1. **The first step is being aware of where your time is going, now.**
   You can't find something you've lost when you don't know where you might have lost it in the first place. So the first strategy for managing your time is to know where it's going, now. That means actually tracking or logging your time daily, for at least 1 week (preferably 2). Track the exact time you begin and end an activity, make a note of the duration in exact minutes, and a few words to describe the activity. This step requires you to be really honest with yourself and track EVERYTHING you do in your work day so you can see where your time is really going -- so if you spent 23 minutes chatting with coworkers at the coffee machine (no cheating by logging all your time in nice, even 15, 30 or 60 minute intervals) -- write it down EXACTLY!.

2. **Analyze and summarize your time logs.**
   At the end of the week, review your time logs and start to summarize the tasks (and the amount of time spent on each) into categories. You will create these categories yourself, and you should have between 6 and 12 categories. They should be meaningful to you, self-defining, mutually exclusive and as concise as possible. Some examples might be: Administration, Business Development, Sales & Marketing, Computer, etc. You will then summarize, for each day, how much time you spent doing tasks or activities for each category, in the exact number of minutes. You might also do a little math, to figure the percentage of time each category takes out of each day. You make this step as detailed as you like, but the key here is: AWARENESS.

3. **Create a New Daily Routine.**
   If you were honest and diligent during steps 1 and 2, chances are you had a rude awakening when you reviewed and analyzed your time logs. You no doubt can see where the time drains are occurring -- and now you're ready to make better choices and create a new daily routine. This routine will maximize the time you spend on productive work by conforming to the natural flow of your day and with your natural rhythms, by taking into consideration when you're at your best for
certain tasks, grouping similar tasks together for greater efficiency, and by setting aside dedicated time for doing uninterrupted work. How do you create your routine? Look at where you've been spending your time and start making some decisions about where the different tasks can best be fit into your day, then actually write this routine down and post it where you'll see it every day. Strategies 4 through 10 will give you some food for thought as you develop and implement your new daily routine.

4. Prioritize and stay focused.
Once you've done the upfront work of tracking and analyzing your time, and creating a new routine, how do you keep it on track? You will also need to do some work on prioritizing what you do. You can create your own easy tools to do this. On one sheet of paper, create 5 sections: High Priorities, Secondary Priorities, People to Contact, Telephone Calls, and Schedule. You can fill this out each day, first thing in the morning (or better yet, at the end of your work day so you are well prepared to start fresh tomorrow!) Each day, ask yourself: "If nothing else gets done today, what are the one or two items that absolutely MUST be done?" Those are the items you will use to focus your day. You should also periodically go back to the time logging exercise, so you can determine if you are slipping back into those old bad habits and take immediate steps to get back on track.

5. Reduce interruptions by creating stronger boundaries.
It is true that interruptions to your day can and will happen, and to some degree they are out of your control. However, you probably have more control than you think. Instead of blaming other people and getting frustrated with them for interrupting you, take responsibility for creating stronger boundaries with your coworkers where appropriate. Keep in mind, other people don't mean to be inconsiderate by interrupting, they are just caught up in their own "stuff" and probably don't realize. It is really up to you to set up some guidelines for when you can and cannot be interrupted, to communicate them to others, and then to stick by them. For example: you might institute a "quiet time" policy (mornings are usually best) where you let everyone know that this is a time where you cannot be interrupted -- and then set up another time later in the day where you have an open-door policy. This strategy creates a firm boundary but also provides time for you to
be accessible to others. At first, those around you might try to cross your boundaries, and it’s up to you to gently remind them that they can come back and talk during your "open door" time. After a while, they’ll get used to it. Change takes time, so stick with it!

6. **Structure your telephone time.**
Set aside certain periods of the day to accept, initiate and return calls. The best time to accept incoming calls is just prior to lunch or at the end of the work day (the other person will not want to dawdle on the phone at those times either!) -- so whenever possible, let others know this is your preference and set that time aside so you are available. When initiating or returning calls, the best time to contact those difficult-to-reach folks is early in the morning, just before or after lunch, or late in the day. Other tips for making the best use of your phone time -- plan in advance what you need to cover during the call; and at the beginning of a call, you might say "I have about 10 minutes to spend with you now. If we don't finish, we can always schedule another time."

7. **Don't procrastinate.**
Procrastination is probably one of the biggest "time hogs" we have. Not only are we NOT doing the thing we're procrastinating about, but we also end up wasting even more time worrying about how much we're procrastinating. So, if you have an unpleasant task to do, simply make up your mind to take care of it immediately and just get it done!

8. **Under-promise and over-deliver.**
You may have heard this one before, but a little reinforcement never hurts. Many of us have too many requirements on our time because we take on more than we should... we don't like to say No, don't want to hurt someone else's feelings. When we over commit ourselves, we are not only creating unnecessary stress in our lives, but we are also creating potential situations where we cannot deliver what we've promised. We also don't realize that when we can't deliver what we've promised, we can inadvertently cause more pain and hurt feelings than if we'd been willing to say No in the first place. Remember, you're not doing yourself or anyone else any favors by taking on more than you can reasonably deliver. Commit yourself to making this strategy a high priority in your life, and watch what happens!
9. Separate your work from your personal life.
Whether you work in or out of your home, it is critical for your health and emotional balance that you find a way to separate your work from your personal life. If you work out of the home, don't take work home at all unless you are certain you can get to it -- it's better to stay a little longer at the office (but be sure and set time limits for yourself!) to get it done, then enjoy your leisure time without the stress of having to do that work at home. If you work at home, you will need to be even more diligent in setting aside separate times in your day for work and for your personal time and family. Post your schedule where your family can see it, and make it clear when you can and cannot be interrupted. (When you work at home, you have to create better habits for the whole family to ensure your success!)

10. Remember, you're only human.
We all have only 24 hours in the day -- and sometimes that just doesn't feel like enough, does it? There will always be days where things happen that are unplanned and which can throw even the most organized day into a tailspin. When that happens, take a deep breath or two, and accept that you are doing the very best you can, right now. Tomorrow is a new day and a chance to start fresh. Let go of the need to be a perfectionist and remember, you're only human!

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