Ten top tips for effective time management
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Poor time management is the bane of many a business. In today’s fast-paced world – a new email lands in your inbox every 10 seconds, the phone doesn’t stop ringing, and your day is filled with multiple meetings – it can be difficult sometimes to focus on the job in hand.

A recent report from McKinsey surveyed 1,500 executives across the world about how they spend their time at work. Findings revealed that only 9% the respondents deemed themselves ‘very satisfied’ with their current time allocation.

Effective time management is the backbone of business. Ineffective management doesn’t just waste time, but money, too. Missed deadlines, financial losses and job loss are all potential outcomes of poor time-management skills, not to mention the impact of the stress it can cause on an individual’s physical and mental health.

“Many employees feel battered by being constantly accessible. There are dozens of different ways of clawing back time. The important thing is to do something rather than feel powerless. Even small efforts may help you to feel more in control.”

Dr Rob Yeung, organisational psychologist at leadership consulting firm, Talentspace.

Top tips for effective time management
Understand how you currently spend your time
This is an important planning step. View it as being a bit like knowing how much money you’ve got, and how you currently spend it, before writing a budget. If time runs away with you and you feel as though you’re constantly chasing your tail, work out which tasks are the most time consuming.

By keeping a log you’ll become more aware of more stressful, busier times and down times, and will be better equipped to plan your time.

Prioritise
You may already work hard and be well organised, but if your efforts are going on the wrong things you won’t be effective. Once you’ve made your to-do list, sort out the jobs in order of priority so you can devote more time to the most important tasks. And make sure you differentiate between urgent and important tasks: an urgent task may not necessarily be important! And know your deadlines.

Remove distractions
You are probably distracted several, if not dozens, of times every day. Whether it’s emergency emails and phone calls, browsing the internet, being interrupted by colleagues, or deciding your desk is too messy, there are some simple measures you can take to minimise the number of distractions you may face. Schedule email times so that you check and respond to emails at times of low productivity, block out other distractions like Facebook and other forms of social media, unless you use these tools to generate business.

If other people in the office distract you, doing something simple like wearing headphones will mean you’re less likely to be interrupted.

Do one thing at a time
Constantly floating between tasks doesn’t help you or those working with you. You will concentrate better when you focus on one job at a time. Fitting between different things will make each job take longer. Of course, sometimes, things will happen that take priority over what you are doing at that moment, but apart from unforeseen interruptions, work methodically through your to-do list.

Work out your goals
These can be short, medium and long term. By setting a specific goal you can clearly see what it is you want to achieve. Make sure your goals are realistic, even if they are challenging. You can be ambitious but make sure the outcome is attainable as well as measurable so you can stay motivated and see progress as you make it.

Make a list
A common time-management mistake is trying to remember too many details, leading to information overload. A better way to stay organised and take control of your projects is to write a list. Sir Richard Branson is such a believer in lists that he has littered the pages of his biography with them and regularly credits his enormous success to their existence. A daily to-do list helps focus the mind. Don’t get bogged down with detail though. Three tasks on a list is perfectly acceptable. If you end up actually completing five, even better.
Use technology
There are lots of tools hitting the market that can help with time management. Sage 200 Extra and Sage 200 Extra Online are examples of business management solutions that can help streamline your working practices beyond all recognition. A regular review of technology that you currently use will show ways of improving efficiency. Mobile tech and online software, such as Sage 200 Extra Online, mean that workers can work from anywhere at any time. As long as you get the balance right, being able to work on the move can be an important part of a good time management strategy.

Delegate
By delegating effectively, you can use your time more efficiently and increase the amount of work you can deliver. Delegation allows you to make the best use of your time and skills, and it helps other people in the team grow and develop to reach their full potential in the business. By rearranging the workload so that you are working on the tasks that have the highest priority for you, and other people are working on challenging jobs, you have the key to success.

Learn to say no
All of the above is irrelevant if you take on too much in the first place. Your ability to say no is an important component of your time management skills. It determines how much of your time will be wasted on solving someone else’s problems. Of course, you can’t always simply refuse an extra task, but if it really doesn’t fall within your remit, then an assertive explanation as to why it should not go on your to-do list will give you time you once may have lost.

Take regular breaks
It may seem a contradiction in terms to incorporate doing nothing as part of making sure you are as productive as possible, but it is crucial. Overworking is as damaging to your health and a business as not doing enough, so it’s important to step away. Make sure you have a proper lunch break, get away from your workstation and get some fresh air. Good time management at work means doing high-quality work, not high quantity. You may feel resentful about being in the office after hours. You’re also likely to be less productive and frustrated about how little you’re achieving, which will compound your stress.
Find out how Sage 200 can help your business to make the most of each working day

Sage 200 Extra and Sage 200 Extra Online, help small and medium sized businesses get full visibility of information across their entire organisation, letting managers track their own – and their team’s – time. Up to 50 users in companies ranging from 10 to 200 employees can use the solution and improve time management by bringing everything together in one, easy to use, intuitive workspace.

Accurate, timely insight helps you drive success
Save time by getting straight to the business-critical data you need, from sales, to orders, invoices, productivity, budgets, profits and much more in a single system. Get up-to-date, real-time information quickly, without the need to spend time compiling reports.

Access data when away from the office or on the road
Enjoy the freedom to work anywhere, making it easy to access critical information when you’re out of the office visiting customers or suppliers, and making home working straightforward.

Gets you a clear view of every project, quickly
Make the most of your time by tracking multiple projects based on time and materials, fixed price contracts, or a combination of both. Share information with other areas of your business to save time and reduce administration costs.

Makes sure your team is managing time effectively
Collect timesheets and expenses information online from anywhere, saving time and ensuring accurate payments.

Sage 200 Extra helps to improve your time management by providing easy access to data; automating manual processes; assisting mobile working and much more.

To find out more go to: sage.co.uk/sage200extra
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