

Work Smarter with the Gamonnet Method

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20 TOP TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS

By Mike Gardner

Time management doesn't come easily, but it is a behaviour around which skills can be learnt. By improving your time management skills, you will feel less overwhelmed, more productive and better able to control the deluge of e-mails, ringing phones and constant interruptions that are part of everyday life.

You will then have more time to spend doing what you choose to do, perhaps spending time with your family, time on leisure activities, or if you are a business owner, perhaps spend time working on your business rather than in it.

What is Time Management?

Time Management is a misleading description of a common problem. The solution to a shortage of time is the ability and the willingness to manage yourself better.

Unless you acknowledge that you are fully responsible for your own actions, you will never achieve what you want within the time available.

Time Management Requires ACTION!

Beware: In order to be successful at managing your time, you must be willing to change your behaviour and take action! Let's start off easy with a few basic tips. Start making just one change a week and you'll see results quicker than you think!

1. Start your day early

Do you wake up to the alarm each morning, and finally get out of bed after hitting the snooze button 5 times, only to discover you're already running late for work? How about on the weekends? Do you sleep in both days?



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🕒 Forcing yourself to get up on time, without rushing, will leave you refreshed and less stressed. Keeping this schedule on the weekends will grant you more hours of productivity. So get up, get dressed, and get going! (Okay I'm not that harsh, you can lie in on a Sunday).

2. Prioritise your tasks

It may be best to get the hardest task out of the way first. If you start early in the day, you'll have more energy to complete the task and you'll feel more accomplished and less stressed when the big project is out of the way. Others believe that finishing a lot of smaller jobs first is better because you'll be able to build momentum and cross more off your to-do list, which will help you feel more productive.

🕒 In the end, there is no right or wrong way to prioritise your tasks; whichever way motivates you to do the work is the best way. Once your spirit is lifted, you'll feel more optimistic and be more productive.

3. Use calendars or daily planners

With the wide variety of calendars and planners on the market there is truly no reason to be disorganised or miss deadlines. Not everyone will benefit from the same type of planner so take your time and discover which system is best for you.

Whether it's traditional paper, an electronic device such as your smart phone or tablet, or a web-based application such as Microsoft Outlook or Google Calendar, mark all of your deadlines and activities on it and discover where you have gaps so you can take some time to treat yourself.

🕒 Calendars or planners are only useful if you use them consistently. Bring your planner with you to mark down important appointments. Schedule time for yourself, (gym sessions, runs, and thinking time) on the planner and check your



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calendar before booking lunch with a friend. After just a few days you'll have a new habit and using a planner will become second nature.

4. Set and respect deadlines

If you're one of the many people who get stressed when a deadline is looming, build in some extra time so you can finish the job well ahead of time.

🕒 At work, your boss holds you accountable if you miss a deadline, but what about all those projects at home that you put off until tomorrow? Enlist the help of a friend or spouse to hold you accountable for completing these dreaded projects. It's difficult to admit your mistakes so you'll end up working harder to avoid having to tell a partner that you missed a deadline, yet again.

5. Focus on one thing at a time

For years, experts have been touting the benefits of "multitasking," praising those people who can accomplish ten different things at the same time. What has been discovered recently, however, is multitasking very often diminishes the quality of the work, even though it may be finished before a deadline.

🕒 Which sounds more productive: writing a 5-page report in one hour's time or spending three hours writing the report while also answering emails and phone calls? Just focus on one thing at a time to get things done and off your plate.

6. Limit your distractions

Are you addicted to computer solitaire or have a habit of checking your email or instant messages every 5 minutes? Keeping email and IM turned off and keeping background distractions to a minimum while working can help you focus on the task



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at hand. You'll be surprised how much more you accomplish when you're not distracted every five minutes.

🕒 Some people say that music helps them to think and concentrate. If that works for you, then there's no reason to turn the music off... unless you find yourself singing more than you're working. That's a pretty clear sign that you need to refocus your efforts without the music.

7. Take frequent breaks from difficult tasks

While this might sound counterproductive, taking frequent short breaks can break the monotony of a task and can give you some new energy. If you're just staring at the computer screen without typing the report that's due, you may as well awaken your brain with a brisk walk.

🕒 Stepping away from a project for five minutes will relieve your stress and you'll feel more refreshed to come back and finish the job. Do some simple stretching exercises at your desk; grab a cup of water or coffee. Just don't get trapped in office politics or other time wasting activities – that just zaps you of your energy.

8. Set a specific time to check email or return phone calls

Limiting your distractions does not mean you can't communicate with the outside world. If you're expecting client emails, allow yourself time to check and answer them every 90 minutes or so. If you're dying to chat for two hours with your best friend, schedule that time in your planner.

Once something is scheduled, allow yourself that time and activity.

🕒 Setting these boundaries is especially important if you own a home-based business. Your clients need to know your business hours and when they are allowed



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to call. Not many business owners or their families appreciate client calls during dinner or family time.

9. Use a timer and set limits

Still need some convincing to tackle that big project? Set a timer for 30 minutes and work intensely during that time to accomplish as much as possible. When the timer goes off, allow yourself time for a break or to move on to a smaller project. When the timer chimes again, move onto yet another project. This is perfect for those people who like a constant change of pace.

🕒 Keep the timer with you as it ticks away the time. The ticking sounds might be annoying but it just may be the nudge you need to avoid procrastination and keep moving.

10. Outsource or delegate tasks to others

If your budget allows, outsource – or hire – an expert to do the task you’re dreading. This is not the same as living in denial because you’re taking the steps to hire an expert! Experts very often have the right tools and equipment to make the job go faster and they also need to move quickly to get to the next customer on their schedule.

🕒 If you are a business owner, working with a Virtual Assistant (VA) can free you up to work on your business, rather than in it. Hate doing the books? Hire a bookkeeper. Hate making sales calls? Hire an appointment maker. Outsource the things that are not a valuable use of your time.



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11. Set reasonable goals

Which is more likely to get you motivated: sorting out that filing cabinet or sorting out one draw of the filing cabinet? If you haven't opened the filing cabinet for 12 months, what makes you think you'll sort it out all in one hour?

🕒 Strive to break down seemingly unconquerable tasks into smaller, more manageable chunks. So for example, when it comes to a messy desk, instead of attacking it all at once, clear a part of it for ten minutes every hour, you will either get so motivated that you will in fact do it all in one go or by the end of the day it will be done, because you would have spent at least eighty minutes tidying it.

12. Use commuting time wisely

While it may be tempting to catch some extra sleep on the train or bus, use this time to catch up on emails or put the finishing touches on that report that's due. By the time you get to the office your inbox will be organised and you'll have a clear plan of attack for the day.

🕒 You can also use the time to read your favourite book or magazine during your commute. Life doesn't have to be all work and no fun! Time management is all about using your time wisely so you can enjoy your free time.

13. Use automated electronic equipment to save you time

Your time is valuable, no matter what job you have. If there's an easy, automated way to do a particular task, there's no shame in using that technology to give yourself more free time to spend with your family. There are plenty of ways to automate repetitive tasks. Ask your colleagues or family for some ideas.

🕒 Some writers dictate articles into a small, digital recorder while on the treadmill, then voice recognition software transcribes the articles! Time



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management at its best. Another example: if you send people the same emails over-and-over again, create a template so the computer does most of the work for you.

14. Reward yourself for a job well done

There will always be certain projects or tasks that we just do not like doing no matter how positive our mindset is. When faced with this scenario, schedule something fun right after you complete each of those negative tasks. You'll tend to work faster if you know you have something to look forward to.

🕒 Grab a coffee after finalising the client's report. Follow that task that you did not want to do, with the one that is just calling for your attention.

15. Organise your desk and computer files

A clean desk with properly labeled files will save you countless hours when you're searching for answers. Instead of checking multiple folders for that one piece of paper, you'll check just one folder because it's properly labeled. And you'll know exactly which directory to search on the computer for your client's missing file.

🕒 Don't know where to begin? Refer back to tips #10 and #11. Either hire a professional organizer or just tackle one drawer of your desk to start.

16. Be decisive

Rather than debating for 15 minutes over whether you should keep that 10-year-old set of accounts, set your timer or a stopwatch and make the decision in less than one minute. The longer you think about your options – the more options you allow yourself – the less likely you will make a decision.



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🕒 Set rules to help you to make decisions, the chances are if you have not looked at a file for six months, you are not going to look at it again, but as we are just starting out you can lengthen this time to twelve months.

17. Don't micromanage

If a colleague is working on a project, avoid asking 500 times if they need help or want to know other ways to do things. If you're focused on other people's work, then your own work suffers.

🕒 Lead by example by focusing on your own project and working efficiently. You'll also give others the space they need to accomplish things by themselves.

18. Learn to say No

This isn't about being rude to clients or friends; rather, this is about taking control of your life and your free time. When asked to take on another responsibility, consult your calendar and then decide if you'll enjoy it or stress out over it.

🕒 Most people would prefer an honest answer of no, rather than overburdening someone who'll only do a less than acceptable job. If you feel awkward saying no, suggest a better time for you to help or try to find a suitable replacement.

19. Take advantage of your prime time

Your prime time is that time of day when your energy levels are at their highest, you should use this time to concentrate your personal effort on the high value tasks. The aim of implementing Prime Time is largely to reduce stress, whilst increasing Planning and Productivity .



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🕒 Even if your Prime Time is short lived, you'll feel much better having accomplished a high value task.

20. Be positive

Negative thoughts permeate our minds very easily when we get discouraged with a challenge. If we carry these negative thoughts with us, we start to believe that all challenges are impossible and it's okay to give up and leave projects unfinished.

🕒 The same can be said of positive thinking. So instead of saying to yourself: "I will try to get this done," be positive and say: "I will get this done."

The Final Lesson

Everyone has the capabilities to change what we don't like. If your time management is not as good as it could be, you have the ability to change your ways, but only you can take these action steps to become more productive.

By practicing just one of these tips every week (or every day, if you're ambitious) you will soon develop lifelong habits and these time management techniques will become second nature to you.

THE TIME DOCTOR



Mike Gardner is 'The Time Doctor' and is highly regarded as one of the UK's leading Time Management specialists and is regularly featured in articles in the small business sections of both The Times and Guardian newspapers. www.thetimedoctor.co.uk

