

Time Saving Tips

Today, there are more gadgets and devices designed to keep people connected and save time than ever before – so why do so many people feel they have less time to themselves? Welcome to the 21st century - the era where people work longer hours, get less sleep and generally lead more stressful lives.

The western societal pressure to keep busy or at least *appear* busy is apparent when you rehash some recent conversations with acquaintances that you happen to bump into at the grocery store or shopping mall:

Bob: Hey John - long time no see. What have you been up to?

John: Oh the same old same old. I'm still working at the same job and the wife and kids are fine.

Bob: And how's the job treating you?

John: The boss has me working long hours as usual. I've been upping my caffeine intake to 5 cups a day just to stay awake. Sometimes I don't even have time to eat a proper breakfast or lunch...

Aside from cutting into your sleeping time (not highly recommended), or asking for shorter hours (not happening unless you are willing to forgo the extra income, or unless your boss is a god/goddess), how can people save some time during the day? I am certainly not a time management guru, but rather a regular shmoe working the nine to fiver. The following tips are things I have learned on the job, or are gleaned from the minds of others:

- Office
- Business Trips
- Home

Saving Time at the Office

Project Management

- Tackle difficult tasks during your peak performance times. If you are a morning person, do the most challenging assignments first thing, and leave the simpler tasks for later in the day when you are feeling less productive.
- Avoid sidestepping particular tasks by asking yourself "What do I need to accomplish?" rather than "What do I want to do first?" Often, team members delay acting on tasks they view as unpleasant – this merely slows down project progress and increases the difficulty of that task. Try to create a supportive environment which encourages action on all tasks.
- Be aware of the fine line between communicating regularly with team members and causing interruptions. Schedule regular meetings, only call on other members outside of meetings if you have a clear agenda, and conversely, do not let others interrupt your task at hand.
- Schedule project deadlines a couple days ahead to allow for interruptions and unforeseen obstacles. This way you are more likely to have the project complete on time without having the additional stress of being behind schedule.

Email

- Organize your email Inbox by creating different folders per client, project and so on.
- For long and detailed email messages, prepare the document in MS Word or another word processing application and then send as an attachment. This makes it easier for you to edit and find the document, as well as preventing the reader from doing unnecessary scrolling.
- Once a week (perhaps on a slow Friday afternoon), spend a few minutes cleaning out your Inbox. Regular email cleaning will save you time in the long run and prevent your Inbox from reaching its maximum storage limit.

- Unless absolutely necessary, only check your email a few times a day. Checking your email every time you receive a message distracts you from your task at hand – it takes a few minutes for most people to get back on track.

Phone

- If you are on a tight deadline and do not want to be disturbed, allow your calls to go straight to voicemail. None of your outside clients will know you are actually sitting at your desk, so relax.
- Set aside half an hour a day to return calls. Leave detailed messages describing exactly the purpose of your call or risk being engaged in a lively game of phone tag. There are few things more annoying and time wasting than calling someone just because you are “returning” their call.
- For important phone calls, write down what you wish to ask or obtain from that person. This prevents you from having to call them back later.

Work Space

- Try not to overstuff folders in filing cabinets – this will only make it more difficult to retrieve specific documents later. If necessary, create subfolders within general folders.
- Quickly write a To-do-list for the following day at the end of each day. Ensure that this To-do-list is *realistic* – there is no point in making a list if you are not reasonably able to complete it as it will cause frustration. This means leaving some spare time for normal everyday interruptions. Creating a list will help you settle into your tasks more quickly in the morning.
- Spend 5 minutes at the end of each day (or at the very least every week), cleaning and organizing your desk. You will then begin each day or week with a clean desk and therefore a clear mind.

Frame of Mind

- Learn to delegate and let go. Many managers complain about having too much work and too little time. If you have reasonably competent staff, then allow them to help you – after all that is why you hired them, right? Ask yourself if it is *vital* for you to be involved in a particular task. If the answer is no, then delegate.
- Take your full lunch break away from your desk if possible (if you do not have an hour, even half an hour away is preferable to a full hour at your desk). By remaining in your work space and eating at your desk, you are visually reminded of the task(s) that remain to be completed and not allowing yourself to relax. Reminder the cliché “Out of sight, out of mind” (at least for a little while anyway).
- It is okay to say “No.” If your schedule is jam-packed with projects, meetings and deadlines and your boss asks you to begin work on yet another assignment, say you cannot do so at this point. Ask your boss to help you re-prioritize your workload, so you can focus on the most important tasks first. If need be, ask for help. In my experience, it is better to say no and/or ask for help, than to accept more assignments and not be able to deliver.

Saving Time on Business Trips

Packing

- I have 2 words for you – *wrinkle resistant*. Yes, I have heard the many criticisms of wrinkle resistant clothes such as poorer quality, etc. However, there are many decent wrinkle resistant dress shirts available today – I am not saying you have to buy a whole wrinkle resistant suit! This should save you a few minutes of ironing at least.
- For clothing items that are not wrinkle resistant, create a “pocket” for your smaller items by folding and laying a pair of pants or a skirt halfway in the suitcase. Next, place smaller items such as a t-shirt, underpants and socks on top of the bottom pants/skirt layer. Lastly, take the ends of the pants/skirt that is hanging from the side of the suitcase and fold on top of the smaller items. This prevents you from getting the dreaded “bend-in knee” effect.

Arrangements and Traveling

- Call the concierge ahead of time to make dinner reservations. You will avoid lining up at the desk and will have a plan for the evening.
- Keep your passport and other identification in an easily-accessible yet secure area of your baggage. People sometimes pack their passport into their suitcase causing delays as they must rummage through their belongings.

Saving Time at Home

Meals

- Keep a few take-out menus in your car so you can order dinner while you are stuck in traffic and pick it up on your drive home. Or better yet, keep some take-out menus on your desk at work, so you do not need to use your cell phone while driving.
- Cook larger meals. You can divide up the leftovers and freeze/thaw them for later.
- Prepare larger proportions of staples such as potatoes and rice. Make baked potatoes one night, potato salad for lunch, stir fry and rice the next night and throw in both the potatoes and rice into a healthy stew the last day.

Household Cleaning

- After washing and drying bed sheets, fold neatly into a pillowcase to keep the entire set together. This way you do not need to go searching for the separate items next time you change your sheets.
- Use one multi-purpose cleaner for windows, mirrors and furniture to enable you to clean many rooms without needing to switch cleaners.
- Wipe and anti-static sheet over your furniture which helps to repel dust.

Fitness

- Exercise while watching TV. This is probably one of the easiest forms of multi-tasking – an added bonus is that you do not need to worry about timing yourself. Simply exercise while watching a half hour sitcom from start to finish.
- Many of you may already have one – the exercise ball. Unlike sitting in a chair, the exercise ball engages your abdominal muscles and improves your posture. Use it when you are paying bills or watching TV, or ask your boss if you can bring it in to work.

This article is written by a staff member of Arcspan (a division of Acrodex Inc.). This article does not necessarily reflect the opinion(s) of Acrodex Inc., Arcspan or any of Acrodex's affiliates. Arcspan's Professional Services Automation application helps organizations manage projects, resources, timesheets, invoicing, billing and more. To find out more about how Arcspan can increase your business's profitability, please visit www.arcspan.com, or www.acrodex.com for corporate information.