

## How to tackle your time thieves

Do you feel as though you are under time pressure for much of your day to day life? Do you think you are “cash rich, time poor”? So many people living in today’s apparently increasingly busy and frenetic world feel as though they do not have enough time – yet we have all the time there is!! Why is it so many people struggle with this? Over the years of running various forms of time management training I have come to the conclusion that the reasons are simple. However, doing something about them is challenging!

To get more from your time, there are 3 basic steps:

1. Decide what you want to do or achieve.
2. Plan and organise to get there.
3. Cope with the distractions to your plan.

It is this third step which causes many to struggle. The range of time thieves which either sneak up gradually, mug us or even get invited in!

You need to identify which ones steal your time. Create a simple system to record them – noting who what they are and who is involved. The main time thieves which typically affect us are listed below, with some ideas for dealing with them. As mentioned, these are both simple and yet challenging. The only person who is going to make them work is you!

**Telephone:** Learn to be unavailable by turning phones off, using voicemail (although it is important to update messages and not to have a generic one hanging around) or re-directing the calls. Where feasible, have calls screened. Give people a time when you will return calls, and ask for clear messages about the purpose of the call.

**Interruptions:** Your boss, learn to manage this situation proactively! One option is to acknowledge what they are asking for, state that you have another thing with a deadline and ask them to tell you which is the priority. Another choice is to arrange to meet with your boss regularly, using the time to share what you are planning to do and asking them what they have coming up where they may need your help so that you can schedule it.

Your staff, check whether it is something which really needs your help or is it “a monkey”! You need to create “a monkey free zone” by learning to pass these back, stopping feeding them. Encourage them to think of some options for how they will deal with it, come back and share these and to tell you which they will do. Support them with their choice –and be ready to do it again until they become confident in making their decisions and stop leaving you the monkeys!

If colleagues cause interruptions, learn to feel OK about telling them you are busy, or to give them a time when it is convenient to come back. If this is not working – stand up when they come to your desk or office, they will linger for a shorter time than if they can sit.

**e-mail:** A real scourge for many in this electronic and IT age. Whether at your computer or with your Blackberry, learn to be away from e-mail for times of the day. (Over-availability is not helpful in time management!) Access your email in certain time slots, rather than immediately. Deal with it during these windows and then do other things until the next one.

**Self-inflicted:** There are two main elements, the first is procrastination. We all have the ability to put things off until we have no choice other than to do them. Ask yourself, what are the tasks you procrastinate on – and why? What do you hope to gain? What are the consequences? Recognising these, you can get on and do them which will save you time and frees you to do something you can enjoy!

The other aspect to self-inflicted thieves, is the habit of being over-available or inviting people to interrupt you. It is your time, learn to respect this and use it for what is important. Set aside time for you, be unavailable to others so that you can get on with some tasks which need completing. They will be done more quickly and more accurately – freeing you to give time to others.

Identifying the time thieves which cause you to be distracted from your plan is the easy part. Starting to use some of these approaches to reduce their impact is more challenging, however the benefits make it worthwhile. The solution is in one person's hands – yours! Remember, *“if you continue to do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got”*. So, reclaim control of your time and get rid of the time thieves.

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