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Presents

Making Time

Your fool-proof guide to
getting more done in less time -
and reducing your stress in the process

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Published by:
ContemporaryEngineer.com PO Box XXX, Cheyenne, WY 82003
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Is time running away from you?

Do you let time manage you, instead of you managing your time?

If you answered YES, you're not alone struggling through each day and asking yourself at the end of the day "Where did all my time go?"

Time management is one of those skills no one teaches you in school, yet it dramatically impacts your professional and personal success.

It doesn't matter how smart you are if you can't organize information well enough to take it in.

And it doesn't matter how skilled you are if procrastination keeps you from getting your work done.

What really matters is recognizing today's fast moving world has more professional and personal demands than ever before.

Therefore, without solid time management skills, professional success will be an uphill battle and personal satisfaction will be more difficult to achieve.

It's also well known that people who implement successful time management strategies are able to control their workload rather than spend each day in a frenzied reaction to crisis after crisis.

As a result, their stress declines and their personal productivity soars!

So, no matter what stage you're at in your career, successful time management will not only help ensure your current success, it will also help advance your career.

And in your personal life, successful time management gives you more free time to do what you love to do most, including more time with friends and family.

So how do you manage your time to achieve this vision of professional and personal success?

By managing time according to the single most important time management rule – allocating more time to things that MATTER.

We can learn how to do this by following our four-step time management process.

1. Setting Defined Goals
2. Gathering Time Usage Data
3. Identifying Time-Eating Habits
4. Making Time

Our experience has proven if you undertake the effort to follow these steps, you too will be able to have more time for the things that matter to you most.

So without further ado, let's show you how to "make time."

Setting Defined Goals

Successful time management will help you find time to spend on important tasks.

But first, you have to figure out what your important tasks really are.

That's where setting goals comes in.

Goals are the foundation of successful time management. They help you decide what to do, then keep you focused on doing it.

We use the **SMARTER** process to ensure our goals are effective. **SMARTER** stands for:

- <u>S</u>pecific – detailed and written. Your goals should be clearly defined and in writing; there is a power to writing down your goals.
- <u>M</u>easurable – can be evaluated. You should be able to measure both the progress and accomplishment of your goals.
- <u>A</u>chievable – realistic and often challenging. Your goals should force you to stretch but with sustained effort should be able to be accomplished.
- <u>R</u>elevant – have value to you and your organization. Your goals should be important to you either professionally and/or personally.
- <u>T</u>imely – defined milestones and deadlines. You must have defined deadlines for your goals and any necessary milestones along the path to meeting those established deadlines.
- <u>E</u>valuate – have you met milestones? As you progress, you should periodically revisit your goals to see if you are meeting the milestones and deadlines, if adjustments are necessary to continue accomplishing the goal, or if the goal is even still valuable to you and your organization.
- <u>R</u>eevaluate – were midstream adjustments beneficial or detrimental? Naturally, it's just as important to revisit any adjustments you made to also ensure they were effective.

Your goals should cover everything you do including your day-to-day activities. For example, "I'm always on time for work," "I will pass the PE exam this year," "I will meet 98% of deadlines this quarter," or "I'm never more than 1 week behind on my laundry" are all legitimate goals.

This is because each of these has defined measurable outcomes so you can check your progress. They also each have a deadline – never is an implied deadline.

By contrast, a goal of "return all customer calls promptly" is hard to measure. How do you define promptly?

If you were to rewrite this goal as "return all customer calls within 2 business days" you have replaced "promptly" and can now measure your progress much easier.

Also as part of measuring your progress, you need to set achievable dates for your goals. For ongoing goals, you can set regular dates like "by the end of every month."

Example Goals

Here are some goals that come from our own goal lists over the past several years.

These should give you an example of SMARTER goals that include both professional and personal activities.

- Complete engineering analysis on arena by April 30th
- Win two new projects next year
- All delivered courses this year will receive instructor and content ratings of at least 4.5 on a 5.0 scale.
- Complete course review by November 3rd
- Edit book by the end of the month
- Next month's articles written by the 15th of this month
- Less than 2 weeks behind on my invoicing/paperwork by the 10th of each month
- Purchase new computer by December 15th
- Exercise 3 days/week for 50 weeks this year
- Attend every monthly Board meeting this year

These goals each satisfy the SMARTER requirements. They are specific, measureable, achievable, relevant, timely, and can be evaluated and reevaluated if necessary.

Exercise

Using a sheet of notebook paper, or a word processor, spend 5-10 minutes listing all of the professional and personal goals you have.

Make sure they satisfy the SMARTER guidelines, and if you'd like, you can identify them as professional or personal.

Then come back here as soon as you're done.

Classifying Goals

Once you've defined your goals, the next step is to classify them by type. Classifying your goals is an absolutely crucial step in the goal-setting process.

This is because how you classify your goals will determine what each one means to you and consequently how much time you dedicate to accomplishing it.

We like to keep the classification simple, because simple is easier to implement especially when changing a habit, and it also simplifies the rest of the process.

Therefore, we use three types of goals:
- **Important goals** - Goals that must be achieved for your professional and personal success. Examples of important goals include customer commitments, plan submission deadlines, product deliveries, retirement account, etc.
- **Secondary goals** - Goals you can live without for now, but which would help you meet important goals in the future. Examples of secondary goals include better design processes, streamlined manufacturing steps, learning a new business skill, learning a new language, etc.
- **Other goals** – Goals that would just make life better or easier. Examples of other goals might be a faster laptop, a bigger office, newer car, etc.

Why is classifying goals so important?

In the real world, you won't always be able to achieve every goal. By knowing which goals are vitally important to your professional and personal success, you will be able to better prioritize the 24 hours in your day.

Using our previously introduced list of example goals, we've classified them into important, supportive, and other categories.

Important Goals
- Complete engineering analysis on arena by April 30th
- Win two new projects next year
- Complete course review by November 3rd
- Edit book by the end of the month

Supportive Goals
- All delivered courses this year will receive instructor and content ratings of at least 4.5 on a 5.0 scale.
- Less than 2 weeks behind on my invoicing/paperwork by the 10th of each month
- Exercise 3 days/week for 50 weeks this year
- Attend every monthly Board meeting this year
- Next month's articles written by the 15th of this month

<u>Other Goals</u>
- Purchase new computer by December 15th

<u>Exercise</u>

Using the list of goals you previously prepared, think about which ones are truly important to your professional and personal success and which ones may be better classified as secondary or other goals.

Take your time because this step is crucial and will affect the rest of your time management process.

Allocating Your Time

Now, with your goals identified and classified, your aim is to spend on average:
- 70% of your time on **important** goals
- 20% of your time on **secondary** goals
- less than 10% of your time on your **other** goals

As with any new habit, especially with one that may result in substantial changes to what you focus on, it's often "easier said than done."

So for now try not to stress about the potential changes of this new process, or how many items you may have on your important goal list.

Instead, celebrate the fact that you've accomplished the first third of the "Making Time" process.

Then keep reading, and most of all, keep implementing the process.

Gathering Time Usage Data

Now that you've identified your goals, and determined which ones are the most important, the next step is how to focus your time and energy on them.

In order to do that, you must first determine how you are spending your time now and isolate those activities that are time-eating habits and distractions.

The best way to do this is to keep an Activity Log of <u>everything</u> you do <u>every day</u>.

Your activity log can be something as simple as a sheet of notebook paper or a document in a word processor. It can be a more automated spreadsheet or database.

It can even be a full-fledged time tracking software for your computer or smartphone. We've personally used Qlockwork Pro which integrates with Outlook.

Once you've done the basic 5-minute set-up for Qlockwork Pro, it automates time tracking. This allows you to focus on achieving goals and provides feedback regarding your actual time required vs. your own internal estimates.

If you're a pen and paper person, or interested in starting right away, we've included a basic activity log in the back of this book that we've also used ourselves. Feel free to print out as many copies as you need to get started.

No matter how you choose to log your activities, make sure the tracking includes a time-duration component and a place to classify the activity. This allows you to quickly identify activities and time spent directed toward low-value goals.

We include a "connected goal" column so we can see at a glance what goal the activity helps accomplish. We also include a start time component as our experience has shown each person usually has periods of higher productivity throughout the day.

Regardless of your preferred logging method, within a week or two of filling out activity logs, you will begin to see patterns.

These patterns will show you how you allocate your time to your most important goals and help identify your "high productivity periods." When combined, these become the keys to identifying and eliminating your time-eating habits.

Classifying Your Activities

To understand your time usage, you need to classify each activity in your activity log by the type of goal it helps you achieve – important, secondary, or other.

In other words, an activity that helps you accomplish an important goal is considered an important activity, an activity that works toward achieving a secondary goal is considered a secondary activity, and so on.

Logging Your Activities

It does not matter if you use a pen and paper activity log or a software solution like Qlockwork Pro to log your activities. Either way, you'll want to classify your day by following these steps.

Step 1: Identify an activity

This may be as simple as writing down an activity you worked on or as sophisticated as filling in a computer field from a drop-down menu of preselected/preloaded activities.

No matter your method, you will put down either the activity you're planning on doing next, or one that you worked on previously in the day.

Step 2: Classify the activity

Decide if the activity should be classified as **important**, **secondary**, or **other**.

Remember, the activity's classification should be based on the classification of the goal, if any, that activity is contributing to achieving.

Step 3: Complete the rest of the activity's data

With the activity now documented, and its classification assigned, note down the start time, the duration (if it's already been completed), and the goal, if any, the activity is helping to accomplish.

Step 4: Move on to the next activity

Repeat steps 1 through 3 until you have logged all your day's activities, including their classification, start time, and durations.

Once this becomes a regular habit, it should generally take you 10-15 minutes to classify your whole day following these four steps.

Naturally, if you're using a software program like Qlockwork Pro, you will can likely speed up the process by using previous entries, setting rules to automatically classify your activities, classifying several activities in one go, or choosing projects from the project dropdown in the list view.

Interpreting Your Logs

Once you have some data points, you'll be able to start analyzing and interpreting your activity logs. This may be as soon as one day, or it may take a couple of weeks to sufficiently show trends.

The first, and most important, thing to look for is how your time was allocated. Recall from Goal Setting that your aim is to spend on average:

- 70% of your time on **important** tasks
- 20% of your time on **secondary** tasks
- less than 10% of your time on **other** tasks.

So, as you study your activity log, determine how much time you spent on each of the different types of activities.

If you notice your time allocation on important tasks is substantially below 70%, you have an incredible opportunity to "make time."

In fact, if you simply make that one change of allocating a higher percentage of your time to important activities, your performance improvement in important activities will be enough to positively impact your success.

And that's regardless of whether you measure that from a fiscal, emotional, or personal satisfaction perspective.

Later in this book, we'll show you some techniques for making those types of changes.

But first you'll want to look for patterns. As previously mentioned, you may find a particular time period during your day where productivity is really high.

If you do, make every effort possible to schedule your high value activities (e.g. the ones tied to important goals) during that time.

As an example, we each have high productivity periods very early in the day – usually from 5:30 AM to about 8 AM. Because of that, we schedule activities that contribute to important goals during that time.

Then, after the high productivity period draws to a close, we'll start going through emails and taking care of secondary and other activities. This process is repeated a couple more times throughout the day.

By structuring our work days like this, not only do we accomplish more high value activities, we have also found we maintain a consistently higher level of energy throughout the entire day.

Identifying Time-Eating Habits

You've now defined your goals and gathered data about where your time is spent.

Your next step is to thoroughly review your activity logs and find out what your personal time-eating habits are. When you break these habits, you'll be well on your way to "making time."

A time-eating habit is a pattern of behavior that wastes your time, distracts you, or prevents you from achieving your important goals.

The following list represents the most common time-eating habits.
1. Focusing on non-important activities
2. Completing ineffective activities
3. Losing time to email and IM
4. Bouncing between activities
5. Procrastinating
6. Being the designated "helper"
7. Believing you can, or should, do it all

Before you review your activity logs to find out if you've fallen victim to one of these bad habits, let's go through the details of each of these "time eaters."

1. Focusing on Non-Important Activities

Recognized Pattern: You spend considerable time on secondary and other activities, and not enough on your important activities. As previously mentioned, this is actually a very common time-eating habit.

Counter Action: Keep your goal list updated and review it regularly. This could be done at the end of each day, but should at least be done weekly rather than monthly. And these shorter term goal lists should tie back to annual or long-term goals.

Further, when starting each activity, consider the goal the activity helps accomplish. If it isn't one of your important goals, are you giving the activity too high a priority? Can you defer it, or drop it and replace it with a more important activity?

Also, don't complete a non-important activity to a higher standard than absolutely necessary. While we all want the confidence of knowing a bridge design was completed perfectly, making sure the office decorations are perfect might not be quite as important.

If focusing on important activities continues to be a struggle, you might consider limiting non-important activities to certain days or times.

For example, you could restrict non-important activities to only Fridays or to the last hour of each day. Or, like us, only allow yourself time to do these AFTER completing some important activities.

2. Completing Ineffective Activities

Recognized Pattern: There are activities in your log that don't pay off – they don't help you achieve your important goals.

Counter Action: An excellent way to free up time is to drop ineffective activities – activities that don't help you achieve a goal.

For each activity consider, if I dropped this task and used the time on something more critical, would I be better off? Would my job performance be better? Would I have more personal satisfaction? Will the world end?

An excellent example of an ineffective activity is meetings with no agenda and few or no results. Strive to only attend meetings with agendas, assigned actions, and defined, demonstrable results. Most other meetings are pointless.

3. Losing Time to Email and IM

Recognized Pattern: In your activity log, email-reading or instant messaging (IM) represents one of your largest chunks of allocated time. Or, you find reading emails and IM shows up repeatedly over the course of the day.

Counter Action: Both email and IM can be very distracting, particularly if you let new incoming messages break your concentration on critical activities. There are many ways to control these communications rather than having them control you.

- If possible, review new emails/IM only at set times. One business owner we know only reviews emails at the end of the day. Another business owner whose entire business is online only checks email after 3 hours of critical activities, then once again at the end of the day.
- Turn off email/IM notifications. At worst, email/IM notifications cause you to start/stop activities (see time-eating activity #4). At best, these notifications break your concentration and disrupt your productivity.

To turn off Outlook notifications go to "Options Menu." In Outlook versions through 2003, go to Tools->Options and click on the Preferences tab; on Outlook 2007/2010, go to the File tab and select Options. For both, click on the Mail/Email item.

In Outlook 2003 and prior, click the "Advanced Email Options" button; in Outlook 2007/2010 scroll down to the "Message Arrival" section. *Ensure the 4 options in the section entitled "when new items arrive in my inbox" are <u>NOT checked</u>.*

For IM clients, we recommend turning them off completely unless your organizational culture has replaced the phone with IM. Refer to your specific IM client's help file for instructions on modifying notifications.

You can also train yourself, your clients, and your coworkers to use more effective email/IM communication. Here are some guidelines:

- Keep emails/IMs short and sweet. For example, don't write a long email that covers every situation for your entire organization. Instead, break it up into several short emails, each targeted and sent to smaller groups.

- Use descriptive subject lines. Recipients shouldn't need to open an email to find out what it's about – the subject should clearly tell them. "Should we meet?" is a bad subject because it's not clear. What is the meeting about and when is it? "Let's meet Friday 2/4, 2-3pm for design review" is much better.

- Each email/IM should have a clear "call to action." The recipients should know what you need from them and by when. A good call to action might be, "Please read this and provide your responses to the two questions below by the end of the day." If there are different calls to action for different recipients, consider sending separate emails/IMs.

- Be clear what "CC" means on emails. Recipients can interpret "CC" as meaning anything from "you need to read this right now along with the recipient" to "FYI – read if/whenever you get around to it." If a recipient must perform an action (even reading the email) it is usually better to include them on the "TO" line.

- Email is not an efficient means of instant communication. To contact someone urgently, use the phone (or IM if your organization has replaced the phone)

- Put yourself in the recipients' shoes. Write emails/IMs for the maximum convenience of the recipient, not for yourself.

4. Bouncing Between Activities

Recognized Pattern: Your activity log shows single activities in multiple small chunks throughout an entire day, or it shows you frequently bounce back and forth between activities without completing them.

Counter Action: Studies show a broken task takes 30% longer than a activity you complete in a continuous effort.

If you are constantly being interrupted and bounced from activity to activity, try to identify the root cause and reduce its impact.

This doesn't include "bounce time" such as researching technical details related to that specification on the Internet or in a trade journal while in the process of writing a specification for a project or device.

It can include constant interruptions by coworkers. If this is a problem for you, set aside specific times for answering non-urgent questions. Then request that outside those times, people interrupt you only for urgent issues.

5. Procrastinating

Recognized Pattern: You have an important task that intimidates you or seems overwhelming. This often appears as an activity log that contains too many secondary or other tasks, because you are avoiding one of your important tasks.

Counter Action: Recognize that avoiding your critical task won't make it any easier, and it's better to "just do it" as the Nike commercial says.

Here are some suggestions that may make it easier to take action:
- Write down what you are trying to achieve. The task may seem more approachable when you can see it visually.
- Break a big job down into smaller, manageable chunks. Like the old adage about how you eat an elephant – one bite at a time.
- Ask a coworker to help. Often, a different viewpoint and somebody to bounce an idea off may make the task less intimidating.
- Make sure you have the right skills to do the task. If not, sign up for a course or in-house training. Whatever you do, just take action.
- Get started on an easy part of the task. As Newton's law states, a body in motion stays in motion. So once you get started, it will be easier to continue.

If you still need help, consider a professional coach, a mentor, or even an encouraging colleague. Having "somebody in your corner" can help motivate you – especially when faced with a new challenge that seems daunting.

6. Being the Designated "Helper"

Recognized Pattern: Your activity log is filled with activities that help other people achieve their goals, but don't help you achieve yours. This usually results from you always saying "yes" when someone asks you for help.

Counter Action: A common time-eating habit is to postpone your own tasks in order to help other people complete theirs. Helping out often makes you popular and it can make you indispensable in your current position.

However, it doesn't help you achieve your professional and personal goals. And often it presents you from growing and graduating from your current position.

You don't have to stop helping out. If possible, try to incorporate it into your 10% "other" time allocation. Here are some additional practical ways to cut down:

- Place high value your own work and goals. Make sure the goals you've set for yourself are genuinely important to you. Regularly review them – it's your responsibility to meet them.
- If someone asks you for help, rather than taking on the job on yourself, offer training, advice, and feedback on their results. At first, this may take longer than doing it yourself, but it will save you time in the long run.
- If helping somebody is honestly important, incorporate the assistance you'll provide as one of your appropriately classified goals. Then, it will become part of your overall managed time.

7. Believing You Can, or Should, "Do It All"

Recognized Pattern: Your activity log contains a number of tasks that a subordinate could do with proper training. These usually show up as tasks that recur week after week, and regularly require more than 30 minutes to complete.

Counter Action: Delegation is the process of transferring your work to someone whose time is less valuable or whose position has been created for such tasks.

For each activity you've logged, consider:

- Is there a subordinate or someone less busy who could do this task?
- If they can't do it now, could I train them to do it?

You may have to train this person before you can delegate the task and have confidence they'll complete it to an acceptable standard.

But recognize by doing this, you are also providing this person with the opportunity to challenge themselves with a new goal and to increase their skillset and value both professionally and personally.

Below are some common excuses that can lead to under-delegation.

- **It would take longer to train someone than to do it myself**. In the short-term that's almost certainly correct, but in the long term you'll have more time, and you staff will not only be better, they'll have increased value themselves.
- **Someone else won't do it as well as me**. That may be true. But beyond the arrogance of thinking nobody is as good as you, does the task need to be completed to a "really high standard" or is there a lesser quality level that is still acceptable. Could you do something more worthwhile with that time?

- **I know should delegate this task, but I enjoy it**. If you delegate a fun job, it will make your staff happier. Think about when you were a kid – didn't having fun activities make it easier to endure the necessary crummy jobs?
- **The task keeps me in touch with my staff**. Instead of doing the task yourself, ask the person you delegated the task to for regular briefings on their progress. This will allow you to remain in touch with your staff and the task, while giving your delegate extra support, training, and feedback.
- **My team is too busy to take on extra work**. In the short term, you may want to take pressure off your team by doing some of their work yourself. However, that won't improve the long-term situation. Instead, spend the time looking for ways to reduce their work load. You may have to recruit new staff, improve training or change processes and workflows.

Now that you've identified your time-eating habits, let's head to the final step in the process and learn how to "make time."

Making Time

Making time is more about valuing your goals, and your time, as important than it is about anything else. We each have 24 hours every day, and yours are just as important as anyone else's.

You've likely already identified at least a couple time-eating habits. And like any other habit that doesn't serve you well, you'll have to work to change it.

We use the term change because it's been proven that habits are easier to change than to break. By this we mean it's easier to replace a bad habit with a good habit than it is to just get rid of a bad habit.

Ideally, when you eliminate a time-eating bad habit, it will be automatically replaced by an increased pursuit of your high value goals and their activities.

But we know the world is far from ideal.

Therefore, in the previous section we included a list of solutions to common time-eating habits such as email distractions, bouncing between unrelated tasks, and procrastinating from starting on important activities.

We've also found it's often difficult to succeed at changing habits when you have a laundry list of habits that need modification.

Therefore, we recommend concentrating on changing one habit at a time to prevent the "I'll never be able to do all of these things" mindset from overwhelming you.

By concentrating on changing one habit at a time, this not only breaks the changes into less-overwhelming, easily digestible parts, each changed habit provides a milestone that helps validate your ongoing success.

Be Ruthless with Your Time

The most powerful way you make time is by mercilessly weeding low value activities from your current activity list and replacing them with higher value activities instead.

To put it simply, spend less time doing those tasks that don't directly contribute to accomplishing your important goals.

You can achieve this by deferring them, delegating them, dropping them entirely, or completing them to a lower, but still acceptable, standard.

And remember these tips:

- Look for activities that don't contribute to your goals. If they take up more than 5% of your time, rewrite your goals or get rid of those tasks.
- Look for duplicated effort. If several people handle the same emails or attend the same meetings, evaluate if this is an effective use of your time.
- Look for individual activities you spend a lot of time on. Are you completing them to an unnecessarily high standard? Are you spending too much time on them to avoid another task?
- Look at how much time you spend reading emails and IMs. Minimize it with good email/IM practices.
- Look for time spent in ineffective meetings. Ineffective meetings should generally be dropped.
- Look for time spent travelling. Could you use an efficient alternative such as audio or video conferencing?

Remember, like weeds these habits have a tendency to return. So like a garden, it's important to be proactive and continually evaluate your activity log for signs that time-eating activities are beginning to sprout up again.

You now have all the information you need to use your time more effectively. Following these processes can generate hours of extra time every week.

And that adds up to extra days – EVERY month. And to quote S.L. Parker, you can "add the equivalent of a full week of work on your most valuable asset: you."

Finally, we'd love to hear from you! Let us know how effectively you are "making time" by dropping us a note at feedback@ContemporaryEngineer.com or posting a comment on www.ContemporaryEngineer.com.

Activity Log

Start Time	Duration	Activity Description	Class	Connected Goal

www.ContemporaryEngineer.com

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