

A person with curly hair, seen from behind, is sitting on the edge of a wooden boat. They are looking out over a calm body of water that reflects the surrounding landscape. In the distance, there are blue mountains under a clear sky. The overall color palette is dominated by various shades of blue.

Reclaiming Your Time

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The Time Crunch

If you feel like you are trying to do a lot more in a shorter period of time, you are not alone. In a recent study completed by Forbes readers, data showed that as many as 16% of women in leadership and 13% of male leaders reported feeling significantly overwhelmed in their jobs. Surprisingly, there was also an age difference, with younger managers and leaders reporting higher levels of stress and overwhelm than their older counterparts.

Other interesting facts and information on time shortages, stress, and overwhelm in the workplace provide an even clearer picture.

- The 2017 APA study on workplace stress in the USA found that 80% of employees reported stress was a factor in their life (personal, professional or both)
- Only 17% of people report rarely feeling stressed, and just 4% report no feelings of stress at work
- 1 in 5 people reported quitting a job due to stress
- 46% of people responded that workload was the most significant contributing factor to their levels of stress
- The average worker has 1 interruption every 8 minutes, which adds up to over 50 per day
- The typical interruption from a work activity consumes 5 minutes of productive time
- Managers and leaders report that 20% of their day is spent on vital or critical activities while 80% is spent on activities of little value or importance
- Lack of personal organization results in a loss of up to 1.5 hours per day in searching for misplaced, lost or incomplete items, information, or data
- Only 5% of managers and leaders report using a list or schedule to structure their day in small businesses, while over 40% of top business executives use this strategy

It is possible to avoid becoming one of these statistics. The next pages will provide concrete strategies anyone can implement to become more effective at time management.

The Social Media Death Trap

Most people have at least one social media account. This includes kids, teens, adults, and seniors. There are a variety of different social media platforms, but the most common are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest, with WhatsApp with Tumblr also very popular but more generally with the younger demographic of those 13-19.

In studies by GlobalWebIndex, most people using social media platforms spent, on average, 2 hours and 22 minutes per day on these sites. This includes 83% of users self-reporting they were spending time at work using these sites, even though only about 24% of that group reported any positive effect on their ability to do their job, connect with clients and customers, or to track down new leads.



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There is no need to give up social media, but there are ways to streamline your use of the platforms. Cutting down social media time can quickly free up one or more hours per day for most adults, including those using social media as part of their job.

A few strategies to help you to manage your social media time more effectively include:

- **Schedule** – schedule social media into your day. By monitoring how much time you use a given platform, and why the platform is used, it is easy to set a time allotment for use.
- **Analytics** – if you are using social media as a marketing tool, use analytics to determine how effective it really is. Most effective business marketing uses social media as part of the plan, but it is only a small part. Assuming that time spent on social media platforms translates into more leads is often a very incorrect assumption.
- **Set goals and timers** – while it may seem counterproductive, setting goals, developing boundaries, and using old fashioned timers, are all useful in focusing your efforts while on social media. This is also a great way to avoid getting stuck watching funny cat videos and looking up to find you have just wasted an hour of your day.

Daily, Weekly, and Monthly Lists

Ok, let's face it, nobody likes to live their life by lists. Everyone likes at least a bit of freedom to be able to take advantage of unique opportunities, seize a prospect, or to prioritize things based on real-world changes and necessities.

However, having an overall schedule and "things to do" list on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis can be instrumental in reducing redundancy, preventing oversights that throw off your entire day or week, as well as planning for the short and long term.

Getting Started

An excellent way to develop a scheduling plan is to track yourself for a week. Use any paper or online calendar to track what you do at work by the 30 minute or 1 hour block for each day during a typical week. A simple spreadsheet makes an easy weekly tracker. Remember, this is just for you, so feel free to use abbreviations, color coding, or terms that are relevant to you to simplify this process.

It can be helpful to set an hourly reminder on your phone, computer, fitness tracker or smartwatch to remind yourself to make a note of what you have just completed or are working on.

This creates a compelling and easily visible way to see where you are spending your time and where you may be doing things that are counterproductive or redundant in your day.

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At the same time, use the weekly and monthly schedules to pencil in tasks that are ongoing or routine within the week and the month. It may be possible to move some of those reoccurring tasks around to balance out your work rather than having everything due in on the last few days or the middle of the month. You may also be able to group similar tasks, notably different types of reporting or record keeping tasks, to assist in limiting your need to review the same types of data over and over again.

By taking a big-picture look at what you do, how you use your time, and how you can make changes to boost efficiency, most people find they can streamline some of their tasks.

For the weekly and monthly calendars, just pencil in things as they come up or as you become aware of deadlines, events, or days you need off. By having these readily visible you can quickly confirm appointments or reschedule for a day without conflicts.



Managing Email And Retaining Your Sanity

Email is a necessary evil for most business professionals. It is a convenient way to share information, to reach out to people with details or requests, as well as to stay in touch with friends and family.

Unfortunately, email is also a significant time drain for most people. The average person working in the United States receives 121 emails per day, and this number is only increasing. To help manage emails, consider the following:

- Keep work and personal emails as separate accounts – do not use your work email for personal communications and keep any non-work related subscriptions to email lists or newsletters in your personal account.
- Block off email time – schedule 10 or 15 minutes to check and respond to non-critical emails two or three times a day. Turn off notifications to your email or silence any audible notifications to avoid the natural tendency to open the folder and take a look.
- Have an emergency communication method that is not email – for those leaders managing situations where immediate responses are required, consider a text message or phone call policy for these situations. A phone call often allows for a complete understanding of the issues and shorter time to find a solution.
- Use filters – most email accounts now allow for folders to be set up and specific emails from designated senders to go directly to those folders rather than in the main inbox. This allows you to choose when to manage different types of email without the manual sorting process.
- VIP emails – another option is to use a VIP folder and have all emails from specific people or departments filtered into that folder. This allows you to quickly identify incoming emails that need immediate attention.

Is This Meeting Really Necessary?

While meetings are essential for any organization, they are not always a productive way to work through a problem. Most middle managers spend about 30% of their time at work in meetings, and this does not include gathering data, writing status reports, and preparing for and getting to and from the meeting.

The higher up the corporate ladder, the more time is spent in meetings. Evaluating the need for team meetings and combining meetings to accomplish more at one time can free up a lot of time for the entire group. To manage your meeting time, consider the following:

- Virtual collaboration – there are a lot of different platforms that can be used for project management, collaborative work projects, and even for virtual meetings. These platforms allow for continuous and asynchronous information sharing as well as the ability to host a "live" virtual meeting where everyone can talk and discuss. By being able to share your screen with the others, and have immediate access to all referenced documentation and data, this can help keep meetings moving forward.
- Have an agenda – for scheduled meetings, have an agenda. Meeting participants can add to the agenda, which helps focus the discussion on what is relevant and essential. Some businesses even have a time limit on agenda items, which helps to ensure the sharing of relevant information without all the additional discussion.
- Ask for meeting feedback – consider a survey or a feedback discussion with group members. This is an ideal time to find out if there are ways to streamline the meeting, shorten the meeting, or even hold it in a more productive alternative way.
- Evaluate your role – if you are only at the meeting as the department head, manager, or leader, consider if your participation is necessary. It may be just as effective for the group to meet, and then have you come in for the presentation of the proposed decision or recommendation.

Schedule Mindfulness Time For Yourself

So far, all of these suggestions have made recommendations for how to take things out of your busy day to create more time to do the things that you wish to focus on.

The last suggestion is for at least one and ideally two short blocks of time to add into your schedule. This scheduling of time for yourself is not to look at emails or complete your hourly activity log, and it is not to catch up on a phone call or to contact that hard to locate employee, client, or customer.

Instead, these are short 2 to 5 minute blocks of time where you are just you. These short breaks focus on mindfulness, which is the state of being aware of yourself and your surroundings in the present moment.

Mindfulness does not have to be meditative, nor does it require any special seating position, stretches, or poses. Instead, it is the simplest way to connect your mind, body, and spirit to the present. It is a therapeutic way to reduce stress and anxiety, to lower heart rate and blood pressure, and to focus and clear the mind.

To get started, sit in a comfortable position and set a timer for two minutes. Repeat the following steps for the duration of the time:

- Close your eyes, and keep them lightly closed.
- Breathe in through your nose and feel the breath move through your nasal passages, down your body, and into your lungs. Feel your ribs expand and the air push down into your stomach and inhale as much as possible. Count to five in your head on the inhale.
- Hold your breath for the count of 4.
- Exhale through the mouth or the nose for the count of 8.
- Count to 4 and then inhale and repeat.

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During this time, if thoughts come into your mind, see them but let them go. Do not think about them or hold them. This can be hard to do, and some people find saying "not now" in their head is a helpful trick.

At the end of the two minutes, open your eyes and notice how you feel relaxed - both mentally and physically.

This is also a great way to prepare for any type of activity or event that causes anxiety or stress. Over time, you can stop counting add visualization exercises or other mindfulness exercises as you become comfortable with becoming still both physically and mentally.



Summary

I hope this short e-book provided some ideas for how you can reclaim your valuable time.

As a Board Certified Executive and Leadership Coach, I work with professionals at all levels and across all industries to become better at what they do. Common topics or areas of focus for executive coaching include:

- Strategic planning
- Onboarding of new mid to upper level managers
- Improving personal effectiveness
- Managing organizational change and restructuring
- Creating positive workplaces and cultures
- Increasing collaboration within the work environment
- Professional development focus, goal setting, and planning
- Succession planning
- Team building
- Emotional Intelligence development
- Conflict management skills development
- Effective leadership skills
- Interpersonal skill development
- Work/life balance
- Stress management and stress resilience
- Motivating and engaging teams and employees
- Empowerment of employees
- Creating a "deep bench" in emerging leaders
- Effective influence within an organization

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about executive coaching, please visit the website at www.poscs.com for more information.

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No matter who you are or how carefully you plan your life - things happen. Sometimes these things provide multiple opportunities, sometimes they create challenges and often they have the potential to create conflict. In my role as a professional coach and conflict resolution professional, I have the unique privilege of working with a wide variety of clients who are in search of personal and professional answers, solutions, and effective strategies for creating the life they want to live. Certified in EQ-i 2.0 leadership, workplace and group assessments, this valuable tool is a great starting point for developing a balanced approach to interpersonal interactions in any setting. Working for over 26 years as a mediator, trainer, educator and professional coach, my focus is on assisting people in finding the best solutions and developing a path for personal and professional growth and development that is uniquely their own. My background and credentials include a Master of Education (M.Ed) in Curriculum and Instruction, CDM (Credentialed Distinguished Mediator) through TMCA, and I am a Board Certified Coach (BCC) and fully certified in EQ-i 2.0 assessments. I have experience in senior management, administration, and as an entrepreneur with my own business.