

No.1 Time Management Skill: Doing Nothing

By Lyndsay Swinton

You can improve your time management skills by doing nothing. Sounds impossible? Okay you're right; you have to do something but not very much.

The skill of time management is about knowing what to do and when. And one other important tip, but we'll share that secret later.....

Got to run, people to see, places to go...

Busy managers are always on the go. They have noisy phones, bursting email inboxes, back-to-back meetings, and they grab lunch on the run. But hang on, if they're so great, why are they doing so much?

Being busy is not the same as being effective

A key time management skill is knowing what to do and when to do it. Imagine this... The phone rings while you're answering emails and a colleague is fast approaching your desk. What do you do?

- a) Answer the phone, whilst reading your emails. Your colleague will have to wait.
- b) Stop everything and talk to your colleague.
- c) Ignore the phone and your colleague and keep working on emails.
- d) None of the above.

Answer – d) there is no one correct answer!

How could I be so mean to ask a trick question? Simple, I wanted to demonstrate that there are always 101 factors affecting decisions about how best to manage your time. Only you know the right answer.

Tune-up your time management skills

The mental checklist for time management decision-making goes something like this.

1. What is the most important thing for me to be doing right now?
2. What deadlines have I got?
3. What happens if I don't do this? (this is the top time management question :>)

Let's look at each of these in turn...

What's most important?

Good relationships with your colleagues, that's what's most important. Effective managers make time for people because they know in the long run it will pay back many times more.

Back to the colleague approaching your desk. He just wants to go for coffee... If you've got a great relationship with this person, then maybe defer the invitation so you can finish up your emails. If you need to get to know him better or smooth out some conflict, then go for it.

If thinking about relationships in terms of payback seems calculated and ruthless, then get used to it. This is what good time managers do. It is just another time management skill. The 10 minutes spent going for coffee may uncover why you've had to chase your colleague for that report and get it resolved then and there.

Is there a deadline?

If deadlines are looming then they win. After all, in olden days a prisoner would be shot if they crossed the deadline! (Don't you just love the original meanings of words? :>)

But is your deadline negotiable? Can you buy extra time and do it later or de-scope the work and do less but on time? Your careful relationship management will work wonders for you when time is tight.

If the deadline is non-negotiable, quit moaning and go do it, or you'll get shot!

Back to the ringing phone... It's shouting loudly, demanding urgent attention. Unless you're in customer services or expecting an important call, consider using voicemail to your advantage. Avoid switching from "email mode" to "phone mode" and back where possible as it steals time and affects your concentration.

What will happen if....?

Will the world stop turning if you don't do something or do it in a different way?
Don't fool yourself into being busy by thinking you're work is invaluable or perfect.

Question the value of everything you do and how you do it.

- o Think through your routine tasks or tasks that simply take too much time – are you doing them for a reason or from habit?
- o Stop sending that report and see who notices.
- o Prepare online answers to “frequently asked questions”.
- o Delegate to a colleague.
- o Redesign the process.

It may take time to save time, but it's pays dividends in the long term and makes your job more interesting.

Slow down, you go too fast

I hope you're getting the idea by now – the sum of all time management skills is knowing what to do and when. Busy managers are not effective managers if they don't stop and think;

- o Is this important?
- o Is this urgent?
- o Do I have to do this
- o Can I do this differently?

Asking these four simple questions will revolutionize your time management skills.
Put time in your diary today to become a more effective time manager.

By Lyndsay Swinton

Owner, Management for the Rest of Us

www.mftrou.com

[Signup for Monthly Management Tips here](#)