

# 12 time management mistakes that set you up for failure

**John Rampton** November 21, 2019



Time management is all the rage these days, and it's easy to understand why. Most people, particularly small business owners and entrepreneurs, are working themselves to the bone. It's been found that 70 per cent of us work beyond "office hours" and into the weekends. We're working from bed, while eating dinner and when on vacation. This hurts our relationships, health and productivity.

It's not shocking that we seek out as much time management advice as possible. Unfortunately, much of this information is so unhelpful it is setting you up for failure.



## **1. You think there isn't enough time.**

We've all been guilty of believing there is not enough time. We look at our to-do lists or calendar and get overwhelmed. "If I only I had more time today I could get all of this done."

We all have the same 24-hours in a day. Some people can get the most out of this limited amount of time because they've admitted there's a problem and did something about it.

Complaining that you don't have enough time isn't going to grant you any more time magically. It may make you feel better, but only momentarily. It's not getting to the root problem, which may be that you're lousy at time management. Admit to yourself that there is enough time — you don't know how to get the most out of it. Now, you can start improving your time management.

## **2. Believing that there's a one size fits all solution.**

You've admitted there's a problem and you're scouring the internet for advice. You should feel good that you took this first step. It will only take you reading two or three posts to realize that there isn't such a thing as a one-size fits all solution.

Ana Cecilia Calle, a Ph.D. student in Austin, Texas, discovered this great truth when reading about time-management tools that offered: "this promises that you would gain certain control over your life," she told the BBC. "But whatever you start doing, it works for a while, and then it stops working." The reason? Most of these tools were built by developers who wanted to solve their own time management problems — which means they may not be valid for all of us.

Instead of relying on a tool with all the bells and whistles, find out where you're struggling and what's essential for you. For example, if scheduling is taking you away



from product development, then you could use a scheduling tool like Calendar that uses machine learning to automate most of your scheduling needs. If you're wasting too much time on email, then consider using a tool like SaneBox to help tame your inbox.

This advice may not be the most thrilling answer, but when you identify your problem areas and priorities, you can find the best solution that works for you.

### **3. Failing to distinguish between being busy and productive.**

Here's another time management trap we fall into: believing that just because you're busy means that you're productive. That's great that you cleaned out your inbox and spent some time connecting with customers on social media for the last couple of hours. But, was that the best use of your time at the moment?

I honestly believe that this concept of — busy vs. productivity — is something a lot of people struggle with. Here's how you can be productive instead of just busy:

- Identify what is both important and necessary, as opposed to focusing on something that can wait.
- Implement an organizational strategy. For example, every night I have a routine where I lay out my clothes, list my three most important tasks, review my schedule, and make sure I have all my gear for tomorrow. A little prep the night before ensures I have a smooth and productive day.
- Eliminate distractions, like email and text messages.
- Don't worry about being perfect.
- Only say "yes" to time requests that serve a purpose.
- Be willing to make certain sacrifices, like quitting an organization that is no longer beneficial.
- Surround yourself with other productive people.
- Weigh the pros and cons before jumping on a trend.
- Be honest about your progress.



## **4. You'll have less anxiety.**

It's true that when you properly manage your time, you can alleviate some stress. However, depending on the time management system you choose, make sure that your system doesn't add to your stress.

Take the favorite Getting Things Done method. This system requires five steps: capture, clarify, organize, reflect and engage in everything you have to do. Phone calls, emails, meetings, shopping and the projects you have to do around the house. For some, this is going to cause anxiety and overwhelm.

Time management is only useful when you're aware of your limitations and don't let the system dictate your entire life. In other words, when you don't tread lightly (especially at first), time management can add more stress to your life.

## **5. Miscalculating the time needed for specific tasks.**

Let's say that you want to write a blog post for your website. You block out an hour for this task. You end up spending two hours — your entire schedule is out of whack. Indeed, there is a truth that when you set a time limit on certain things that have to be done, this can motivate you to get them down within that period. However, sometimes it's just not possible, and you have underestimated the actual time this task takes you to complete.

The best course of action is to track your time for a couple of weeks. You can manually do this by jotting down your daily activities in a notebook and calculating how long each will take and see if you are realistic. You can also use time-tracking software like Toggl or RescueTime. By having a more accurate idea of how you're spending your days, you can dedicate the right amount of time to specific activities.



## **6. Focusing on time management, instead of task management.**

“Task management is the process of managing a task through different stages: planning, development, and completion,” writes Laura Sima in the Teamweek Journal. “It works both on an individual and on a group level by getting people to accomplish their goals.”

“Effective task management involves all the steps from planning it to setting a priority, including status, outlining the necessary resources for completion, notifications, and observation,” adds Sima. Tools like “online calendars, workflow software, and even project management software” will “help you outline different projects, tasks and clear statuses from all of them.”

Task management is more effective than time management because these tasks “come with clear limits which make them easier to manage. You know when you’ve started work on a project — and you know when you’ve completed the job. It’s one limited thing at a time.” Compare to this: “the concept of time is quite loosely defined.”

## **7. Always grabbing the low hanging fruit.**

You just got settled into work and are ready to tackle your to-do list. With which items are you going to kick things off your day? You’ll probably pick the easiest, least time-consuming job — or an essential item.

If you’re able to knock off 10 things from your list, you’ll “feel” as if you’re having a good day. Remember that whole idea behind being busy and productive? Just because you get a bunch done doesn’t mean your time was spent or focused where you would be making the best progress.

To be the most effective — don’t pick the “low-hanging fruit,” meaning the easiest. Devote your energy to your most important priorities — and know which work will provide you with the most production. Quickly find a way to have menial tasks either automated, delegated, or saved to do during your energy lulls.

## **8. Having to wake up early.**

I've personally found waking-up early — 5:15 AM to be exact — to be the most productive time for me. That doesn't work for everyone — mainly night owls. If you get up early — you can't stay up all night. You have to have a bedtime schedule — and stick with the routine. Many people suggest that in order to improve your time management you have to wake up early.

If you're not a morning person, then don't force yourself to change. Instead, base your schedule around your specific ultradian rhythms.

## **9. You'll reduce your workload.**

If you manage your days properly, then you won't have such a heavy workload. Sadly, this isn't the truth.

Thanks to Parkinson's Law, if we have availability in our schedule, then we're going to fill it up. You may have cranked out your most important tasks for the day, but, now you're just going to add even more items to your calendar or to do list so that there aren't any blank spaces.

Remember, when it comes to productivity, follow the 80/20 productivity rule. Instead of loading up on even more work, use those open slots to meditate, daydream, or add flexibility to your schedule.

## **10. Get everything done in the shortest amount of time possible.**

Remember that Aesop Fable "The Tortoise and the Hare?" The same idea applies to time management; slow and steady wins the race. There's a misconception that if you get as much work done as quickly as possible, you'll be more effective and productive. This



notion that you've done more only works temporarily before you burn yourself out. Even machines need to be shut down and rebooted occasionally.

Working through lunch, putting in 60-hour workweeks, and never taking a vacation will only go so far. You need to pace yourself and take breaks to rest and recharge.

## **11. Never, and I mean never, waste your time.**

The other day it was beautiful outside. It was one of those days with bright sunshine and clear blue skies. The last thing I wanted to do was stay stuck inside. So, I took a 30-minute walk. I felt guilty at first. When I returned, I was more focused and ready to get back to work.

What I'm saying is that it's okay to waste time now and then. That doesn't mean binge-watching Netflix. Instead of working all day — take some time to read, listen to a podcast, exercise, or catch-up with an old friend or colleague. It may sound counterproductive. But, wasting time can be an asset preventing burn out. You'll unwind, it'll spark creativity, and give you a chance to reevaluate your priorities.



## 12. Not taking control of your life.

Finally, you need to start saying “no” more often. If you say “yes” to every request of your time, you’re not only spreading yourself too thin — allowing other people’s priorities to get ahead of your own.

Instead of letting others control your life, take over the reins. Set boundaries on when it’s time to work and when it’s not. Only help others when you have the availability. Accept meetings when they have a purpose, and if you already have plans, don’t try to commit to something else in addition to what’s already in your calendar. This set of suggestions is the key to time management. Knowing when to accept and deny new projects, clients, appointments, and social functions.

***John Rampton is a serial entrepreneur, investor, and startup enthusiast. He is a founder of the calendar productivity tool Calendar.***



**926 David Low Way Marcoola QLD 4564**

**P: 07 5448 8161**

**E: [info@cmaccounting.com.au](mailto:info@cmaccounting.com.au)**

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