

# Take Control of Your Time

Be more productive and work smarter not harder!



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# Introduction

**The demands of the “always on” world can get the better of anyone. And unexpected problems and a pileup of responsibilities combine to ask more of you than you can give.**

Do you feel too busy all the time? You likely work long hours, but still struggle to get all your work done. You have so much on your shoulders that you can't see beyond the here and now, and you're constantly in “firefighting” mode, simply reacting to events as they happen around you.

What's more, you may be making life difficult for yourself with habits like procrastination and lack of delegation.

You might also have been forced to change your working patterns by working at home. That can create fresh havoc, even in a previously ordered working life, with the need to suddenly reorganize your work and care-giving responsibilities.

If that's you, you likely don't feel in control of your life. You're not alone – there are many people like you. Many of them experience high levels of stress and unhappiness. Some even risk burnout.

But you can take control – and this workbook can help. It pulls together proven time-management techniques that you can start using right away. You'll discover how to protect your time, delegate and schedule work, and banish bad habits for good!

The payoffs and benefits of learning to control your time are huge – in fact, these are some of the most fundamental skills you'll need to advance your career!

The strategies that you'll find in this workbook will enable you to cut out time-consuming and nonessential activities, and to achieve more with your time. This will enhance your reputation, your career, and even your mental health, and it will allow you to get more out of life – both at work and in your life outside it.

You will also find coping mechanisms to help you tap into the skills and availability of others, and to be proactive about planning and protecting your time. After all, when you know how to schedule your time, you'll likely feel more in control of it.

Then, you'll move on to consider how your own habits and behaviors might be making your life more difficult. Bad habits and procrastination are two key ways in which you might be increasing the amount of workload pressure and stress that you feel. So, it's important to identify them, and to look for ways in which you can eliminate them from your life.

Finally, you'll bring all this together to build an Action Plan that you can apply straight away.

So, it's time to get started. Turn the page and start regaining control over every precious hour!

# 1. Organizing for Success

Work Smarter to Maximize Your Productivity

**Time is one of the most important – but scarce – resources that you have. Finding enough time for all the things that you have to do is always difficult.**

So often, days go by in a blur, spent in a frenzy of activity. You race through your tasks at breakneck speed, but never seem to make much headway. And, when you pause for breath, procrastination takes hold. Frustration and stress start to build, and you wish for just a few more hours in the day.

It's a problem that most people face. But since we're all busy, and every one of us has the same 24 hours in every day, why is it that some people are able to achieve so much more than others?

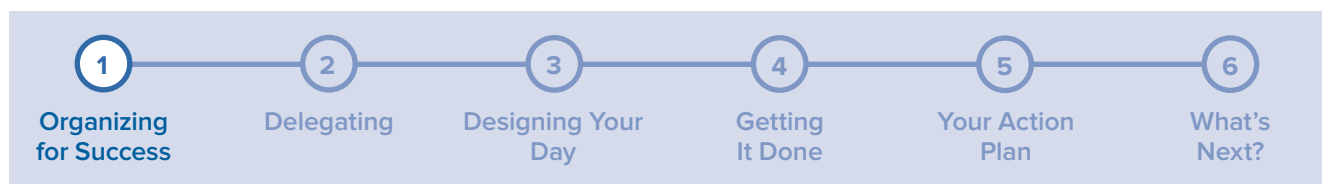
The answer is that time doesn't have to fly by. You can get time on your side, and find opportunities to savor it, knowing that you're using it to your very best advantage.

The way to do this is to practice good time management. It's an essential skill that helps you to work smarter, and to make every second count. With effective time management you can keep your work under control, and stress at a distance.



*“Lack of direction, not lack of time, is the problem. We all have 24-hour days.”*

Hilary “Zig” Ziglar (1926-2012), author and motivational speaker



## 1.1 What Do You Have to Do?

To get control of your time, you need to make time management a key personal goal. Decide right now that you're going to make a positive change, and commit to it. You'll more likely follow through!

Your next step is to take a good look at your workload, and to bring together all of the tasks that you've accepted, and the commitments you've made, in one place. Then you can create a coherent plan for dealing with them.

To do this, we'll use a variant of that very basic, but important, time-management tool – a [To-Do List](#) – and we'll adapt it to help you motivate yourself to complete those tasks.



### **ACTION**

So, what tasks do you need to complete? Start by writing, below, a list of all the tasks that you need to complete today or tomorrow.

**I need to:**


This is the extent of a typical To-Do List. The problem is, it's not particularly inspiring. There's no timeline to help you to schedule tasks. No explanation of why they need to be completed. Nothing to motivate or encourage you.

When you first get into the habit of writing To-Do Lists, it's important that you set yourself up for success. When you see proof that they will work for you, you'll stick with them and keep accomplishing more and more with your time.

This is where it helps to express your tasks as goals. A powerful framework that can help you to achieve them is to set [SMART goals](#). That is, goals that are **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound**.



### ACTION

Express as SMART goals five of the tasks that you listed on the previous page.

#### My five SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound).

1.

2.

3.

---

**Continued.**

4.

5.

When you're getting started with this approach, make it a habit every day to list in a SMART format the things that you need to do.

You won't need to do this so formally when you've become more confident at managing your time, but it's a great reminder and motivator when you're starting out.

**Top Tip**

Once you've got your To-Do List moving, you can start prioritizing items on it from A to F, so that the most important items are at the top. More on this, next!



## 1.2 Prioritization: Urgent Vs. Important

As we said at the start of this section, to be effective, you need to make every second count, and ensure that you get the best possible return on it. This means concentrating on important, high-return activities, and minimizing the time that you spend on low-value tasks.

The problem is, there are so many “urgent” tasks screaming for your attention!

Important tasks have a high immediate value. They help you to achieve your long-term goals, or have serious negative consequences if they’re not completed.

These items may not appear to be urgent. For example, self-development is very important to your career success, and so it should be a high priority. However, it’s not typically very urgent during busy days, so it tends to get overlooked.

Small, detailed tasks, though, which have very little long-term value to you, are often deemed urgent by other people. Unfortunately, they tend to be treated as if they are important when, in fact, they may not be!

“Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.”

Stephen R. Covey

So, to make the best use of your time, you need to separate importance from urgency. Make sure that urgent work is genuinely urgent, and ensure that you put a reasonable amount of effort into important, but non-urgent, activities.

A good prioritization plan helps you to focus your time and attention in this way. With it, you can allocate time for your most important tasks while still dealing with the urgent tasks that matter most. These are the high-value tasks that give you the best return on your time investment.

This is where [Eisenhower’s Urgent/Important Principle](#) can be an effective tool for managing your time, and for helping you to concentrate on the highest-value tasks on your To-Do List. (You can see our representation of Eisenhower’s Urgent/Important Principle in figure 1 on the next page.)



**Figure 1:**  
**Eisenhower's Urgent/Important Principle**



This tool helps you to assess the urgency and importance of each task, using the following four categories:

### Important and Urgent Tasks

There are two distinct types of Important and Urgent activities: ones that you could not have foreseen, and others that you've left until the last minute. You can avoid the latter by planning ahead and minimizing procrastination (see Chapter 4), but you can't predict or avoid every crisis. Here, your best approach is to leave some time in your schedule for handling unexpected issues and unplanned Important activities.

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, we're all rethinking what a [major crisis really is](#). If you're still able to work, you're very likely having to make huge changes to how you go about it. But you still need to be able to respond to changing circumstances, and prioritize effectively.

You may have to reschedule activities. If you have a lot of Important and Urgent tasks, think about how you could schedule similar activities ahead of time, so they don't become urgent in the first place.

### Important but Not Urgent Tasks

These are activities that you can plan ahead for, and which will help you to complete your work and achieve your goals. Make sure that you have plenty of time to complete them, so that they don't become urgent.

### Not Important but Urgent Tasks

These activities can be a constant source of interruption. They prevent you from achieving your goals and completing your work.

When you're faced with these tasks, ask yourself whether you can reschedule or delegate them. See the following chapters, *Delegating and Designing Your Day*, for more on this.

### Not Important and Not Urgent Tasks

These activities are just distractions and they should be avoided. Some you can simply ignore. Others are activities that other people want you to do, but they don't contribute to your own desired outcomes. Politely and firmly say "No" where you sensibly can.

If people see that you're clear about your objectives and [boundaries](#), they won't ask you to do "not important" activities in future.



### ACTION

Now look at your SMART To-Do List from pages 7 and 8. On the following page, place the items in the correct category, according to Eisenhower's Urgent/Important Principle.

### My Five Prioritized SMART Goals

Goal	Urgent/Important Priority
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

How many of the activities that you currently feel stressed by really belong in the Not Important but Urgent category? How many items in the Important and Urgent category do you think you could have dealt with a while ago? And what does this tell you about how you could improve the way that you manage your incoming tasks?

Sometimes, “stuff” will come up. When it does, you can add unplanned tasks to your Urgent/Important categories. You might have to decide quickly whether a task is a high or low priority, but having clear goals will help you to make these decisions more easily.

Remember, there are only 24 hours in a day, and that is rarely enough time to make everything happen. You can't feel guilty about that. But what you can do is manage your time as much as possible, and know that you're allocating this precious resource to your highest-value tasks.



#### Top Tip

To learn more about prioritization, you can take our Bite-Sized Training™ session, How to Prioritize, [here](#).

## 1.3 Drawing This Together

You've reached the end of the first chapter – well done!

You should now have a better appreciation of how crucial good goal-setting and prioritization are for managing a demanding workload. You'll understand how to put together an effective, structured To-Do List, and how to express the tasks that you list in the most useful way. You'll also be able to distinguish urgent tasks from important tasks, and to prioritize jobs in a systematic manner.

In short, you're already able to exert greater control over your time than you were before you started.

So, let's move on to look at how delegation can also help you to manage your workload – when it's done appropriately and thoughtfully.



## 2. Delegating

### Do YOU Need to Do That Task?

The sheer volume of work that goes into accomplishing important, long-term goals will often mean that you have to involve other people, however organized you are.

It's often a mistake to try to handle everything yourself. In fact, most businesses today actively encourage various forms of [collaboration](#).

We've seen that your time is best spent on the highest-value tasks. But you also need to ensure that everything that needs to be done gets done. So you'll likely need to delegate some of your work.

Delegation is not the sole preserve of managers. In fact, everyone can benefit from it as a time-management tool, as it frees up "discretionary time," which you can spend on important tasks that only you can achieve.

Don't let FOMO, or fear of missing out, hold you back from letting go of a task that's better suited to a colleague!

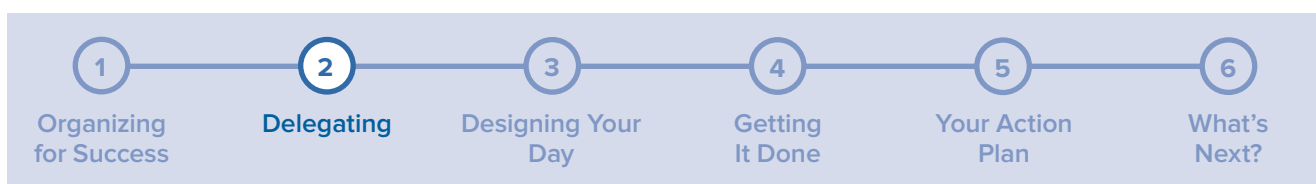
There are several distinct advantages to collaborating and delegating that you can keep in mind as you evaluate the "cost" vs. the benefits.

#### Delegation:

- Increases your discretionary time.
- Develops other people's knowledge and capabilities.
- Demonstrates your trust and confidence in your team members.
- Enhances other people's commitment to their jobs.
- Improves team members' decision making.
- Enhances the efficiency and timeliness of decisions.
- Improves the coordination of work between teams and individuals.
- Helps your team members to develop a sense of personal empowerment.

#### WARNING

Delegating only when you feel overloaded can backfire, as the person you're delegating to will likely resent it. So, be sure to hand over enough responsibility so that they can reap the rewards of doing a good job, and therefore view the task as personally important.



The benefits of delegation are compelling, but the practice is not so easy. It's about much more than just asking someone to do something for you, and it's definitely not about off-loading your work onto others, either!

Delegation is about involving others in meaningful work and cultivating a team spirit so that everyone's capabilities, knowledge and effectiveness are improved. It's also about deciding what you do and what you will ask others to do.



### ACTION

Complete the mini self-assessment below, to determine how well you currently delegate. Place a check mark next to the items that you do, or have done, when delegating a task.

If you've not had an opportunity to delegate, think about what you might do, given the chance.

## Delegation Self-Assessment

	I clearly specify the results I want and need.
	I make sure that the amount of authority I give matches the amount of responsibility for the outcome.
	I acknowledge limitations and knowledge gaps, and provide support where it's needed.
	I clearly specify the level of initiative I expect. (Does the person wait for directions, go ahead but update you at key points, or complete the whole task with only an end report?)
	I encourage the person to participate in deciding when and how the work is to be done.
	I clearly outline the reasons for the activity, and what the outcomes are if it succeeds or fails.
	I work within the organizational structure so that no one is bypassed (or, at least, people are informed of my decision to delegate).
	I delegate regularly and consistently, not just when I'm overloaded or prefer not to do something.
	I encourage the person to come to me with solutions, not merely to ask for advice or answers when a problem arises.
	I maintain overall accountability for results.

The more check marks you've placed, the better! The behaviors listed are **all** needed for a positive outcome when delegating.

## 2.1 Deciding When to Delegate

Empowered delegation involves deciding when to delegate tasks to other people, and when to perform them yourself. There are four questions that you should ask yourself to decide whether it's appropriate to delegate a task:

1. **Does another person have the necessary information or expertise?** You may even find that other people are more qualified than you to perform certain tasks. When this happens, use it to your advantage!
2. **Will another person's capabilities be increased by the assignment?** Try to ensure that the task you delegate develops the other person, and that they can see the benefits of it. (If jobs are intrinsically unrewarding, be sure to share them out fairly, including to yourself.)
3. **Can I trust another person to use good judgment and have values that are aligned with the organization's values?** If you feel that you have to monitor someone else too closely, you're probably better off doing it yourself.
4. **Do I have enough time to delegate the job effectively?** Delegating requires work on your part. You need time to train, to answer questions, and to check on progress. In the short term, there's never enough time, but where there's a long-term relationship involved, it's a mistake **not** to delegate!



### ACTION

Identify three tasks from your To-Do List on pages 7 and 8 that you could delegate. Write them below.

(Make sure that you can answer "Yes" to all the questions asked above. If any of these conditions are not met, the delegation will likely not be completely successful.)

#### Three Tasks That I Can Delegate Are:

1.

2.

3.



## 2.2 Deciding Who You Will Delegate To

Having decided that you're going to delegate a task, you need to consider who you'll ask to take it on.

To delegate effectively, you need to have enough influence with the person to persuade them to accept the task. In an authority relationship, this influence is assumed, as you have the formal right to delegate work. So, if you're a manager, you will likely be able to delegate to one of your team quite easily. But take some time to consider the situation from their point of view first, with our article, [How to Accept Delegation](#).

If you aren't a manager, or if the task you're delegating would be best done by someone outside your team, it takes more planning. It's unlikely that you'll be able to delegate to a peer. But, if you think that person is the best choice to assist you, you can ask for their help, perhaps promising a favor in exchange, or exploring another form of [Win-Win Negotiation](#).



### ACTION

Thinking about the three tasks from the previous page, complete the table below to help you decide who you will delegate to.

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3
Tasks I want to delegate:			
Who has the necessary information or expertise to do the task?			
Whose capabilities will be increased by the assignment?			
Who can I trust to make good decisions with minimal supervision?			
Who can I influence to make the delegation feasible?			
Who has time to take on the task?			
Who is most reliable?			
With all this in mind, who will I delegate to?			



## 2.3 Drawing This Together

So, that's your second chapter completed! You'd already gained an understanding of To-Do Lists, SMART goals, and prioritization, and you now have a better appreciation of the subtleties of delegating, too. You have a feel for how good you are now at delegating, an eye for selecting appropriate tasks, and a tool for picking the best people to do the work. Even better, you can experience the joy of seeing your efforts starting to reduce the size of your own workload! Well done!

Now move on to Chapter 3, to consider how you can make the most of your time by rearranging your routine, being realistic, and negotiating well.



### Top Tip

To learn more about delegating, and to complete a full delegation plan, take our Bite-Sized Training™ session on Delegation, available [here](#).



# 3. Designing Your Day

## Schedule Cleverly to Protect Your Precious Time

**Are you proactive about how you spend your time, or do you let life happen around you and respond to events as they occur?**

If there's never enough time in the day to do everything – even after you've delegated tasks – how do you make sure that you'll work on your important tasks, handle interruptions, invest in your development, and take suitable breaks?

And how do you make sure that you'll be able to get home on time – if you're not currently working from home – and switch off when you do?

The answer is scheduling.

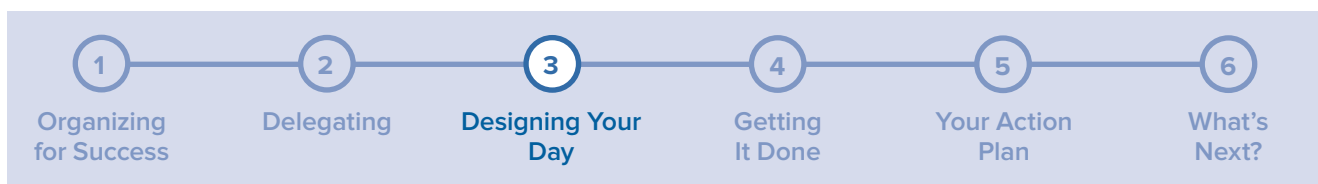
Scheduling enables you to plan your time and your commitments realistically, so that you can deliver on your promises. For example, when you create a proper schedule, you can confidently say, "I've got a very full workload up until the 14th, but I'll be pleased to get that task done by the 20th."

Without a schedule, you can't be that certain. Instead, you'll likely overcommit, or feel anxious about promising your availability. Your reliability and honesty could even be called into question.

Scheduling is particularly important if you work regularly from home, or if circumstances force you to. It gives your day structure, and helps you to avoid procrastination.

You need to be [assertive](#), too. You have a right to free time, even in today's "always on" environment, and you should feel able to say so.

Find out about saying "Yes" to the person, "No" to the task, [here](#).





## ACTION

To create your schedule, start with a page showing days of the week, broken down into hours in the day. Use the grid below, or open a new day in your favorite calendar app.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
6 a.m.					
7 a.m.					
8 a.m.					
9 a.m.					
10 a.m.					
11 a.m.					
12 p.m.					
1 p.m.					
2 p.m.					
3 p.m.					
4 p.m.					
5 p.m.					
6 p.m.					
7 p.m.					
8 p.m.					
9 p.m.					
10 p.m.					

Next, work through this process:

1. Block out the hours that you're **not** available. (If you're behind with your work, consider increasing your availability for a limited period, but be realistic to avoid the risk of burnout.)
2. Allocate sufficient time to fulfill your core responsibilities, especially those that your performance is assessed on.
3. Schedule the genuinely Urgent activities from your To-Do List that you must do in the next week. Be realistic about how long they'll take.
4. Schedule contingency time for handling unexpected problems. However, work to minimize these issues, and don't accept any frivolous interruptions.
5. The time that remains is discretionary. Fill in your Important and Not Urgent tasks here.

By the time you reach step five, you may find that you have no time available. This is clearly a problem!

Be sure to avoid the temptation to kid yourself that you can complete everything in less time. Instead:

- Revisit your assumptions about the things that you **have** to do and the urgent actions that you **have** to take. Are they valid? Can you drop anything? Can you stop urgent actions from being urgent in the future?
- Look at your contingency time. Is it estimated fairly? Could you ask someone else to handle some of the interruptions?
- Is your calendar full of meetings before you even start? Take a new approach, and protect your valuable time, as follows.

Similarly, whenever someone asks you to take on work, refer to your schedule and your To-Do List, and check your commitments to other people. If the new task conflicts with these, negotiate deadlines appropriately. Also, build in a bit of contingency time to the deadline you promise, in case things overrun. This way, your reputation for reliability will grow and your stress will ease.

## 3.1 Managing Meetings

Meetings can play havoc with your schedule, so it's crucial that you take control of these, too!

Try the following approach. Take a moment to examine every meeting request before you accept it, and ask yourself:

- Are you the best person to attend, to achieve the meeting's purpose?
- What about a 25-minute meeting rather than 55 minutes?
- Is a formal meeting really necessary, or would a brief conversation by instant message be sufficient?
- Can you save up multiple meetings and have a weekly or monthly roundup instead?

Find out more about choosing and participating in meetings effectively, [here](#).



### ACTION

In the grid on the next page, list the meetings you have arranged for the day, and decide what action you're going to take, so that you use your time more efficiently.

Meeting Title	Action

Whatever actions you decide to take, always ensure that any meeting you call yourself has the right people in it, an agenda, a clear time limit, a timekeeper, and someone to record action points.

If you're using conferencing software because your team can't all be in the office, make sure that everyone understands how it works. This can be a huge help in keeping the meeting focused, and running to time.

## 3.2 Drawing This Together

You're now well on your way to getting that never-ending To-Do List done, and to feeling in control of every precious hour in your day!

You understand much more about building and managing your own schedule.

You also have the tools and resources to control the amount of time you spend in meetings.

Now unlock the final part of your time- and workload-management toolkit by working through Chapter 4, and actually getting things done!

# 4. Getting It Done

## Managing Yourself and Changing Habits

Sometimes, we can be our own worst enemies, by undermining our time management ourselves.

All that time that we've so carefully scheduled, and jealously guarded, can mysteriously get used up in unproductive ways. But we get so used to this experience that changing our behaviors for the better becomes extremely difficult.

Some classic unproductive uses of time include:

- **Concentrating on trivia.** We all thrive on accomplishment, but often we focus on finishing small, unimportant jobs as a way to satisfy our need for completion.

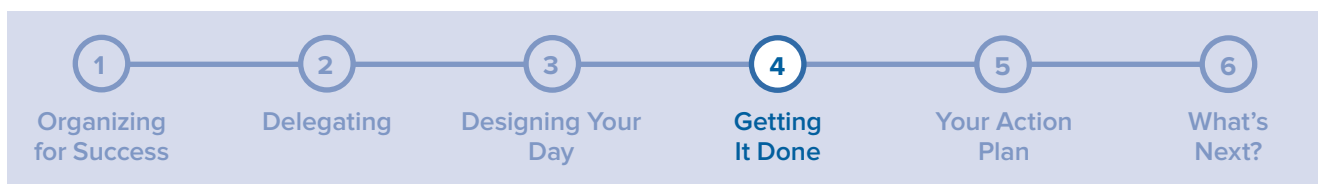
But these tasks provide only temporary satisfaction. They don't lead to strong long-term performance. By concentrating on the prioritization tools we discussed in Chapter 1, you should be able to conquer this time waster.

- **Bad habits.** Productive habits are great. What happens all too often, though, is that our habits lead us to continue doing things in the same unproductive ways. Doing "what we've always done" is often inefficient.

Further, behaviors such as snoozing through the alarm, constantly checking emails, scrolling through social media, trying to do five tasks at once, or chatting to your co-workers, eat up your potentially productive time.

- **Procrastination.** We can sometimes put off decisions and actions until the last minute. But when we're in crisis mode, our ability to think, to communicate, and to produce good-quality work is severely hampered.

We act best when we have just the right amount of time and pressure to motivate us to do a good job, but not so much that we make mistakes.





## 4.1 Breaking Poor Time-Management Habits

What bad habits do you have, and how much of your precious time do they steal?

Do you chat with colleagues every morning, catching up on the weekend's game results and discussing what you did the night before?

Maybe you drink three cups of coffee before you even fire up your laptop. You might simply be a slow starter, who takes the first hour just to wake up.

Be particularly careful with bad habits if you're working at home. It's easy to become distracted by domestic chores, or to take a few extra minutes

over a coffee break. You can go too far the other way, too, finding yourself working longer hours because you can't tear yourself away from the screen.

Whatever your habits are, you're not alone. But in order to take control of your time and your workload, it's important that you identify them and look for ways to change them – and your environment – to [minimize distractions](#).





## ACTION

Write down an outline of your typical day, using the table below. What do you generally do at what time?

Begin with the time that you wake up, and end with finishing work, whether that's in the office or at home. Include when you have a coffee, when you get really focused on work, how long you break for lunch, and other habits, good and bad.

Time	Activity



Now analyze your typical day objectively. Do you see any obvious places where you can take back unproductive time?

For example, would it be possible to use social media on your commute, rather than before you get up? Would your commute be quicker if you left 10 minutes sooner – or later?

If you're not commuting right now, can you set aside some time before work to check social media, so that it doesn't get in the way of your work?

If you are in your workplace, could you sit somewhere less distracting in the [open-plan office](#)? And if you're at home, can you avoid being distracted by your partner or your children, for example?

It would be unrealistic to think that you could use every minute productively and **never** take your mind off work. But if you're honest with yourself about your time wasting, you can take steps to reclaim some of your most valuable resource.



### ACTION

Write down three changes that you can (and will!) make to your typical day to improve your efficiency. Write them as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goal statements, with clear targets, timelines, and measurability factors.

#### Time-Efficiency Goals – the Three Things That I Will Start/Stop/Rearrange in My Day

1.

2.

3.

## 4.2 Busting Procrastination

There will be times when you have to briefly delay important tasks for good reason. But you'll know that you're procrastinating when you suddenly decide that your files, your desk, and the office supply room must all be reorganized... now!

This is one of many signs that you clearly don't **want** to do what you know you **have** to do.

*“My advice is, never do tomorrow what you can do today. Procrastination is the thief of time.”*

Edward Young (1681-1765), English poet

There's no easy way around procrastination. And it's a hard habit to break once you adopt it. The stress and pressure of always having something hanging over you is uncomfortable at first, but then you get used to it – and suddenly, “I do my best work under pressure” becomes your mantra.

The good news is that while no single solution exists that works for everyone, there are effective ways to tackle procrastination. So, if you try a technique that doesn't work for you, don't feel that you've failed. You just need to keep working with alternative approaches until you find the one that helps **you**.

Here's one such strategy. We suggest some alternatives on page 32.



### ACTION

The first step in breaking procrastination – like any bad habit – is to acknowledge it.

So, if you are a procrastinator, and many of us are, use the following space to write down a few recent or current examples of your behavior.

### Procrastination Acknowledgment



## ACTION

Now take some time to think about the negative outcomes of procrastination. What happened, or nearly happened, to you or your colleagues because of your procrastination?

### Procrastination Negative Outcomes

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.



## ACTION

Next, think about the benefits you would enjoy if you completed tasks without procrastinating. What effect would starting and finishing a task in good time have on you and your co-workers?

### Benefits of Not Procrastinating

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

By recognizing that you do procrastinate, you're in a better position to face this trait and change it. And one effective way to do that is to break down a daunting task into small pieces and to gradually chip away at them.

While you might balk at having to spend the next five hours preparing a report, for example, you can probably face 30 minutes coming up with a structure without too much trouble.

That approach gets things done, one small "bite" at a time. Whether you choose to take the bites consecutively or at different times is up to you. A powerful strategy is to complete small sections of unpleasant or overwhelming tasks in between more interesting and rewarding ones.



### **ACTION**

In the space below, break down one of the tasks you're procrastinating about into small chunks that you can complete in 10 to 30 minutes.

**Task:**

**Manageable Chunks:**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

With these small, manageable pieces in mind, you should be able to see an end to the task. All you need to do is get started!

Once you've started, you also need to come up with a reason to continue! Regularly reminding yourself of the positive impact of doing so (and the negative impact of giving up) might help – and you could plan to reward yourself for a job well done.



### ACTION

Thinking about the same task, decide when and how you'll reward yourself for your efforts.

Try to include a reward in the middle, as well as at the end. (The relief of having completed the project might be enough at the end, making a "halftime" reward the only one that's necessary!)

**Task:**

**Reward Schedule:**

Reward:

When:

Reward:

When:

Reward:

When:

Finally, as a way to tie your procrastination-busting plan together, you can use a proven self-motivation technique – a personal contract. Most people respond to the authority of a contract, so making one with ourselves can cement a plan and yield a much higher success rate.

Alternatively, you could draw up the contract with a close friend – even your boss.



### ACTION

Using the template below, turn your goal into a contract statement. Include your rewards, too.

#### Task Completion Contract

I,

do hereby commit to

by \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_

I will accomplish this by working for at least \_\_\_\_\_ minutes at a time, \_\_\_\_\_ times per day until it is complete.

I will reward myself for completion as follows:



### Top Tip

There are countless other ways to tackle procrastination, and by pairing different strategies with fundamental aspects of your character, you should be able to find one that works for you.

Here are a few alternatives to try. You can discover others by reading our article, [here](#).

1. Harness the power of peer pressure. Asking someone you trust to check up on you can be an effective tactic if you struggle to self-monitor. This person can hold you accountable and stop you making excuses.

2. You might be motivated more by the thought of helping someone else – or at least minimizing their pain! – by not procrastinating. Or, you could find that you can always get your work done if you have [a dependent to call](#). You don't want to let them down by working late!

3. And, if you're prone to perfectionism or self-doubt, [affirmations](#) can help you to see yourself and your abilities in a more positive light. Reprogramming your thinking in this way can help you to keep emotions that encourage procrastination – like fear and anxiety – at bay.

## 4.3 Drawing This Together

So, that's your fourth chapter completed – well done!

Getting a grip on poor time-management habits, rearranging your day to make the most of every opportunity, and putting an end to procrastination can have a huge impact on your ability to manage a demanding workload.

You've now put in some serious effort, and you have tools and ideas to hand that will enable you to start working more productively than ever before.

You've also nearly completed your journey through this Taking Control of Your Time workbook. All that remains is to draw your insights together into an Action Plan.

We'll look at how to do that in the next chapter.



# 5. Your Action Plan

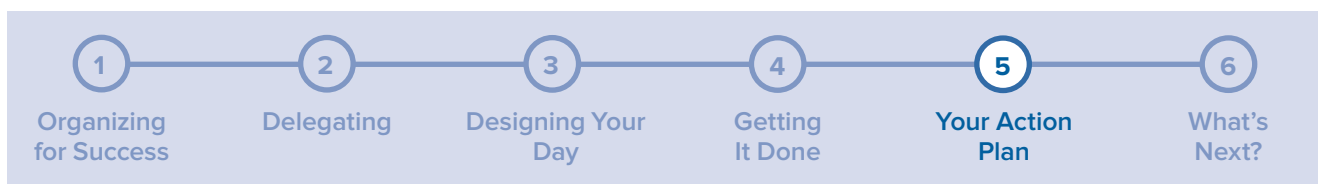
## Putting It All Together

**Now's the time to think back over everything you've covered, and to summarize it into an Action Plan. You can then start applying your insights to keep that workload under control!**

Your time is too scarce a commodity to waste. It's nonrenewable, and you can't buy any more of it. So, it pays to get serious about using it wisely. Hopefully, this workbook has helped you to understand the importance of doing so.

As you go about your working day, think about what you're doing and consider whether you're making the best use of your time. How do your co-workers and contacts manage their time? Can you use their skills and experience, in a mutually beneficial way, to maximize productivity?

And don't be afraid to dig in and get busy. Scrutinize your habits and conquer the desire to procrastinate. When you fully commit to working hard and working smart, the results will come. When you get control of your time, you'll be pleasantly surprised by the extra hours you find – time you can use to do what you want, with no questions asked, and no strings attached!





### Project Catalog

Category	SMART To-Do List	Priority
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

Then, identify individual tasks that you've delegated or could delegate, and move them into the Delegated Actions List, below, including the names of the people now responsible for them. (We covered delegation in Chapter 2.)

Delegated Actions List	

Pull out the immediate and highest-priority tasks into the Next Actions List.

Next Actions List	



## ACTION

Schedule your workload in your calendar or diary, using the tools you picked up in Chapter 3.

Remember not to squeeze tasks in to fit. Instead, be realistic and revisit your priorities, delegation lists, and meeting bookings, to further reduce what you commit to.

### Three changes that I could make to free up more time are:

1.

2.

3.

Poor timekeeping habits limit what's possible in your life and career, and make it harder for you to stay on top of a demanding workload, so it's important to learn how to deal with them.

Chapter 4 has more on the practical ways to do this.



## ACTION

Fill in the most appropriate words or phrases in the following sections.

### My three highest-priority time-wasting habits to tackle are:

1.

2.

3.

### The steps that I will take to turn them around are:

1.

2.

3.



## Top Tip

Review and update your Action Plan regularly – try weekly to begin with. Delete tasks that you've completed, transfer tasks from your Project Catalog to the Delegated Actions and Next Actions lists as you make progress, and include any new tasks that you're responsible for.

Similarly, procrastination reduces your effectiveness and your productivity. It allows your workload to increase as you focus on other, easier, or more enjoyable tasks.

**The three most common triggers for me to procrastinate are:**

1.

2.

3.

**The steps that I will take to avoid giving in to these impulses are:**

1.

2.

3.

You now have an Action Plan to take control of your time – a set of steps that you can take to make your working life more manageable, more productive, and less stressed. Well done!

You've discovered how crucial sound organization is to being in control. Simply having a thorough awareness of what needs to be done is a great starting point. But, you understand that expressing the tasks on your To-Do List in a way that's specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound can really set you up for success. You also now have an effective set of tools for systematically prioritizing all those tasks.

You have a good appreciation of when it makes sense to delegate work, and who you should delegate it to. And, you've learned an effective way to plan and protect your time, so that you can make the best use of it. For you, every second counts!

You also now acknowledge that your own behavior might be a contributing factor to your lack of control of your time. However, you understand that you're not alone, and you know that you can build helpful habits in place of less helpful ones by working **with** your character traits and preferences. Breaking your own poor habits, and banishing procrastination, are now high priorities for you.

Having these measures in place will help you to be more successful, and more resilient, in times of high pressure or adversity. You've now got the tools to organize and take control of your time, whether at work or in your personal life.

By working your way through this toolkit, you've put yourself in a strong position to become the master of your own time and workload. Well done!

## 6. What's Next?

### Now you can take control of your time, and manage even the busiest workloads!

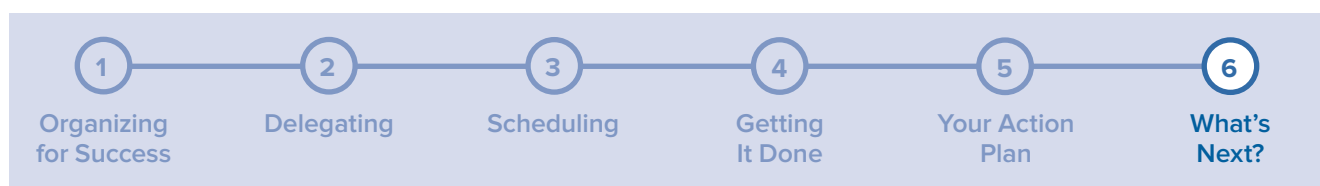
And you have an Action Plan in place to ensure that you do just that. Getting there will take determination and commitment – but, in the end, it will be well worth the effort.

Get started today. Taking the first steps is the most important part of any journey. Enjoy that journey, and have a great time progressing your career!

Remember that you can get individual help and support from Mind Tools coaches, and other members of the Mind Tools Club, in our [forums](#). And you can share your experiences more widely when you follow Mind Tools on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

If you have any suggestions about how we can improve our resources, please let us know at [customer.helpdesk@mindtools.com](mailto:customer.helpdesk@mindtools.com).

Finally, remember to use some of your valuable time each week to browse the Mind Tools website and blog, where you'll find yet more inspiration and support to help you to succeed.





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