

MILES V SMITH

Lost time? Can we recoup it?

No, but let's make it more valuable, fun, and productive here on out!

"Don't say that you don't have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to ... Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michelangelo, Mother Teresa, Leonardo da Vinci, Madame Curie, and Albert Einstein." Life's Little Instruction Book by H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

How many times do you find yourself asking yourself how did the time go by so quickly and what have I actually done with my time? An hour goes by at work, you got side-tracked by an incoming phone call from a colleague or an unexpected visitor, and barely even got started on what you really wanted to do in that time slot. Guess what? You've got good company! Most of us struggle with lost time.

Time is possibly our most precious resource; perhaps even more so than money. In a given two week period, we work anywhere from 60-100 hours. Add to that another 50-75 hours of time before and after work. With time we have the ability to do so many things including realize dreams, have fun with friends and family, exercise, work billable hours, take vacations, volunteer, learn new skills or crafts, or just relax.

Certainly we can't recoup time that we've already spent but we can begin to increasingly reduce the amount of time going forward that we lose to things that aren't our real priorities. Instead, we can actually spend more time on what's truly most important.

In order to best take control over this precious resource, time, one of the best, first steps you can take is to begin to prioritizing what you want to do with your time and monitor how you spend your time.

"Hang on!", you say. "That will take a lot of time, cutting into the time I want to spend on my priorities". Sure, it will take some time, but if you put the right systems in place, setting priorities and monitoring time can be easier than you think, and will actually give you more time for what you want, and will become a habit.

So let's look at how this might work and the benefits from monitoring your time and identifying in advance what tasks you want to accomplish. Let's create a two-week planning system.

Why two weeks? This seems to be a manageable, sane, and adequately frequent block to work with. If it doesn't work for you, feel free to try another frequency.

Two-week planning

- 1) **What do you want to accomplish in the next two weeks?** Determine everything you want to accomplish in the next two weeks. Consider creating regular, ongoing categories for yourself. Here a sample list of categories to get you thinking:
 - Work projects
 - Community/Volunteer work
 - Financial
 - Friends and Family
 - Fun
 - Spirituality
 - Health/Fitness
 - Household

- 2) **Prioritize!** Once you have a list in place, begin to prioritize the list. What items are non-negotiables such as exercise, time with family, pre-established meetings and appointments (Drs.' Appointments, business meetings, your kids' events, date-night)? Categorize all of the non-negotiables as A-priority. Are there any other action items that absolutely have to be done in the next two weeks? If they can be postponed to a later date, categorize them as B- or C- priority, with C not having a timeframe to their accomplishment ("nice to have's").
- 3) **Revisit the list!** Is there anything you can delegate or move to a B- or C- priority? Come on! Be honest with yourself and find where you can get help.
- 4) **Assign the amount of time** (hours) that each task that you want to accomplish will take and if the time will be split up between the two weeks. For example, maybe writing a draft of an article will take you two hours this week and then incorporating the feedback will take you an hour next week. Create a spreadsheet that allows you to divvy up the time of an action item over the two weeks if necessary. See the attached example.
- 5) **Add up the total number of hours of your action items.** With the use of the aforementioned spreadsheet the tally can be much easier and quickly changed as you adjust your priorities and time estimates.
- 6) **What are the available hours over the next two weeks?** Now estimate the number of hours that you will work or dedicate to your activities and projects in the next two weeks. Don't forget to factor in breaks for meals, workouts, commuting, spontaneous moments, and picking up the kids, etc. Give yourself some breathing room for contingencies and spontaneity. What if you bump into a friend or there's a backup on the bridge?
- 7) **Reality check!** Compare #5 to #6 above. Are the two in sync or out of whack? Most likely, there are less hours available to you to do what you want than you think.
- 8) **Refine what you want to accomplish until #5 is 80% of #6** (The additional 20% is left unassigned for spontaneous things that pop up and to account for tasks that take longer than estimated)
- 9) **Assign specific time slots for when you will now do the projects over the next two weeks.** This allows you to be more faithful to what you're committed to doing and can be a good boundary for incoming requests. You can also look forward to that time dedicated to an A-priority.
- 10) **Now go to work!**
- 11) **Monitor!** As you complete tasks/projects be sure to keep track of the number of hours they ACTUALLY take (using the spreadsheet you've created, add a column next to your time estimates to note actual time taken to complete the project)

- 12) **Evaluation!** At the end of two weeks determine how many and which specific projects you completed relative to your goals (Here you are keeping track of what's most important to you in this two week time period). Through this exercise, you will begin to develop a better ability to estimate completion time as you keep track of this.

How did it go? Did you accomplish more than you usually do? Were the real priorities in your life given top-billing? Did you experience any other benefits from this? One possible additional outcome is feeling more energy from the sense of satisfaction over accomplishing goals and not losing time. We hope so!

Sources: David Ellis, Falling Awake Life Coaching (www.fallingawake.com) and Nicole Vamvakias