

TEN TIPS FOR MANAGING TIME

Tamara Holland

OVERVIEW

When we're lucky enough to have responsibilities and feel engaged, we also typically feel we don't have "enough time." Our screens -- computer, smart-phone, others -- usually intensify this feeling. Because no matter how darned wonderful our screens are at making many tasks faster and easier, that benefit comes from the fact that screens make people, ideas, information and connectivity instantaneously ever-present, ever-stimulating -- and ever-demanding. Phew! Suddenly, figuring out how to manage our time so we can actually get things done feels itself like a part-time job. Here are ten tips to help you streamline that process.

TIP ONE: THINK LONG-TERM FIRST

Steven Covey puts it well in The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: "Begin with the end in mind." Literally. Covey asks us to imagine our own eulogies. What do we want people to remember us for? Which boils down to, how did we spend our time? Most of us probably don't want to be remembered as, say, internet power surfers. Figure out what matters to you, and commit to it by voting with your time.

TIP TWO: CALENDAR YOUR CHOICES

We honor those time choices by scheduling them into our calendars. Again, literally. Write in your calendar the hours you'll spend on each activity that matters to you. Keep track, just like we keep track of dental appointments, when to pick up the kids, when to be at work. Because isn't how we want to be remembered just as important? Treat it like it is.

TIP THREE: PUT YOUR BODY ON THE TO-DO LIST

Taking care of our bodies -- consistently! -- has to be an honored priority. We all know how tempting it is to "get more done" by cutting out exercise, and cutting into our sleep hours. That method of operating is unsustainable. It never, ever works over the long haul. So, feed yourself nutritious food. Get enough sleep enough every night. Exercise regularly. Meditate if you can.

TIP FOUR: SCHEDULE TIME FOR YOURSELF

A friend calls this the "oxygen mask instruction." Flight attendants tell us that if oxygen masks become necessary, we should put on our own first, and then help others. That's because when we're out of commission, we can't help anyone. Time is just like oxygen. When we don't spend any time rejuvenating ourselves by doing what we love, we're ultimately depleting our capacities to be of service anywhere.

TIP FIVE: SET GOAL DEADLINES AND BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEM

Based on what you value, give yourself a goal and pick a realistic time by which you'll achieve it. Then, tell someone what you intend to achieve, and by when. If you'd rather use technology for this accountability check, look at websites like stickK.com -- where you can make a contract with yourself, and designate either a reward or punishment.

TIP SIX: SURRENDER THE NEED TO MASTER EVERYTHING

It's easy to get time-paralysis by believing that we can't start a project until we . . . fill in the blank with anything from, "Learn Adobe Photoshop," to "Learn how to optimize my operating system." But no one can be an expert in everything. Expecting we will be hamstrings us. So, import the services of someone who knows enough to teach you what you need, and get on with your goal and life.

TIP SEVEN: UTILIZE LIST-MAKING TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Make weekly and daily to-do lists . . . if they serve you. If they empower you by organizing your time and thoughts, and don't instead overwhelm you.

Checking things off "to-do" lists can provide great energy boosts. Lists also help remove nagging items from our brains' pop-up screens. Writing down "Pick up the laundry" lets our brains know we've received their memos, and they can stop sending them (typically at 3:00 a.m.).

TIP EIGHT: LEARN YOUR FIELD'S EFFECTIVE TIME RATIOS

To develop my paper arts business, economic folk recommend I spend 50% of my work time on marketing, 30% on administration, and 20% on visioning and new production. Bingo. Right there, I've got a template for how I should best be allocating my work hours. Learn what is the effective time ratio for your field, and follow it.

TIP NINE: LIMIT YOUR SCREEN TIME

On-line time can be powerfully productive. It can also become a "time suck" that keeps us from what we should be doing instead. We can look honestly at whether we're wasting our days' time by being on-line. We can set time limits, and honor them. Also, consider the benefits of a day or two each week of "screenless" time, as William Powers suggests in Hamlet's Blackberry.

TIP TEN: GET A COACH IF YOU'RE STUCK

Sometimes we find ourselves completely overwhelmed by our schedules, unable to prioritize and release ourselves from unproductive commitments, or to get a handle on anything that feels manageable. It's an awful feeling. Don't stay stuck. Find a good coach to help you get back on track.

RESOURCES

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, by Stephen R. Covey

Hamlet's Blackberry, by William Powers

Eat That Frog! by Brian Tracy

ABOUT TAMARA HOLLAND

Tamara Holland is a post-conviction attorney for condemned prisoners in California. She is also the artist and owner behind Bean Up The Nose Art (which reprints her mixed-media collage pieces as paper products), and is

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