the steps you take towards achieving your dreams. You can set long and short-term goals, ones that are lofty and ones that are attainable in the next hour. Goals can be thought of as your road map in life, whether it is which street to get to today or how to fly to the moon! Goal setting is an invaluable tool, one that will help you with your time management and reaching your dreams.

So how do you identify what your goals are? Some will be obvious to you and jump straight to mind. Most people will be able to name a long-term goal. It might be running a marathon by the time you turn 40 or getting your Masters degree. Short-term goals can be as specific as finish a report or clean the refrigerator. It is wise to list goals that are both short-term and long-term.

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely or SMART goals are the ones to aim for. The SMART principle if often used in goal setting.

Specific: A clear goal that is recorded in some way (on paper, in your diary, on your computer) is termed as a specific goal. Having a specific goal will make it seem more realistic. It is a goal that has a clear path. For example if your goal is to run a marathon before turning 40 you will write it down and take steps to achieve it. If you are 39 this is a short-term goal and your steps will be quite different from a person who is 25 recording this as one of their goals.

Measurable: Running a marathon by age 40 is easy to measure, but to be sensible you will need small, measurable steps along the way. Get a medical check-up before starting training, increase running distances over a certain period or join a running club. These might be all measurable steps towards your marathon goal. If you measure your steps you will be able to see the progress you are making. This will keep you motivated and focused on your goal.

Attainable: goals are realistic ones. If you turn 40 next week and haven't exercised for the past decade, then running a marathon might not be possible. You may have to change your focus. Your goals can be flexible, as long as they are attainable. Begin training for a marathon when you turn 40 might be more realistic.

Rewarding: Goals should be rewarding, otherwise why would they be goals for you? Cleaning the refrigerator may not be the most fun thing to do, but keeping it clean will help in keeping your food fresh and healthy to eat. That is a reward in itself. For long-term goals, the focus should be on not only the journey to attain your goal, but how good you are going to feel once you reach it. Can you imagine the euphoria you'll enjoy once you cross the finish line at the end of the Boston Marathon? Sensational!

Timely: Goals should have a time limit (well most of them - having a goal of living a healthy life is an on-going one). Set a time limit to reach your goal. Are you going to clean the refrigerator today or tomorrow? Have run a marathon by the time you are 40. Timely guidelines will stop that dreaded procrastination setting in and keep you focused on the job at hand.

Once you have identified your goals, list them and follow the SMART guidelines. It will amaze you how much more attainable your goals will seem once you have completed this list.

BREAK GOALS INTO SMALLER STEPS

Goals can seem daunting, especially if they are big ones. Perhaps one of your goals is to have a book published. That's a mighty big goal and one that may or may not be attainable. Is there any way to make this goal seem more realistic? Can you make the 'hugeness' of this dream more manageable? The good news is, yes you can.

If you think about your goal in more detail, you will soon realize that it is made up of smaller goals. These smaller goals can be broken down into manageable stages. Breaking your goals into these smaller stages will make them seem more easily attainable.

Compare these two statements: "My goal is to have a book published" and "My goal is to take creative writing classes and join writer networks so as I can improve my writing and find out how to submit a manuscript to a publishing house."

The second statement is more structured, outlining the steps you will take towards achieving your goal. The first statement is indeterminate. So you want to publish a book - but how are you going to go about it? Breaking your goal down in to these smaller, manageable steps will show you how you are going to achieve your goal. Your roadmap to the future becomes very clear when doing this.

Having big goals is a good thing, but you have to believe you can reach them. Think about how you are going to get there. How many specific steps can you break your big goal in to, to make the journey seem less daunting? Believe it or not, setting smaller stages will make your brain think the large goal is more easily within reach. How do you think you would react to this statement? "I want to buy a house." Seems reasonable enough - a dream of many people. But how are you going to reach that dream? You could start by noting down the steps to getting the house.

1. Save a deposit
2. Find a house
3. Buy the house

Let's now look at the first step, save a deposit. How are you going to do that? How much money do you need? You will need to break down this smaller goal into a smaller goal again. Your goal might now be, "I'm going to save $10,000 so I can put a deposit on a house." That's a good start, but it's still not enough. How are you going to save the $10,000? Break it down again to something like this, "Each week I'm going to put aside $50 and do this every week for four years. At the end of the four years I will have the $10,000 deposit for a house." Seems much more realistic, doesn't it?

List your goals then break them down in to small attainable steps. The task should seem easier. It's almost like writing the recipe to achieving your dreams. Pretty soon you'll be cooking up a storm, in a well-managed time frame.

WHY LONG RANGE GOALS HINDER PROGRESS

Having long term goals can set you up for life. You know what you want, what sort of person you are and how much money you are going to make. Fantastic! Or is it? Are your long-term goals attainable or are they overwhelming? Too big, too ambiguous and immeasurable goals can be frightening and will hinder your progress to achieving your long and short-term goals.

Have you set too many goals? Do you feel paralyzed by the responsibility you have given yourself? If so, you may need to reduce the number of goals set. Remember you need to have both long and short-term goals; don't just focus on the big ones. Short-term goals are often steps to achieving your long-term ones - don't leave them out. While long-term goals can give you a sense of purpose, on their own they can become obstacles.

If you are focusing only on the goal, for example starting your own business, but not on the reason you want to achieve this goal (better hours, more control over your life), your goal can become scary. You may be plagued with thoughts such as, how do I start my own business, will I bring in enough money or will I be able to do this? These negative thoughts will hinder your progress to reaching your goal. If you want/need better hours and more control over your life, focus on these thoughts and begin to break down your long-term goal in to small stages. Attend business development courses, apply for start-up grants and believe in your ability to follow your dream.

Don't give up on your long-term goal. If you don't have persistence you may not reach your goal. You also have to be prepared to be flexible with your plans. All is not lost if the guy next door opens the exact same business as you were going to. Be prepared to change, and alter your long and short-term goals along the way. It is not a sign of failure if you change your plans to meet new obstacles. However failing to meet new challenges or becoming overwhelmed by all the obstacles will almost certainly lead to an unmet long-term goal.

If your goal is a lofty one, one that is not attainable, you obviously will not reach it. Failure to meet your goal can lead to loss of self-esteem and reduced drive to meet other goals. Setting yourself up for failure is something you should try to avoid right from the beginning!

Setting short-term goals that lead to an over-all long-term goal will stop you from becoming frustrated and overwhelmed. You may be surprised at what you can accomplish when you keep your long-term goals in the realm of possibility by being aware of the steps to reach them. Having high expectations, with no visible means of how you are going to reach that goal will certainly hinder your progress. Plan your goals well. Give yourself realistic steps to reach them. Then be pleasantly surprised by the outcome.

WHY YOU NEED TO CREATE A REALISTIC SCHEDULE

How busy are you? If there doesn't seem to be enough hours in the day now, how will scheduling your tasks help? When creating your schedule you must be careful you don't make matters worse. You need to be realistic. Don't overload yourself with a busier schedule once you have set some goals. Whether you are focusing on a short or long-term goal, the time frame to complete your nominated tasks must be manageable. Unrealistic deadlines will lead to either poorly completed objectives or not reaching the goal at all. Both are equally as bad and demoralizing.

How many tasks do you have written down for today? Will it be possible for you to do all of them? If not, will you feel disappointed in not having achieved your goals? Being overloaded can lead to procrastination, sending you into a state of inactivity. No way will you be able to complete your tasks now. If you have overscheduled you won't know where to begin!

Are you the sort of person who underestimates how much time a particular task will take? If you are, you may have unrealistic expectations for when you will complete the task. If you write down every step required for a job, you should be able to schedule more appropriately the time each job will take.

So how do you create a realistic schedule for yourself? There are some simple rules to follow.

1. List all your tasks (goals) and their due date
2. Break them into smaller steps or stages
3. Work out when you have higher energy levels in the day. Are you a 'morning person' therefore achieving more before noon? Schedule your most taxing tasks for the time when your energy levels are high. Take your rest breaks during low energy periods.
4. Use your activity log to schedule something in every hour slot. Include meal breaks, exercise, rest and social activities.

5. Get someone who knows you and your work practices to check your schedule - do they think you are being unrealistic?

6. Try out the schedule and see if you are managing. If you're not - reschedule! Like everything in time management, being flexible is the key. This should also apply to your schedule.

Realistic scheduling will reduce stress, not increase it. If your schedule is realistic you will be able to manage all your tasks, without feeling overwhelmed. You will feel in control of yourself and be managing time well.

KNOW WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL AND WHAT YOU CAN'T

You know you can't control time, only manage your use of it. But what other factors are within your control and which ones aren't when it comes to time management?

Goals that are dependent on the actions of other people may make it difficult to reach that goal. You have no control over other people's actions. If you delegate an action as part of a step in reaching a goal, you could lose control over the outcome. For instance if you are putting together a presentation on coal mining and you get a colleague to research the facts, you may not have the relevant facts in time for the presentation. Did you ask your kids to bring the washing off the line when they got home from school? Did they? Did it rain before they did it? The weather is certainly one thing you can't control! It's important to delegate tasks where you can, for effective time management; just remember it will take away some of your control over the outcome.

If your goal is reliant on outcomes that involve chance such as "I want to be a millionaire so I will buy a lottery ticket"; again you will have no control over the outcome. Although you may have an influence in a goal that involves some chance component, such as winning a talent contest, there are factors involved that you will have no control over, such as not knowing that the judge doesn't have any knowledge of the talent you've chosen to display.

Don't have all your set goals involving chance. Ensure some are ones that you have complete control over. Losing weight, giving up smoking, saving money are all good examples of goals you can have complete control over.

You don't have any control over how many emails or phone calls you will get in a day, but you do have control over how you will deal with them. Put your answering machine on and set aside a specific time in your schedule for dealing with phone calls. Do the same with responding to emails.

You also have control over your priorities. Remember your activity log. Plan your priorities for that part of the day you have the most amount of energy. Deal with your high priorities first! That way if you have uncontrolled interruptions, you will still have time to complete the highest priorities on your list.

You have no control over technical faults. But if you have your activity log with you and your computer breaks down, scan your list; see what else you can do while the computer is being fixed. Can you move a meeting time? Can you vacuum while you wait? What happens if your car breaks down? Can you make some phone calls while you are waiting for the repairman? Can you eat your lunch?

Controlling your day completely is impossible as many interruptions, be they welcome or not, will occur. If you are organized with your time and priorities, you will be able to deal with many factors that are not within your control. You can't control the weather, but you can be flexible in your time management!

HOW TO CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

An Action Plan is not a to-do list. On your to-do list you will have noted everything that needs to be done. An Action Plan shows you the steps that need to be carried out to complete your goal. Creating an Action Plan will break down your goal into stages, each one being a step towards the completion of that goal. Once you have broken down your goal into stages it will seem more obtainable. You can focus on each stage and keep track of your progress in manageable steps.

Creating an Action Plan is an easy process. Focus on your goal and break it down into tasks that will lead to the completion of that goal. Make each task a simple one, breaking them down to as easy a task as possible. If the tasks appear too difficult it is easier to fail, so be specific. Once you have broken the goal down into manageable steps, identify the action/s you need to accomplish for each step.

You may have several goals at once that you have action plans for. That's okay. Remember to set a time plan for each goal and its subsequent action. Always keep your goals realistic. And don't forget the all-important mantra - be flexible!

So here are the steps you should follow in creating your Action Plan:

1. List your Goals
2. Break your Goal down into achievable steps
3. Determine what Actions you will take to carry out each step
4. Determine what constraints (if any) there are to carrying out the Action
5. What help do you need to complete the Action? (From other people, technology, etc)
6. A time frame for the Action to be completed

Creating a table to record all this information is the best way to set up your Action Plan. Using the 6 steps above as your guideline you can keep all your goals in the one table. For example if one of your goals is to buy a car you would set your Action Plan up like this:

Column 1 - Goal: Buy a car

Column 2 - Steps: 1. Decide how much to spend 2. Decide what type of car to buy 3. Choose car dealership to buy car from 4. Buy the car!

Column 3 - Actions for each step: 1. Work out how much money you can put towards a car each month. 2. Investigate different payment options (do the same for each step)

Column 4 - Constraints: Do you have enough money for the car you want? Have you accounted for insurance costs? Will a bank lend you the money?

Column 5 - Help: Can anyone help you raise the money? Can you buy your car over the internet? How can you tell if the car is reliable?

Column 6 - Time Frame: Step 1, 1 week

Do this for every goal and keep it somewhere you can refer to it regularly. Follow your Action Plan and see how well you remain focused on your goals and how quickly you achieve them!

HOW TO APPLY THE 80/20 RULE

Using the 80/20 rule or Pareto's Principle will make you more effective in your time management. But what is the 80/20 rule?

In the early 1900's, Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto reported on his findings of the unequal distribution of wealth. That is, twenty percent of people owned eighty percent of the wealth! This phenomenon can be seen in other areas of work. Dr Joseph Juran called the principle the 'vital few and trivial many'. By this he meant that twenty percent of something is always responsible for eighty percent of the results.

But what does that mean for you? How can you apply this 80/20 rule to time management? What we do can appear as this ratio: twenty percent of work will take up eighty percent of our time. That seems like a lot of wasted energy doesn't it? But it can work the other way too. Twenty percent of tasks can give you eighty percent of the results. And that's how you need to apply to 80/20 principle. You need to focus on the twenty percent that really matters. The trick is to learn which twenty percent to concentrate on, to help make your time management effective.

To implement the 80/20 you need to prioritize. Once you've figured out which tasks are going to give you the best returns, concentrate on them. They are the tasks that you want to carry out first. To determine which tasks aren't in that twenty percent, you may need to ask yourself a few questions.

Do you frequently work on urgent tasks?

Do you work on tasks for other people, but they don't have any priority for you?

Are tasks taking longer than you expected?

Are you complaining all the time about your work?

Are you doing tasks you're not good at and are they taking up a lot of your time?

If you answer yes to these questions you may be in the category of eighty percent of your tasks only giving 20 percent reward. If so, you need to reverse things!

What about these questions:

Are you working on tasks that you've always wanted to do?

Will your current activities keep you pointed towards your major goals?

Are you happy with what you are doing?

Have you delegated the tasks you don't like or aren't proficient in to other people?

If you are working on activities you don't like, can you see how they relate to your long-term goals?

If you can answer yes to those questions you are making the 80/20 rule work for you.

To help make the 80/20 rule work, remember to prioritize. Projects that are valuable and will lead to your ultimate goal, or have approaching deadlines should be in the twenty percent you want to work on - especially if they make you smile! Tasks that do not lead to your overall goal, ones that you are not competent in, ones that make your grimace, especially if they don't have a deadline, might be worth moving out of the twenty percent of tasks you want to be working on.

Remember - the twenty percent of tasks that give you the greatest gains for the effort you put in are the ones to be working on!

STEPS FOR MAKING AN EFFECTIVE TO-DO LIST

Writing a to-do list every day is not hard to do. But how do you make it effective? Some lists may seem overwhelming with many, many tasks on them. Looking at the list and thinking "How am I going to get through ALL this today?" can be very daunting, so you may find yourself only putting the big, important tasks on the list, trusting your memory to remember the smaller jobs. This is not a good idea. Your mind will become cluttered trying to remember all the other things not on your list. This can make you unfocused for the tasks at hand. The purpose of committing tasks to a list is to take away the strain of remembering them from your brain.

Your to-do list must be linked in some way to your personal goals. Remember that goals can be broken down into stages. Using this knowledge will help in building an effective list. Your to-do list also must include the everyday tasks such as taking the kids to the dentist and doing the shopping. What it can't be is only mundane tasks or only goal-related tasks. The list must include everything. There are many techniques you can use when drafting your to-do list, but the simpler the better.

First, decide where you are going to write your to-do list. There's no point writing it down and then forgetting where you put it or not being able to access it. Using computer programs is becoming more popular to deal with all the multi-tasking expected each day.

Secondly categorize your to-do list in terms of Goals and Tasks. This will make it easier to keep track of what you have to do and what are the most important things to accomplish each day. Goal stages have actions to carry them out. It is those actions that will become part of your to-do list. Tasks include your mundane items.

Next prioritize your actions and tasks for the day. This is an important component of any to-do list. Those that have time constraints must be at the top of the list. Some to-do lists will include

time slots for when certain actions/tasks will be carried out. Some could be set out as a grid with a more flexible time pattern. For example Monday 10am-12 noon, meet with caterer, phone Bill, arrange dental appointment. Any of these three items could be carried out first, but all of them need to be completed in the two hour time slot - barring urgent interruptions of course.

Again flexibility needs to be considered. You may need to take the dog to the vet after work, but if your car breaks down that won't happen. Your to-do list is a reminder of what you want to accomplish. If you can't get it all done on that day, move it to tomorrow. Unless there are deadlines for certain projects, be prepared to be adaptable in your approach to creating an effective to-do list.

ANTICIPATE OBSTACLES AND PLAN FOR THEM

Planning for obstacles that will hinder your time management plan will help you stay in control, even when things appear to be spinning madly out of your grasp! Obstacles such as over-scheduling, perfectionism, procrastination and being a slave to the call of "urgent" can all be planned for.

Let's have a look at them in more detail.

Over-scheduling, as discussed before, is a huge obstacle. When creating a realistic schedule don't try and cram too much into your day. Set time estimates and make sure you are working on your high priorities at the time of day when you have the most energy.

Are you a perfectionist? If you don't think that anyone can do the job as well as you, you'll end up doing everything, or re-doing tasks until they are perfect. Being perfect is a psychological barrier to successful time management. It will give you an excuse for poor performance 'I wasn't happy with the outcome anyway' or 'I didn't have enough time to get it exactly right'. Remember, not everything has to be perfect.

Procrastination appears to be everywhere and can be a huge obstacle. Do you put things off because they aren't high on your priority list or do you procrastinate because you aren't quite sure how to do a task? Are things of very high importance hard to get motivated for? Avoid procrastination by making sure the stages to reach your goals are in small measurable steps. If fear of failure is making you procrastinate work out how you can overcome this fear. Is there anyone who can help you with this task? Do you need to learn more before you tackle the project?

How urgent is the job you are working on? Is it the one you want to be working on right now? Some people are slaves to the call of urgent. Can you ignore the telephone ringing? Do you have trouble identifying priorities? It may seem to you that every task on your to-do list is urgent. If you can learn to differentiate between urgent and non-urgent tasks and perhaps delegate some of the non-urgent ones you will no longer be a slave.

Other obstacles that need to be planned for include being over-accessible. Everyone wants a piece of you and you want to help everyone. Is that possible? Learn the art of saying no. It doesn't make you a bad person. Everyone has their limits as to how much they can do.

Do you get distracted easily? This can also be an obstacle to effective time management. Working on your concentration or making your workplace free from unwanted distractions can help.

Fear of failure and depression are also obstacles for some people. Negative thoughts can lead to both these obstacles. Depression can be a passing thing or a more serious illness. Medical intervention may be necessary.

Meeting an obstacle well prepared will give you the tools to deal with it. Obstacles will test you and your time management plan. Meet them head on and deal with them. Then move on to those things high on your priority list and remain in control.

ORGANIZE YOUR WORKSPACE FOR EFFICIENT TIME MANAGEMENT

A cluttered workspace can indicate a cluttered mind. Right? Maybe.

New material comes in every day, usually things you haven't scheduled to deal with so it goes in your in box. These items may bury important stuff you are working on or the new papers may have information you need but it may disappear amongst the clutter. This can result in you spending too much time on urgent things rather than the tasks you have prioritized. A lot of people will tell you they work better in a cluttered workspace. Others will have nothing on their desk except their phone, a pad and a pen. Which is better? It would have to be the clear desk. Right? Wrong.

Whatever works for you is best. Whatever will make you more effective in your workspace is the better option. Most people can afford to get rid of some of the mess on their desks and no one works well with a completely clear desk. Creating an efficient workspace is exactly the same as goal setting. Break it down into small steps so the task doesn't seem overwhelming.

There are five things you should do each day that will keep your workspace, whether it is at home or in the office, efficient.

1. Remove catalogs, journals, brochures, manuals etc from your desktop
2. File as you go
3. All memos, 'stick-it notes', reminders, etc to be transferred to your diary or planner (more about points 1, 2 and 3 in a minute)
4. Run your virus scan for emails or when downloading
5. Defrag your computer at the end of every day.

The first three points usually create all the clutter. If you haven't dealt with them for a while your desk will be a complete mess and you need to sort it out - now! Start by clearing your desk and creating three piles. From now on, you will deal with all paperwork, journals etc as they come into your workspace and separate them into these three piles.

Pile 1 is for anything that needs to be dealt with immediately. Pile 2 is for things that need to be filed. This is paper that isn't urgent but needs to be put with the other projects you are working on, or put with the goals that you will work on at a later date. Pile 3 is for paper that can be tossed or recycled. We use so much paper in this technologically advanced world. Recycle as much as you can.

That system seems rather simple. But it needs a little more, especially for Pile 2 to work. Most people have clutter on their desks because of the information kept in Pile 2. If they didn't have Pile 2, the Keep It pile, you would find different piles all over the desk with each pile representing a project to be worked on, referred to or to remind you of what needs to be done. It becomes too much information for your brain to remain clear for the task at hand.

For Pile 2 you need to invest in a series of folders that can be filed away, so at the end of the day, you can quickly re-file all the paper in Pile 2, into the required folders. Label each file for your projects, such as 'Tasks', 'Mining Report', 'Budgets' and so on. The folders can then be filed away and only brought out when you have scheduled to work on that project. Now you will be in control of the clutter on your desk. You will be able to find each item, as you need it. It is at hand in your filing cabinet, just a short step away from your desk. If you are concerned you won't remember where you put it away, make note of it in your diary or planner.

As you sit down at the end of the day to make your to-do list for tomorrow you can enjoy the feeling of a clear desk to start the following day's work. It's a load off your mind.