

Time Management

Discover how managing your time can help you achieve more in life and give you greater opportunity to enjoy yourselves, too...

The article **Goal Setting** (see the Personal Development page of the Stitchlinks website) looked at how business people set SMART goals and how you can use the same principles in your everyday lives.

“Time Management is all about looking at the time available, the tasks that need to be done, who needs to do them and combining these for maximum benefit and efficiency.”

Here, we take a look at another business tool, Time Management. It is used to improve productivity in a business setting, but you can apply the same principles to your own life. It will enable you to get the most out of living and minimise stress. So what is it all about...?

It's all about looking at the time you have available, the tasks that need to be done,

who needs to do them and combining these for maximum benefit and efficiency. It involves planning your days and allocating specific time slots for particular tasks and keeping to this plan. Time Management gives a structure to your day and puts you in control, minimising last minute panic activities.

Controlling time

Time that was previously wasted can be used more efficiently to enable you to fit more into a day. Demanding or important activities can be scheduled for times when you're at your best. Likewise less important tasks can be slotted into times when you perform less well, or they can be delegated to others.

Before you begin, take a close look at the structure of your day and make a list of the jobs that need to be done. The best way of doing this is to keep a diary for a week. Write down everything you do including rest periods and times when you sit doing nothing. If you're keeping a

diary for work make sure you allow time for routine jobs that have to be done and any travelling time.

Remember too that phone calls, unforeseen problems and disruptions will all inevitably eat up precious minutes. Don't schedule your day so tightly that you can't accommodate these.

If you need to plan a specific event or project it can be useful to plan backwards from the date of the event to determine when you should start work on it. This will help to avoid the stress of last minute panic and will enable you to foresee any problems.

Eliminate unnecessary

Everyone develops routines that evolve over time without much thought or structure, so when you take a close look at how you fill your day, you'll inevitably find activities that are unnecessary.

Eliminate these from your 'to do' list. Businesses often categorise tasks into those that must be done, those

that should be done and those that could be postponed or delegated. An Urgency Grid (see right) will help you assess the importance of tasks. Categorising jobs into 'Urgent and Important', 'Important but not Urgent', 'Urgent but not Important' and 'Not Important or Urgent' will help you prioritise them.

'Important and Urgent' tasks should be done immediately and not delegated. Tasks of this nature may include meeting a deadline for today or tomorrow or an urgent phone call.

'Urgent but not Important' tasks are a priority but can be delegated and could include catching the post with an important parcel – it's urgent for today, but can be done by someone else.

'Important but not Urgent' tasks don't need to be done immediately but can't be delegated, such as buying a present for your partner's

“Using an Urgency Grid such as the one above will help you to prioritise your tasks. Make a ‘to do’ list of these with the most important at the top allowing time for unforeseen distractions.”

birthday next week, for example. Tasks that are 'Not Important or Urgent' can wait and can be delegated and

<p>URGENT AND IMPORTANT – needs to be done today and can't be delegated.</p>	<p>IMPORTANT but not URGENT – can't be delegated but don't need to be done today. (Note may become urgent if left too long).</p>
<p>URGENT but not IMPORTANT – needs to be done today but can be delegated.</p>	<p>Not URGENT or IMPORTANT – can be delegated and don't need to be done yet. (Note may become urgent if left too long).</p>

Using an Urgency Grid is a good way of prioritising your tasks and deciding which can be delegated.

may include painting the house or washing your car. However, the urgency of these tasks can change if left. If you forget to buy your partner's present it will become urgent and important on the day!

Ask yourself what tasks take up time but contribute little or nothing to your life or wellbeing? Could some tasks be done quicker or differently, or could someone else do them just as well? Prioritising in this way means valuable time and energy are spent on the issues that are most important to you.

Now write a 'to do' list with the most important items at the top. When you complete a task, cross it off your list. This will give you a sense of achievement and

serve as a reminder of the remaining tasks.

Ensure you've allocated enough time to do important tasks well – undoing mistakes wastes more time in the long run. It's much better to get things right the first time around, but you also need to recognise when you've done enough and stop.

DO it

A problem we're all guilty of at times is procrastination – putting off jobs we don't want to tackle. Delaying jobs often means they get bigger and more difficult, so when you finally have to do something about it, it causes a great amount of frustration and wasted time.

It's much better to use your goal setting skills (see

Goal Setting on the Personal Development page of the Stitchlinks website). Break larger or onerous tasks up into manageable bites and start immediately. Even if you only do 10 minutes a day. If a task does get unmanageable it's a good psychological strategy to spend 15 minutes a day on it. Remember the most difficult step is getting started in the first place. Doing a little every day will make you feel better.

You may decide that you need to improve your skills in certain areas. Perhaps learning about new technology will improve your efficiency at work and home.

Don't waste time

There are many time wasters that you have control over. These include clutter and untidiness; things not being put back in the right place; failing to listen to instructions; constant or long phone calls and lack of delegation. Your environment can have a significant time wasting impact on your life, particularly if you're always misplacing important documents or tools; those used regularly should be close by.

Many of us waste time simply making decisions and mulling over endless possibilities. Learn to think and decide faster and stick to your choices. Of course one of the biggest time

wasters is unexpected disruption. It always happens, so learn to expect it and schedule in some flexible time to accommodate.

Always insisting you do everything yourself can waste an enormous amount

“Don't procrastinate. The task will only get bigger or more difficult. Break large or onerous tasks up into manageable bites and start immediately. Getting started is the most difficult bit!”

of time, too. There's no shame in asking for help, so if you find things getting on top of you, ask your friends, colleagues and family to help out and don't be afraid to say no to increasing demands on your time.

Successful delegation is an art in itself and if you're one of these people who finds it hard to let go it's one you should learn! When delegating it's important to be clear in your instructions, time scales and targets, and to discuss these with the person who's helping you out. If necessary write down step-by-step instructions, but recognise too that everyone does things differently and yours might not be the best way. You might actually learn something new, by listening to someone else's viewpoint on how a task should be tackled!

If the person you're delegating to is new to the task it would be helpful for both of you to monitor the situation. Ask for regular feedback so they feel supported. Remember to always praise a job well done, however small.

On a personal level getting enough sleep and regular exercise will ensure your concentration is at its best, making you more efficient. Too much stress can have a detrimental effect, so use stress management and relaxation tools daily. Your knitting and stitching are perfect for this. Taking regular breaks to stretch and walk around will boost your circulation and oxygenate your brain, too.

Adapting for the future

Plans should never be set in stone. So review and change them to adapt to your lifestyle as it evolves. Life will have many things in store that you can't possibly envisage right now, and it would be a pity to miss out by being too rigidly set in your ways!

Pacing takes Time Management a step further and will enable you to better manage chronic pain, ME, fibromyalgia and other long term medical conditions (see **Pacing** on our Your Health Matters pages). If you're finding it difficult then why not seek the support of friends who understand on the Stitchlinks Forum?