

Effective Scheduling



Busy bees associate with getting a job done.

Planning to Make the Best Use of Your Time

It's the end of another busy working day and, even though you came into the office early and left late, you don't feel as if you've accomplished anything significant.

It's all too easy for this to happen. Faced with endless meetings, frequent interruptions, and urgent last-minute tasks, you can easily be busy all day without making any progress on high-priority projects and goals.

That's why it's so important to know how to schedule your time properly. In this article, we'll look at the steps you can take to do this, thereby making time for the work that really matters, while still leaving time for personal development, family and friends.

The Importance of Scheduling

Scheduling is the art of planning your activities so that you can achieve your goals and priorities in the time you have available. When it's done effectively, it helps you:

- Understand what you can realistically achieve with your time.
- Make sure you have enough time for essential tasks.
- Add contingency time for "the unexpected."
- Avoid taking on more than you can handle.
- Work steadily toward your personal and career goals.
- Have enough time for family and friends, exercise and hobbies.
- Achieve a good work-life balance.

Time is the one resource that we can't buy, but we often waste it or use it ineffectively. Scheduling helps you think about what you want to achieve in a day, week or month, and it keeps you on track to accomplish your goals.

How to Schedule Your Time

Set a regular time to do your scheduling – at the start of every week or month, for example.

There are a number of different tools to choose from. A simple and easy way to keep a schedule is to use a pen and paper, organizing your time using a weekly planner. (Click [here](#) for a free downloadable planner template to get started.)

You can also use apps and software such as Google Calendar®, or MS Outlook. Choose a scheduling tool that suits your situation, the current structure of your job, your personal taste, and your budget. The most important thing when choosing your planner is that it lets you enter data easily, and allows you to view an appropriate span of time (day/week/month) in the level of detail that you need.

Once you have decided which tool you want to use, prepare your schedule in the following way:

Step 1: Identify Available Time

Start by establishing the time you want to make available for your work.

How much time you spend at work should reflect the design of your job and your personal goals in life.

For example, if you're pushing for promotion, it might be prudent to work beyond normal hours each day to show your dedication. If, on the other hand, you want to have plenty of time for out-of-work activities, you might decide to do your allocated hours and no more.

Step 2: Schedule Essential Actions

Next, block in the actions you absolutely must take to do a good job. These will often be the things you are assessed against.

For example, if you manage people, make sure that you have enough time available to deal with team members' personal issues, coaching, and supervision needs. Also, allow time to communicate with your boss and key people around you.

Step 3: Schedule High-Priority Activities

Review your **To-Do List**, and schedule in high-priority and urgent activities, as well as essential maintenance tasks that cannot be delegated or avoided.

Try to arrange these for the times of day when you are most productive – for example, some people are at their most energized and efficient in the morning, while others focus more effectively in the afternoon or evening.

Step 4: Schedule Contingency Time

Next, schedule some extra time to cope with contingencies and emergencies. Experience will tell you how much to allow – in general, the more unpredictable your job, the more contingency time you'll need. (If you don't schedule this time in, emergencies will still happen and you'll end up working late.)

Frequent interruptions can eat into your time. Learning how to **manage them** can reduce the amount of contingency time you need to set aside. Some interruptions will be hard to predict, but leaving some open space in your schedule gives you the flexibility you need to rearrange tasks and respond to important issues as they arise.

Step 5: Schedule Discretionary Time

The space you have left in your planner is "discretionary time": time that is available to deliver your priorities and achieve your goals. Review your prioritized To-Do List and personal goals, evaluate the time you need to achieve them, and schedule them in.

Step 6: Analyze Your Activities

If, by the time you reach step five, you find that you have little or no discretionary time available, you need to go back through steps two, three and four, and question whether all of the tasks you've entered are absolutely necessary. It may be that some things can be delegated or tackled in a more time-efficient way.

One of the most important ways that you can build success is by maximizing the leverage you can achieve with your time. Increase the amount of work you can complete by delegating to other people, outsourcing key tasks, or using technology to automate as much of your work as possible. This will free you up to achieve your goals.

If you find that your discretionary time is still limited, then you may need to renegotiate your workload or ask for help . Use your newly prepared schedule as evidence of your heavy commitments. This demonstrates to your boss how well-organized you are, and might make him or her more receptive to your request!

Key Points

Scheduling is the process by which you plan how you'll use your time. Doing it well can maximize your effectiveness and reduce your stress levels.

Follow this six-step process to prepare your schedule:

1. Identify the time you have available.
2. Block in the essential tasks you must carry out to succeed in your job.
3. Schedule high-priority urgent tasks and vital "housekeeping" activities.
4. Block in appropriate contingency time to handle unpredictable events and interruptions.
5. Schedule the activities that address your priorities and personal goals in the time that remains.
6. Analyze your activities to identify tasks that can be delegated, outsourced or cut altogether.

It's important that your schedule makes time for your professional and personal goals. If you have little or no discretionary time left when you reach step five, revisit your tasks to see if you can do them differently – otherwise, your work-life balance will suffer.