

**How to free up more of your time
to do the things that
really matter.**

**By
Judy Janse van Rensburg**

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Introduction	3
Mindset	4
How long is your To-Do list?	5
Deciding whether to attend meetings or not	7
Are you being robbed of time without knowing it?	8
Is technology helping or hindering?	9

Introduction

Do you ever wish that the world would just stop for a few minutes so that you can catch up?

I work with a lot of managers in high pressure environments like production and manufacturing. No one seems to have enough time.

Everybody is always saying how they wish they had more time to do the things that need to be done.

How often do you hear people say "I just wish I had more time"? When they do decide to do something about it, they often phone the training department to find out what courses are available to "manage time".

Very often then many managers go on a time management course where they learn a lot about theory and models of time management. I suppose this could help to a certain extent; however I've found that the majority of managers I work with have already attended a "time management" course and still don't have enough time. So what are you then supposed to do?

The thing is that we all get the same amount of time – 24 hours – in a day. So what do you do with those 24 hours? How do you spend your time?

Do you allow people to steal your time? If so, who is stealing your time and how can you stop them from doing it?

Are you attending endless meetings and not getting to what needs to be done?

Many of my clients ask me how I manage my time, because I seem to get a lot done. So I had a good look at what I do and put it together in a format that would be useful for you. I'm not saying that this is the only way, by no means, but I have found that the techniques and tools outlined below do contribute substantially to freeing up more of my time in order to do the things that really need doing.

Mindset

Probably the most fundamental aspect that will allow you to get more done is your mindset. Many of the managers I work with have limiting belief systems about time and time management. They believe that they have to manage their time. This is where I tend to have a different opinion. Time can not be managed. You cannot turn back the clock. When time is lost, it's gone – you can't get it back. You can't make time go faster or slower. This law applies to every human being on the planet (unless you've designed a fully functional time machine!) What you need to manage is tasks/actions, not time.

You have to prioritise the tasks that you have to do on a daily basis.

The way we talk also influences our ability to get things done. If you keep saying that "I don't have time, I'm so busy", that will become true for you. In this respect I've found affirmations to be extremely helpful and have used the following affirmation to help me get more things done:

*"I have more than enough time to
do the things that need to get done today"*

You may choose to write down your own affirmation here:

How long is your To-Do list?

A colleague of mine used to have very long To- Do lists. She would often walk around the office declaring to everyone that “Today I’ve got 27 items on my To-Do list, I’m so busy”. Then the next day she would have 35 items on her list. Needless to say she never got all the items crossed off her list. They just seemed to keep growing. I don’t believe in long To-do lists. Quite frankly, I find them demotivating. So many years ago I decided to chuck out the long To-Do list and limit my list to 5 items.

The following technique is one I’ve used for years and it works well for me.

→ 5 Items priority

Keep your to-do list limited to 5 items. This forces you to think about what you really need to get done today. The idea is to focus on the few tasks that will have the maximum impact on today, but not only today, it will also positively influence tomorrow next week and before you know it, the entire month. It may take you a while to get the hang of how to stick to 5 items.

A question I often ask managers that I coach on making the most of their time is:

“What would happen if you did not complete that particular item?”

If the answer does not include something like “the production line will stop”, “staff won’t receive their salaries”, “I’ll get fired”, “I’ll be in big trouble”, etc. then the item is removed from the list. If there is no consequence in not completing a task, then it should not be on your list.

You need to consider the impact of your to-do list items.

Which items can you put on your list that, once completed, would have had an 80% effect/improvement on everything that you should deliver?

Wanting to do everything

The other tendency that I often see with managers who complain about lack of time is that they want to do everything themselves.

The following exercise will help you in deciding which items really require your personal attention.

Ask yourself: *Do I really have to do all of this myself?*

(This is where most managers say yes. Please read further.)

So, if you were hit by a bus on your way to work tomorrow, who would you phone to complete some of these tasks for you?

Write their names here

Clearly there are other people that can do these tasks. So why don't you go ahead and ask them to do it?

Identify at least three items on your list, which you could give to someone else to do.

Write these items here

→ Does everything on your list have to be done today?/What is your time line?

Does everything on your list need to be done today, or are there items that could be done next week or even later? I'm not saying you should procrastinate, but consider the timelines on your to-do list.

One way of streamlining your timeline is to prioritise the items. This is how it works:

Put a 1 next to all items that absolutely have to be completed by the end of today. Put a 2 next to items that can be done tomorrow. Tomorrow all your nr. 2 items become nr. 1. If you had to "carry over" nr. 1 items to your list the next day for 3 days in a row, that item is:

- either not important or ;
- it is an item that is intended for someone else to complete or;
- it is a task that you must delegate to someone else.

Deciding whether to attend meetings or not

One of the key areas where managers spend the most of their time on is attending meetings. I have found that many of the managers I work with spend between 5-6 hours a day attending meetings. That's insane. How do they get any work done?

Personally I am very allergic to meetings, especially meetings that are scheduled for more than 20 minutes.

I've found the following criteria to be very helpful in deciding whether I should actually attend a meeting:

- Is there an agenda for the meeting?
- Is the purpose of the meeting clearly stated?
- Will my input in the meeting have a direct influence on the outcome of any decisions that need to be made?
- If the purpose of the meeting is to share information, could the information rather be distributed via e-mail instead of requiring my physical presence?
- Do I physically have to be present or could I send someone else to represent me?

Are you being robbed of time without knowing it?

Have you given thought to the number of people you interact with on a daily basis? Does every single body that you interact with really require your attention? Why are they interacting with you? Are they requesting specialised knowledge that only you have? Are they only looking for someone to have a "chat" with? Are they complaining about things that you can do nothing about?

Make a list of the people you know that steal your time. Those people who pop into your office on a regular basis to chat and when they leave you wonder "What was the purpose of that discussion?" Or people that stop you in the hall way to tell you about their day and complain and not really add value to the conversation.

Write your list here:

Be careful of the open door policy. Some people may abuse that policy. They don't feel like working and then go about trying to find someone to chat with about "work stuff", but it is not a focussed conversation, nor does it require action on your part.

Start distinguishing between those conversations that you can add value to and those that just take up your time.

Is technology helping or hindering?

Technology like cell phones and e-mail are fantastic, provided that they are used appropriately.

How often do you check your e-mail?

Do you sit in front of your computer and open every e-mail as it comes through your inbox. Is this not making you very reactive?

You may want to set specific times when you check your mail, say early in the morning, at lunch time and maybe at about mid afternoon.

How many mails do you get and do they all require your action?

I find Internet Explorer very helpful in that I can sort my mail according to who it comes from. In that way I can already distinguish what needs to be at the top of my list. Let's say you are part of a project team, you may want to create a folder for that project team in your inbox in order for all the mails relating to that project to be organised in one place the moment they enter your inbox.

We get bombarded with so much information on a daily basis, that I believe one of the key skills for a manager in this day and age is the ability to know what information is important at the right time.

I've managed to root out those FYI mails. If something does not require my doing something about it, then I don't want the information. Who has the time to read through piles of documents just to learn that it does not require your attention?

To what extent are you using the meeting schedule function and task function in your e-mail program? Do you use the reminder and "flag" functions in your e-mail program?

Do you ever take a lunch break?

A large number of individuals I coach do not make time for lunch. In the majority of cases these individuals skip lunch or have lunch on the run. They often only allocate 5 -10 minutes for lunch. It is essential to take some time out to nourish your body and let your mind rest for a few minutes.

Other tips

Allow one hour every day for dealing with unexpected problems. In other words, expect the unexpected.

Take action!

What to do now:

1. Read and re-read this.
2. Make a new to do list.
3. Now do it.

I hope you have found this E-booklet useful.

For more resources on being more effective at work, please visit:

<http://www.mindz.co.za/documents>

Warm regards

Judy Janse van Rensburg

Director

Mind Strategies

judyjvr@mindz.co.za