Time of your Life

Tackle Time Wasters and Use your Energy to Full Effect

Benjamin Ball

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Time of your Life: Tackle Time Wasters and Use your Energy to Full Effect
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Contents

1   Where are you losing time?

Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.
– C. Northcote Parkinson

Every job and every function is different. And yet almost everybody struggles with time. Each in their own way, and at the same time similar patterns emerge. Note down in which fields you would like more time, and what you're losing/wasting time on for the moment.

➔ *How productive are you, in %?*

➔ *What are you losing time on?*

Draw a house. Your time and energy is like the heating in that house. Where does it leak out from? Draw the places and amounts of leakage.   Now relate this to your daily life. Where can you find these leaks in your work?

2   If only it were this simple…

2.1   The Golden Rule

Are you sure you're ready to stop procrastinating and to get more done, day in day out? All right then, here we go:

The best way to get more done is to **choose one thing** that you'll work on next. **Dedicate yourself to it entirely, without distractions or multitasking. Turn off ANYTHING that might bother you and keep going until it's done.**

That's how simple it is! So simple actually, it's nearly irresistible to sin against. There are always exceptions to the rule (like your office being on fire), but there aren't nearly as many as we permit ourselves. Every concession to this golden principle is like punching a **hole in a bucket**. Before you know it you're losing energy on all sides, and you can't seem to get anything done.

Of course, if it were that simple I wouldn't be giving you this course. There has to be more going on, or we would all be doing it – right?

3   Time Management = Self Management

"I am definitely going to take a course on time management…
just as soon as I can work it into my schedule."
– Louis E. Boone

"Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff that life is made of."
– Benjamin Franklin

All Time Management courses and books eventually boil down to one central theme: that in the end, we ourselves are responsible for the use of our time. No-one else can give you more time, or take it away from you.

Time Management is about the HOW: which **techniques and systems** can I use to free up as much time as possible?

Techniques give us ways to work more efficiently, when we're willing and able to. But they don't resolve the issue of your colleague or boss walking into your office or swamping you in mails; or how to deal with days that you just can't focus.

Basically, time management techniques and systems work when you have time and energy. Whenever those fail however, most systems fail as well. Just when you need them most! Because they take too much time and energy themselves, or they don't take into account your personal way of working and your blind spots that make you vulnerable to distraction.

This approach is limited, because it doesn't take into account the inevitable patterns and habits that we have, that will clash with this new system or technique. Managing your time is about more than just calculating and re-ordering. It's about all of our unconscious motivations and fears.

3.1   Building your own Time Management Style

Because we're all different, one single approach can't possibly work for everyone. Certain techniques are useful for everyone, but fail because of personal reasons. If you want to learn to manage your time more efficiently and become more productive, you need to **know yourself and what works for you**.

This course will do just that: give you some insights into your specific time management personality and offer you options that you can turn into new habits and systems.

Self Management is about knowing yourself. What do I want to be doing? What are my **priorities and goals**? What do I do well and quickly, and what is difficult? Where do I lose time, what are my weak spots? It puts the responsibility for time with you and your choices.

3.2   What type of Time Manager are you?

The way you manage – or mismanage – time is connected to who you are as a person. Certain ways of organising oneself and ways of working are just closer to your nature than others. The **Social Styles Model**, explained below, can give you an insight into different types of people, and what drives them.

The model also lists **your qualities as well as the challenges those qualities entail** when you exaggerate. Because every quality is in balance with its opposite: structure versus creativity, speed versus depth, people versus results…. When discovering yourself, you also discover where you are on each of these spectrums, and how you can enlarge your scope.

The great thing is, working on this also means **working on yourself as a person**. The more developed and flexible you become within yourself, the easier it becomes to manage your time.

3.2.1   The Social Styles Model

The Social Styles Model is built around two axes, that create four quadrants.

The horizontal axis is the spectrum Proactive – Reactive.

Being **proactive** implies taking initiative. People that are proactive generally like speed and results. They don't need all the details to move ahead. Sometimes, they even move too quickly and run into walls.

Being **reactive** implies a more compliant and waiting attitude. Reactive profiles focus on depth and quality, more than on speed. That means they'll take more time for things, and let things come to them rather than go looking for them. Sometimes, that makes them on the slow or passive side.

The vertical axis is the spectrum Relationships – Facts&Tasks.

Relationships people value relationships above facts. They prefer to deal with the human side of things. They're good at making friends, forging bonds, networking. On the downside, they may neglect objective facts and lose out on results because of their emotional ties to people and situations.

Facts&tasks people want objective truth and facts. They analyse well and make their decisions based on rational conclusions. Work comes before play. These profiles tend to be more serious, and can come across as distant and sometimes even cold.
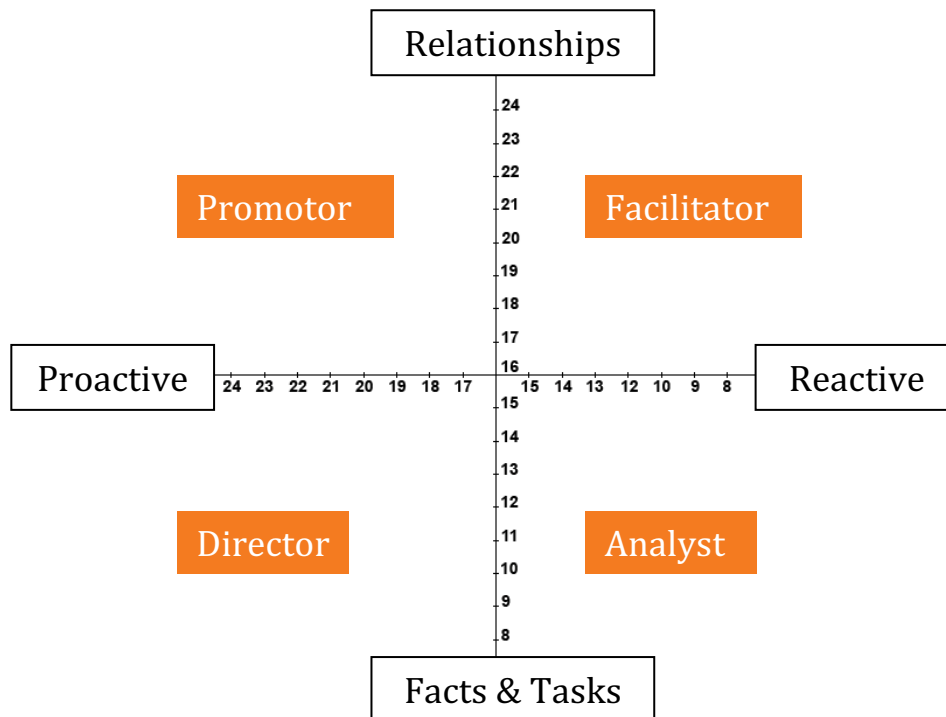
Relationships + Proactivity:
The promotor sells him/herself to others

Promotors are spontaneous, full of ideas, energetic, stimulating, creative, enthusiastic and future-oriented. You know them! They're the president of the sports club or personnel union and like to walk up front.

Promotors are **dominant and relationship-oriented**. They're real trend setters. They're interested in innovation, their image and reputation. They're original and like things to go fast. They also like comfort and luxury.

They can have **difficulties with** priorities, planning and maintenance. They also tend to stray on the superficial side, ignoring difficulties and tough situations. They like it if others are open, join in on their fantasies and illusions, and are optimistic towards the future.

Qualities	Challenges
Enthusiastic and dynamic	Tends to be egocentric
Jovial and charming	Can be superficial
Informal and loose	Impatient
Full of ideas and initiative	Can't always keep promises
Creative	Average listener
Communicative	Not or badly organised, often too many appointments
Sees needs of others	Rarely on time
Motivates others	Plans little or overestimates him/herself
Has good social contacts	Doesn't like routine
Likes New and Exclusive	Has a hard time finalising projects
Global thinker, holistic learner	

Time Management style

Easily starts things but has a hard time finishing.

Tends to sweep over things and neglect details.

Not too reliable when it comes to deadlines.

Can get lost in dreams and future planning.

Has a hard time focusing on one thing for a long time.

What you can work on if you're this type

Learn to stay in one place, physically but also in a job.

Create structure in your life on all fronts.

Generate depth by staying and delving into the details.

Learn to appreciate 'boring work'.

Less planning & dreaming, more doing.

Relationships + Reactivity:
The facilitator likes to blend in and get along with others

Faciliators are **reactive and relationship-centered**. Examples of this style are employees that 'behave' and that like helping everyone with odds and ends even if it means leaving their work. It's the neighbour that always has time to help you out.

This type is more **accommodating** than the others, sometimes even docile. They want to have good relationships with their environment. They don't like being in the center of attention, but they do like helping others. They like to be **useful in the background**. They tend to **adapt**.

Because they're not task-oriented, but predominantly people-based, they'll often rely on **external guidance**. Facilitators aren't the once pulling the cart, and often they need a little push.

Qualities	Challenges
Shows his/her emotions	Lets others take the initiative
Prefers to work in team – social and engaged	Tends to be doubtful
Follows the rules – loyal	Doesn't like too much responsibility
Is flexible	Avoids conflicts
Keeps promises	Will put relationships above tasks & facts
Consults others for decisions	Agrees with everybody to not hurt anyone
Takes other peoples' feelings into account	Puts others ahead of him/herself
Listens well – empathic	
Says 'yes' to make you feel good	
Glues the group together	

Time Management style

Is flexible and helpful.

Tends to wait for work rather than look for it.

Works together well.

Has a hard time thinking ahead.

Will easily do things for others, leaving his own work.

Has a hard time saying 'NO', even if it's too much.

What you can work on if you're this type

Take more initiative
Say 'no'
Make your own planning and deadlines
Actively set goals and priorities

Tasks&Facts + Proactivity:
The director gives orders and follows those of others

The director is dominant and task-oriented. He or she is generally focused on the task at hand, and seeks **control and results**. Examples are the school director with a focus on procedures, output and control. The co-worker that controls or demands that certain rules be obeyed.

Directors are result-oriented, impatient, demanding, precise. They **don't adapt easily** to others. When they do, it'll be based on hard facts and measurable results. Don't try to pressure them, instead give them the feeling they can make their own choices.

They're generally **self-regulating**. They don't need much encouragement.

They can improve in listening skills, and **being open to other people's opinion**. They can also let go of solutions sometimes, especially where it concerns other people's problems.

Qualities	Challenges
Direct and decisive	Tends to be inflexible
Defines clear objectives	Can be dominant and controlling
Well organised	Bad listener
Convincing	Impatient
Self-assured	The ends justify the means
Realistic	Doesn't like vagueness
No-nonsense – doesn't beat around the bush	Stubborn
Results and Action	Can be uncomfortable around emotions
Global	

Time Management style

Goal- and Result-oriented

Organised

Easily gives orders

Takes initiative, makes things happen

Tries to do everything himself

Can be stubborn and rigid, difficult to work with

What you can work on if you're this type

Personal exchanges, working together

Don't try to solve everything yourself, ask for help

Take it easy on yourself, and others

Tasks&Facts + Reactive:

The analyst observes, reflects and concludes

People with an analytical style are **reactive and task-oriented**. This is the somewhat **isolated** co-worker that busies himself with **minute details**, poring over endless charts and complicated equations. The expert. Or the quiet colleague that likes to prepare everything perfectly and is always ready to research things.

Analysts are punctual, like to work step by step, are **methodical and detail oriented**. They work systematically, avoid risk and aren't satisfied with vague, global reactions. They're mostly **self-regulating** in their working style.

Because they're not dominant and task oriented, they're **prepared to follow the directions** of managers punctually. Maybe even too punctually, as they may remind others of the procedure and demand the same punctuality from them.

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Analysts have a **hard time making decisions**, as well as taking risks. They try to reduce stress by tackling complexity and problems that they sometimes get lost in.

Qualities	Challenges
Rational, exact and precise Organised Prefers written communications Analyses before acting Prefers to work alone Strives for correctness and quality Problem-Solver Serious	Loses him/herself in details sometimes Has trouble keeping to deadlines Not very expressive Can come across as distant Doesn't make new contacts easily Is or seems wary Often feels uncomfortable discussing feelings

Time Management style

Detailed and precise

Organised and analytical

Can be slow and stubborn

Waits for work to bit into, rather than creating his own priorities

What you can work on if you're this type

Set your own goals, deadlines and priorities

Make your own decisions

Work shorter and more globally, 80% is good enough

Think in terms of solution, don't lose yourself problems.

Exchange with others, don't try to do it all yourself

3.2.2   What type are you?

Of course, no-one is just one type. Instead, we have certain inclinations. You may be more of a director at work, especially when things become stressed, and more of a promoter at home where you feel at ease. We do have a center, from which we can expand in all directions. The more outspoken our character, the less access we have to other types.

If you want to be more specific, choose **one context** (the work floor, your relationship to your boss, family life, the sports club…).

Draw a circle with a diameter the length of one half of a spectrum. That should look a bit like this:

Promoter	Relationships	Facilitator

Proactive		Reactive

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Director	Facts & Tasks	Analyst
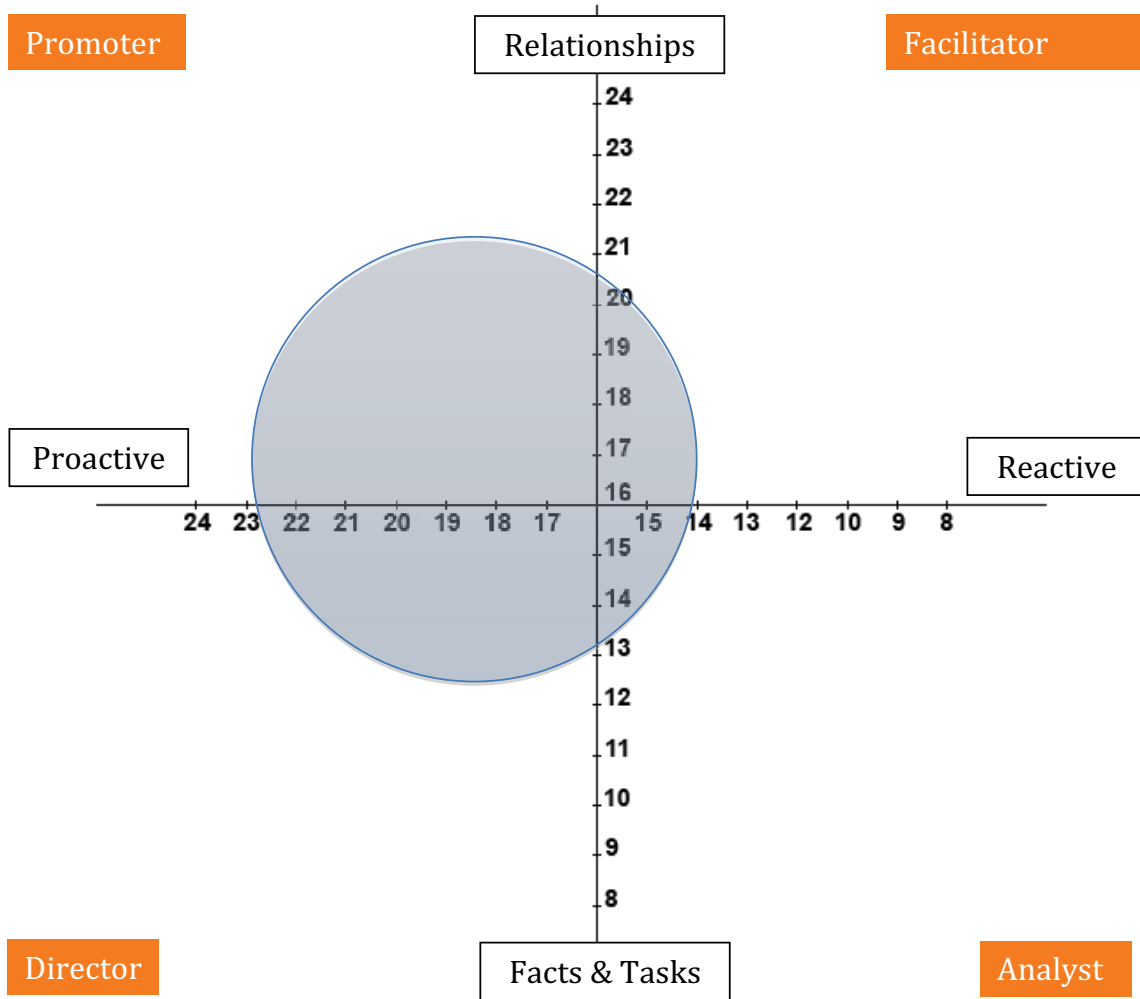
<u>Let's summarize!</u>

Which personality and Time Management style do you have?

Write down 3 THINGS thatyoualready do well.

What's ONE THING you'llpay attention tofromnow on.

Now you know more or less which type you are, you can look at the following insights and techniques through a more specific filter. Select those things that work for you, and build a Time Management style from that.

4   The enemy of Productivity: Procrastination

Have you ever made (New Year's) resolutions? I bet you have! I'll also wager that most of those resolutions had something to do with your productivity at work. Mainly about how you can increase it, without actually having to work longer hours. Am I right? You want to beat procrastination.

4.1   Reasons we procrastinate

How many times have you begun your week full of good intentions, swearing you won't let yourself be distracted and that you'll get things done? Only to find that you're spending time on Facebook again, or checking your emails and not ticking off things on your list.

How is that possible! You just want to get your work done and yet you keep on getting distracted. What little devils are at play here?

1. We want instant gratification. Having a nice nap in the couch may seem a lot more fun than going out running in the cold. Sipping on your coffee and staring out of the window is easier than working on that boring report. Checking your mail or Facebook gives you a quicker result than finishing the project that takes hours of work.

2. We're afraid. Maybe you're postponing your work because there's a problem or question that hasn't been solved yet. Maybe you're afraid you'll fail or look stupid. Sometimes it's easier to do something easy and save the real work for later. That way, you don't get confronted with possibly negative results.

3. We get paralysed by perfectionism. If you like things to be done really well it's probably going to take a lot of work. Just thinking about the work your project will take, you could easily get slightly stressed. In fact, it can make you so stressed that you never get started. You'd rather dream about the result than have to face the possibility of not having a great result.

4. We're not children anymore. When we were in school, there was a teacher breathing in our necks that chided us for not doing our work. In some work environments, the same applies. Under external pressure, however unpleasant, you do have the tendency to get work done. As an independent adult you're supposed to be doing this by yourself, which sadly many of us don't. You probably wouldn't be reading this if you did.

> **5. We overestimate our future self.** We often postpone things because we think we'll get them done in some bright future where you're more productive than ever and work is effortless. Sadly, reality tends to be a bit more grim. If you're not working on it right now, in your bright future you'll be the same procrastinator you are today. Why would anything have changed? Stupid future self…
>
> If you want to be more productive in future, you need to start working on it now. Every explanation or reason that leads to not working on it now, is just an excuse and will end up with no increase in productivity.

6. We want to do too much. We all know the phenomenon: you get so sick of procrastinating that you swear it's going to change this time. The first thing you do works, so you get hungry and try to fix everything at once. Soon, you're so swamped in things to do for the sake of time management that you're more stressed than before. Exhausted, you give up and fall back into the same old routine.

4.2   Some starter tips to tackle procrastination

"All the flowers of all of the tomorrows are in the seeds of today."

– Chinese saying

Becoming more productive is not a question of working more, but of being smarter about it. That often implies having less on your mind so you can work with clarity and focus. As with many things in life, your resistance to do certain things is between our ears. It's this resistance you want to deal with, before you begin with any practical techniques to do the actual work more efficiently.

I've tried pretty much everything, and these are the thoughts and things that work best for me. Any of these strategies can give you the momentum you need at a given time to break through your procrastination and get going.

Insight

Identify the reason why you're delaying. Discover why you're postponing the work. Reframe your resistance by discovering more about the work to be done. It's often our fear of the unknown that causes a paralyzing stress, the first step on the slippery slope towards that unproductive frustration. So map things out, create an oversight and insight into what needs to be done. Often, your fears will become considerably smaller.

Make it small enough

You can't get everything at once! Work in small pieces. Top athletes only think a few steps, strokes, or minutes ahead. For example, work in blocks of 15 tot 25 minutes (the Pomodoro system) with 5-minute breaks inbetween. Try to get a certain part of your work done in that block of time.

Install one new habit at a time. Plan time, prepare it, implement it thoroughly and do it until it's automatic. Make sure you have all the necessary means. Doing things halfway just gives you more work without the benefits.

External pressure

Tell others you'll be working differently from now on. Find someone who will check on the work you want to be doing. Make sure it's someone who wants the same as you (so maybe not your boss, that might push his or her own wants upon you) and who doesn't tend to give you any excuses.

'Begin' instead of 'stop procrastinating'

Your subconscious doesn't process negatives. What do you see when you tell yourself to stop procrastinating? You probably see yourself procrastinating, right? So every time you tell yourself to stop it, you're actually strengthening that image. Instead, focus on what you will do. What's the first thing you'll do? Take one small thing and start doing it, now.

Begin at the beginning

Often an end result we have in mind can seem so big it's overwhelming. Forget about having the overview, prioritising, planning… for a second. Let it go. Just do one small thing now, finish it and then do the next. Do that a couple of times, then collect everything into a big picture again. At least, now you're already created something to work with.

Just do something!

We often stop ourselves from starting because we think we're not ready yet. We don't know enough yet, still have to do all kinds of things first… But how often is that really true? What stops you is often less impressive from close by than it initially seems. When you think too much about something, it tends to become an incredible obstacle as all possible scenarios pop through your head. So stop thinking and make a first move, try some stuff out! Trust your instincts and improvisation. Often, the next steps flow automatically from just doing.

5   It's all about energy and will power

Consider your energy and will power as if you're an **athlete in a long race.** To get to the finish in a good position if at all, you need to be very smart with your energy and resources. Too often we squander our energy on unimportant things: reading articles, watching videos, writing long emails, poring over details…

> *You have a limited amount of energy and will power every day.*
> *Make it as much as possible and spend it wisely.*

To get things done, you need to use your will power. You need to select what to do next, get started, stay focused, deal with distraction, finish what you started, bite through the hard parts. All of these things take energy.

We often underestimate **the amount of will power we need throughout the day**. It's a general energy. You need it to get out of bed, to not smoke or eat that bar of chocolate, to concentrate on work or on the meeting, to convince someone of your point, to exercise after work…

One of the biggest reasons we can't stick to simple rules like 'Do one thing at a time until it's done', is because it takes will power we don't always have. **When we feel tired and weak, we let ourselves go and bad habits** – the easiest and most instantly gratifying way to get through the day – **take over**.

That's why you need to learn to conserve your energy. And try not to do many things at the same time that take will power. Here's where your personal life creeps into work. If you're on a strict and difficult diet, you'll find other strenuous tasks become harder or make your diet harder.

Many things already ask for your attention and will power. This is your **Chronic Energy Demand**, like fixed monthly payments from your bank account.

> ➔ *How much energy and will power do you already need to get through a normal day? What do you already pay attention to, try to change, restrict…?*

5.1   Ways to build energy & will power

5.1.1   Health

You've no doubt read this before: take care of yourself and you will have more energy. Just a quick overview of things to pay attention to:

Sleep

Good food

Exercise

Time off

…

5.1.2   Feeling good about yourself

We have two brains: **the limbic system and the neocortex**. The limbic system, the old brain, takes care of bodily functions and feeling: breathing, emotions, hormone release, instinctive reactions… The neocortex is our thinking brain, that has structures and knowledge.

When we get stressed, our limbic brain shuts down. That has a dramatic impact on our body and the neocortex. Our ability to think, to act, to feel becomes impaired. Being stressed is counterproductive.

It's actually healthier to be happy with who you are and what you do, than it is to live healthily but feel miserable.

Succes & Confidence. Every time you do something and it works, you become more confident. That frees up energy to take on new things. On the flipside, every time you fail you lose energy and confidence.

That's why it's important to set motivating and realistic **goals**.

5.1.3   Goals

"Do not confuse motion and progress. A rocking horse keeps moving but does not make any progress."
– Alfred A. Montapert

"It's not enough to be busy, so are the ants. The question is, what are we busy about?"
– Henry David Thoreau

Goals give us something to work for. Something to focus on. A reason to get up in the morning.

What are you doing it for? What would you like to achieve?

If you can answer these questions, your inner motivation will awaken and drive you forward.

Goal setting isn't only the essence of time management; it's the basis of a fulfilled and actively life. Goals give you hope and motivation for a brighter future. They propel you forwards and make you bridge difficult times. They remove the doubt and idleness and turn your life into a productive, happy one. That is, if you make a healthy habit of setting goals – the right kind of goals – and achieving them.

5.1.4   SMART goal setting

SMART goal setting brings structure and trackability into your goals and objectives. Instead of vague resolutions, SMART goal setting creates verifiable trajectories towards a certain objective, with clear milestones and an estimation of the goal's attainability. Every goal or objective, from intermediary step to overarching objective, can be made more or less S.M.A.R.T. and as such, brought closer to reality.

In corporate life, SMART goal setting is one of the most effective and widely used tools for achieving goals. Once you've charted to outlines of your project, it's time to set specific intermediary goals. With the SMART checklist, you can evaluate your objectives. SMART goal setting also creates transparency throughout the company. It clarifies the way goals came into existence, and the criteria their realisation will conform to.

Why not think of a goal you want to set right now, personal or professional. To make your goal S.M.A.R.T., it needs to conform to the following criteria: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely.

Specific

What exactly do you want to achieve? The more specific your description, the bigger the chance you'll get exactly that. S.M.A.R.T. goal setting clarifies the difference between 'I want to be a millionaire' and 'I want to make €50.000 a month for the next ten years by creating a new software product'.

Questions you may ask yourself when setting your goals and objectives are:

What exactly do I want to achieve?
Where?
How?
When?
With whom?
What are the conditions and limitations?
Why exactly do I want to reach this goal? What are possible alternative ways of achieving the same?

Measurable

Measurable goals means that you identify exactly what it is you will see, hear and feel when you reach your goal. It means breaking your goal down into measurable elements. You'll need concrete evidence. Being happier is not evidence; not smoking anymore because you adhere to a healthy lifestyle where you eat vegetables twice a day and fat only once a week, is.

Measurable goals can go a long way in refining what exactly it is that you want, too. Defining the physical manifestations of your goal or objective makes it clearer, and easier to reach.

Acceptable

Is your goal acceptable? That means investigating whether the goal is supported by your surroundings. You weigh the effort, time and other costs your goal will take against the profits and the other obligations and priorities you have with others.

Sometimes we set goals that counteract other people's goals. We then receive resistance. That can be unavoidable, like competing for a position. Or we want a job that doesn't fit with our family situation. Then the question arises: what is most important to you?

Some goals are be dangerous to yourself and others, like inventing a weapon of Doom, selling a terrible product at an exorbitant price or lying to make someone look bad and better yourself.

Realistic

Is reaching your goal realistic to you? Do you actually want to run a multinational, be famous, have three children and a busy job? You decide for yourself whether you have the personality for it, or your team has the bandwidth.

If you don't have the time, money or talent to reach a certain goal you'll certainly fail and be miserable. There's nothing wrong with shooting for the stars; if you aim to make your department twice as efficient this year as it was last year with no extra labour involved, how bad is it when you only reach 1,8 times? Not too bad…

Timebound

Time is money! Make a tentative plan of everything you do. Everybody knows that deadlines are what makes most people switch to action. So install deadlines and go after them.

Keep the timeline realistic and flexible, that way you can keep morale high. Being too stringent on the timely aspect of your goal setting can have the perverse effect of making the learning path of achieving your goals and objectives into a hellish race against time – which is most likely not how you want to achieve anything.

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My SMART Goal
Specific
Measurable
Acceptable
Realistic
Timebound

5.1.5   *Goals in time*

Not only do you need to think about your Goals. You need to do it in different timeframes. If you set a goal for within four years, your chances of making it are way too small. You need short-term goals to keep you going, to give you focus.

And longer-term goals to keep you going in the general right direction. Both aspects are essential: working hard but in the wrong direction will get you nowhere. Nor will having wonderful long-term dreams but not working towards them right now.

Set one SMART goal for the same aspect of your life in each of these timeframes:

This week

3 months

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3 years

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5.1.6   Build good habits

"Successful people are simply those with successful habits."
– Brian Tracy

"I never could have done what I have done without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one subject at a time."
– Charles Dickens

Habits are things you do daily, on a near-automatic basis. They take less will power because they're ingrained in our system. They're paths carved out of the landscapes of our lives by repetition and determination.

Building habits takes time and effort. Another thing we underestimate. It's not because you got up early for one week, that your body will automatically do it the week after. In fact, many habits remain difficult. But most become a lot easier once you've done them for a certain amount of time. 30 days seems to be a good starting point.

It's also important that you don't miss repetitions. You can default one repetition once in a while, but never two. The day after should be extra strong.

Many people are swept away by the tides of Time. By not setting priorities and goals, or building the right habits, time and energy slip away from them and keep them from doing what they really want to.

You already have habits, paths that you follow unconsciously. Some of those are very valuable, and others aren't.

Changing habits can be very challenging. It's like a rocket taking off from the Earth's gravity. At first, enormous amounts of energy are needed. As the rocket gathers speed and height, less and less energy is needed. Until it escapes into orbit, and runs out of itself.

Here are our tips:

- Change small habits. Make it small enough to guarantee you'll do it. Small steps make up big ones in the end.
- Change 1 habit at a time. It takes a lot of focus and dedication to change even the smallest thing permanently. Don't overestimate yourself, or you'll be wasting energy and creating frustration. That undermines your confidence.
- Keep a new habit up for at least 30 days without interruption.

5.2   Ways to conserve energy

5.2.1   From Multitasking to Mode-Tasking

"You can't catch one hog when you're chasing two."
– Moe Schaffer

We've all heard that multi-tasking is bad. Even modern human begins can't do it without losing productivity. Automatic tasks can be done simultaneously, those that don't require conscious intervention. All the rest, however, isn't efficient.

We are like processors in a computer. A task comes in and we run it through our machine. A machine works best if it does one thing at a time. Imagine a factory that constantly changes its production line to a new product; it would lose mountains of time.

The same principle applies to multitasking: every time we switch to another activity, we lose time and energy on the switching process.

To be as efficient and productive as possible, you want to switch tasks as little as possible. Similar tasks can be grouped in something I call **Modes**. A Mode denotes a certain kind of activity, a specific part of your brain processor that's being used. Being creative is a certain Mode that differs drastically from, say, copying a text by hand.

A Mode gets deeper and more powerful the more uninterrupted time we spend on it. The longer you spend in a certain Mode, the better it works and the more efficient you become. It not only takes time to switch between Modes, it also takes time to 'get into' a Mode. Like an engine warming up.

Years spent working in certain Modes, makes us **specialists** in this Mode. That's why the current way of scattered, multi-tasked working is no good: our attention span is becoming too short, and we never go deeply enough into any particular Mode to really deepen and grow its power.

Certain tasks can be said to lie **in the same Mode**: they're so similar that they draw from the same inner resources. Like calling people on the phone and talking to them in real life. Or physical exercise and repetitive tasks, strengthening our coordination skills. Or creating a new logo and a slogan to go with it.

Everyone has their favourite ways of working. Modes that they are **naturally more productive** in. It can be helpful to identify this and orientate your job towards it. It also helps for motivation: these are the jobs that give you energy and confidence. You can often start with those, and coast on that energy to start something in a Mode that's harder to you.

5.2.1   Parameters

Modes are often on either side of certain scales. What we enjoy, is the opposite of something that's hard for us. To find out in what general areas you excell, it can be useful to define some of your scales. Here are some examples

Detail work l---l Working on the big picture

Working by yourself, in silence l---l Working with people/in a lively environment

Focus on tasks l---l Focus on people

Creativity and Variety l---l Procedure and Routine

➔ *Which Modes do you prefer in your work and life? Which don't you naturally like as much?*

➔ *Which tasks do you have in work? Which Mode goes best with each one? At what times of day do certain Modes work best for you?*

➔ *Create a plan to work in blocks according to a certain Mode*

5.2.2   Don't think too far ahead

It's good to look ahead and know where you're going. However, if you're always looking ahead you can't get stuck in now. Often, the enormity of what still lies ahead is paralysing.

When you think too much about things, it tends to paralyse you. There is an invisible frontier after which more thinking doesn't add to the eventual doing anymore; it's just turning around in circles. This is often coined as **Paralysis by Analysis**.

Many people struggle with this. They're trying to solve a problem before it's even there, or without know what the situation is exactly. Instead of investigating and trying things out, there looking at it from a distance where the hidden aspects of can't be discovered, or where the necessary change can't be started up. Examples are feedback conversations, project executions, forecasts…

Top athletes often only look ahead a few steps, strokes or minutes. Everyone can run for 15 minutes! That's why the Pomodoro System is so useful: you only have to focus and work hard for the next 25 minutes, after that you're off the hook. And so on.

Don't lose yourself in endless planning and trying to calculate how long something will take. Spend that time chipping away, that's the fastest way of getting it done and a sure way to not be disappointed.

5.2.3   Finish what you started

Don't leave open ends. Whatever you started, opens up a line that needs to be closed before the time and energy and invested in it can be regained. That includes promises; projects that are pending; conflicts that haven't been resolved; todo's in the back of your head; previous experiences with colleagues or projects…

To have a clear head, learn to close off the day or a task, and free yourself up for the next task. That's why breaks are so important, to give yourself the time to round it off.

Another part of this is celebrating when a big project is finished, and taking some time off before starting on the next one. Your body needs to process the end of the one before it can start on something new.

5.2.4   Write things down

Don't clutter your mind with things to remember. It's like juggling many balls at the same time, it takes too much energy and concentration. It's a chronic strain.

So write things down, in a place you can trust and refer to easily from anywhere. We'll look at my Master Daily Calendar System later on in this course, that'll give you 3 different kinds of lists you can access from anywhere. Those will be all you need to manage every to do you may have.

Another handy thing is to carry a notebook. That can be paper, like in the old days, or digital. These days, everyone who owns a smartphone has one with them. You can easily take notes and set reminders with your phone, and write short texts to keep your ideas with you. This is actually my recommendation. You can forget your Moleskine at home, but you probably won't forget your phone. That brings me to my next point:

5.2.5   Integrate with existing habits

New habits and systems work easiest if they integrate with your current way of working. Adding a small thing to your system is easy, and will pay of quickly. You don't always have to change everything to become more productive and efficient.

If you already have an online calendar, make sure you have it in your smartphone as well and that it synchronises every time you enter something new.

A great way to create an integrated workflow is the Cloud. Everything is stored online, and accessible from any internet connection. One of the best is Google, that has Documents, Calendar, Gmail and more. Pretty much everything you need to run an office and collaborate with others. Very handy.

Find your time of day. One of the most powerful integrations you can make, is to find out when your best times of day are. When can you focus best, when are you most alert and active? And conversely, when do you tend to be distracted?

Most people are at their sharpest between 07h00 and 13h00, between 18h00 and 20h00. That's when you should be doing the hard stuff! Other times can be used to do those 'filler tasks', things that don't really have great importance nor take too much effort, but that need to be done. Think reporting, preparing meetings, copy-pasting, printing things…

Download free eBooks at bookboon.com

Pimp your Smartphone. Everyone has a Smartphone these days. You always have it with you, couldn't live without it… The perfect tool to help you out with your Time Management. Functions you can use your Smartphone for:

> **Note pad** – Write down ideas to avoid forgetting. There's also EverNote, a free app, if you want something more elaborate.
>
> **Timer** – Time how long you work cf. Pomodoro System
>
> **Calendar** – Integrate your to do-list with your calendar
>
> **Contacts** – Find your contacts instantly.

Aside from that, there are hundreds of possible applications you can add to your Smartphone. Keeping track of your budget, spreadsheet programs, daily exercise trackers… Depending on your activities and needs, turn your Smartphone into a useful tool.

5.2.6   Eliminate distractions

Don't try to be stronger than your distractions. Relieve yourself of the constant strain of having to resist. Make as many of your unwanted habits unavailable. Turn off the internet or the email icon; delete your unproductive accounts and apps; find a space to work alone, or put on some earphones. Hide the chocolate.

You need all the energy and will power you have, so don't waste it on a constant struggle against your nature. Humankind will always tend towards quick and easy fixes that don't really solve the problem, don't fight that. Try to circumvent having to use your willpower by creating an environment that shuts of unnecessary distraction.

Digital Distractionitis. These days, we receive more and more information. We check our three email accounts on our phones, as well as our Facebook and Twitter. We follow a link to something else, and before we know it hours have passed.

This habit is no less than an **addiction**! If you want to reclaim your attention span and full productivity, you need to overcome the need to 'quickly' check things. There is no quickly. If you have to do it, do it well and within a **time limit**. Often we do this as a untimed break, which ends up taking more time than the actual work time.

➔ ***What can you do in your work space right now to eliminate distractions?***

5.2.7   Pace yourself

"There is more to life than increasing its speed."
– Mohandas K. Gandhi

You can't be a rock star every day. You have top days, and bad days. Nothing much to be done about it, however early you go to bed or healthily you eat. And yet we often expect the same performance from our best days, every day. We force ourselves to work harder, and create an exhaustion that eventually slows us down.

That's not to say you should let it all hang when it's not really working, on the contrary. But you can be mild for yourself, and respect your limits. Adapt to the energy level you have.

The ideal dose is that where you get the best out of today, without using up tomorrow's energy. When we overdo it one day, we pay for it the next. It creates a yo-yo effect: one day you're up, the next you crash. Then you're up again, and so forth.

This isn't the most efficient movement, because every crash takes time to recuperate from. It stops the **momentum**. That's why it's better to stay lower, and in doing so avoid crashing. It gives you a more steady movement that eventually sees you getting further with less energy.

A good way to dose things is to compart your work into smaller pieces, like in the Pomodoro Technique. Create 25-minute goals, and create constant small successes. It'll make you more confident, motivated and productive.

Some activities also work better when you're relaxed. Everything that takes **precision, creativity and complex thinking** for example. You can't calculate by heart when you're in a hurry, nor dream up a slogan for your next campaign. Other things do go faster when you rush them, mostly **physical and repetitive tasks**. Think of walking up steps or stamping letters.

5.2.8   Say 'NO'

Managing time often means managing other people's time, as well. Some will offload their surplus onto you, pushing you into overload. Learning to say 'NO' can go a long way in helping you clear your desk from unwanted and unnecessary clutter.

A handy way to practice this is to try and say 'NO' once every day. It doesn't matter where, or how, just as long as you do it. You could decline a coffee, or an invitation, or leave a question unanswered. Feel what it's like, you might enjoy the freedom of it!

### 5.2.9   Stop trying to be perfect

"Don't spend a dollar's worth of time on a ten cent decision."
– Peter Turla

The urge for perfectionism is one of the biggest time-wasters around. Statistically, the relevance and usefulness of our time use decreases after a certain point. A good reference is the 80/20-rule.

At 80%, most of your work is good enough. This first 80% often doesn't take that long to compile, create and/or streamline. It could be as little as 20% of your energy! The other 20% to get it just right, often takes ages and loads of fiddling around.

This is called a digressive growth curve: after a certain amount of work, the added value becomes so small it's hardly worth pursuing.
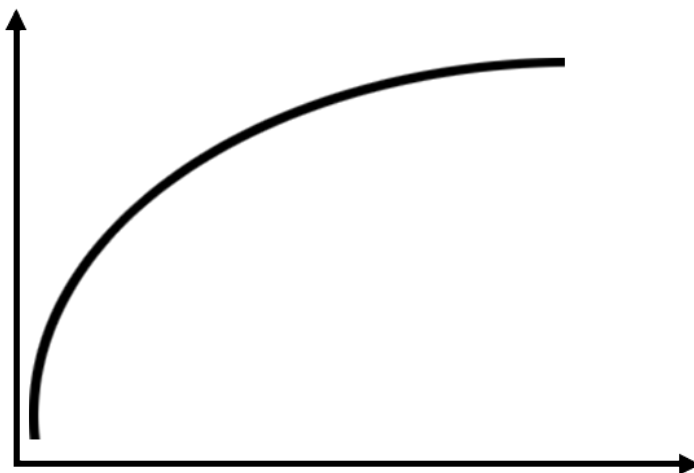
It could be that your job demands this kind of precision; in which case my recommendation would be to seek out systems to alleviate the inevitable but useless tinkering that takes up so much time. Create a template, a formula…

If you don't lose your job over it, I would suggest settling quicker. You're not doing your job better by obsessing over details, on the contrary: you're getting less done and slowing down progress.

Another aspect of this is that often, **other people's feedback** will bring you much more added value than your own process. Another viewpoint often adds that much-needed extra. So stop earlier and show it to others for feedback quicker. That way, you'll also avoid double work that you did based on assumptions that turned out to be wrong.

Be mild for yourself. 80% is often not only good enough, it's also very efficient!

5.2.10   Don't do everything yourself

Not only is this tiring, it's also inefficient. Unless you're Superman, chances are certain parts of your work are better done by others. Or maybe they need more time and deliver less quality, and still it's a good idea to let them do it.

Why? Because you may be able to use your time for more valuable tasks. If you're the business owner or manager, you need to be managing the overall picture. If you don't do that, the whole department or company will suffer. The people you hire are there to take care of the details.

As you'll also see in the part about Modes, certain people are better at certain tasks than others. If you can delegate the tasks to the right person in your team and possibly take on some of their work that you're better at, your group team becomes significantly more efficient.

➔ *Who in your team is better at certain tasks?*

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➔ *What are your own specialties?*

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➔ *What could you give to others, and take over from others?*

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5.3   11 More Ways to Improve Productivity

Do the difficult things while they are easy and do the great things while they are small.
A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.
– Lao Tzu

With a few small changes, you can set a chain in motion to get more done in less time. Here are ten possible changes you can make to achieve just that:

1. Work on your future self – **today**. Unless you do something about it in the meantime, you'll procrastinate as much later as you do today. It's like that movie, 'Back to the Future' – it's up to you now, in the past of your future, to influence how your future self will tackle his present (you have to love that sentence). That doesn't mean you should become the most productive person in one day, but you can make an ongoing commitment out of it. Keep working on it, and before you know it you'll have created it a brighter future for yourself.

2. Be productive, even when you're not working. Maintain a list with small productive tasks you can do as a break. Cleaning (parts) of your desk(top), calling a customer, looking something up for your next holiday… Things that need to be done and that take no more than five minutes. This kind of thing clears your head, gives you a breather and gets you ready for the next big task.

3. Get up earlier. Are you one of those people (like me) who get up just in time to shower, grab some grub on the go and rush off the work? Why not get up half an hour earlier! Ban the snooze button. It doesn't make you any more slept out, and your day can begin with a lot less stress. You could even meditate before work!

4. Prepare your day. If getting up earlier isn't your cup of tea, how about taking time at the end of each day to create some peace of mind for tomorrow morning? Plan your work, put things ready so you can jump right in. That way you don't need to wake up with that slight feeling of panicky dread at the unpredictability of today's tasks: you already know what's going to happen.

5. Put a limit on your time. It's ironic: so many people work long hours and think they're doing great. Sadly, the amount of hours spent working are no reference to getting things done. Your mind works better and faster when it has constraints. An impending deadline makes you many times more productive. So harness the power of time: limit the amount of hours you work and work more productively while you're at it.

6. Limit your to do-list. We often have the tendency to put too many things on the list, and then hop from one job to the other, just getting small parts of each done and generally losing loads of time getting into each task. So make that long, complete list… and then select the 3 to 5 things that you really want to get done. Make sure that when you get these done, you can be satisfied about your day. Start with the most important, before you do anything else (especially before checking your email).

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7. Apply the principle of TV commercials. Some TV channels begin with a new programme as soon as the previous one finishes. A few minutes later, in come commercials. Why? Because by then, people are already watching the next programme. They want to see what happens. The same goes for your work: don't take breaks in between tasks, but a little while after you've begun a new task. That way you also have concrete things to think about, and you'll automatically start working sooner.

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8. Force yourself to take short breaks. Everyone deserves a treat after working hard. But don't break too long! A few minutes to catch your breath is more than enough, rather than losing your momentum with a half-hour break.

9. Fix a time for recreation. Social networks like Facebook are a powerful way to stay connected, but two or three times a day for five minutes should suffice. After that it becomes a waste of time, like many other online and offline recreations. Fix a time for them, like from five to five thirty.

10. Minimise work-home travel. You can't always choose where you work. But you can find the most productive way to get there. You can carpool, or take public transportation. That gives you the chance to not have to drive, which is basically a waste of valuable time. Spend it reviewing your day, preparing something, reading up on important news… This time is often well used for long-term things.

11. Stop reading about time management. There's a big difference between knowing something and being able to do something. You probably already know everything you need, especially if you know the Golden Rule of Productivity. It's like knowing how a car works, but not being able to fix it yourself. So take one practical thing and do it until it's a habit.

5.4   EXTRA – What's the best work music?

If you like listening to music while you work, consider the following points to decide whether or not it's helping you to focus or not. Here are some points that define whether or not music is helping you, or distracting you.

To start with, to concentrate you need music **without words**. Even if you're not listening, talking takes up part of your attention. Ever notice how a certain word or line from a song makes you prick up your ears? How can you hear that word if you're not listening at all… Music needs to support your attention, not take away from it.

A good bet is **computer game music**. It's not exactly Music Awards material, but it is specifically designed for you to do better at the game. That implies not being distracted by it, and helping you perform arduous concentration tasks. It puts you in a **concentrated trance**.

Jazz is often used but actually isn't the best music, it contains too many unexpected turns and twists. This can also be the case with classical music. You're looking for **music that's slightly repetitive without becoming annoying**.

Also think of the right **rhythm**. Techno = 120–150 bpm = fast, allegro moderato = 80 bpm relaxed. Some jobs need uptempo, for other tasks you need to be very calm. Your guide to classical music rhythms, from slower to faster:

- Larghissimo – very, very slow (19 BPM and under)
- Grave – slow and solemn (20–40 BPM)
- Lento – slowly (40–45 BPM)
- Largo – broadly (45–50 BPM)
- Larghetto – rather broadly (50–55 BPM)
- Adagio – slow and stately (literally, "at ease") (55–65 BPM)
- Adagietto – rather slow (65–69 BPM)
- Andante moderato – a bit slower than andante (69–72 BPM)
- Andante – at a walking pace (73–77 BPM)
- Andantino – slightly faster than andante (although in some cases it can be taken to mean slightly slower than andante) (78–83 BPM)
- Marcia moderato – moderately, in the manner of a march [4][5] (83–85 BPM)
- Moderato – moderately (86–97 BPM)
- Allegretto – moderately fast (98–109 BPM)
- Allegro – fast, quickly, and bright (109–132 BPM)
- Vivace – lively and fast (132–140 BPM)
- Vivacissimo – very fast and lively (140–150 BPM)
- Allegrissimo – very fast (150–167 BPM)
- Presto – extremely fast (168–177 BPM)
- Prestissimo – even faster than Presto (178 BPM and over)

6   How To Set Priorities

"You will never find time for anything. If you want time you must make it."
– Charles Buxton

"Managing your time without setting priorities is like shooting
randomly and calling whatever you hit the target."
– Peter Turla

What often goes wrong in our work is that we allow unimportant tasks to take precedence over more essential things. Because they're faster, easier, more urgent. That way, we end up in a rut of endless operational tasks that never allows us the time to work on those dream projects of ours. What to do?

It's all about importance:

Doing something unimportant well doesn't make it more important.
Needing a lot of time doesn't make it more important.

We run around saying: 'If only I had more time, I could get everything done.' The good news is: you do! The bad news: you'll have to let some things go. If you don't, more time would just give you more meaningless tasks to fill it up with. What you need is to stay conscient of and focused on what's really important. That's the only way to get the big things done in life!

"I'm too busy mopping the floor to turn off the faucet."
– Unknown

6.1   Stephen Covey's Time Management Grid

An excellent and easy way to decide on priorities is **Stephen R. Covey's Time Management Quadrant**. I've been using this to create clarity in my todo's for ages, which has completely changed my view on my work. I used to be stressed all the time and complain about not being able to do what I wanted; now I just decide what I want to do and make time for it.

So let's get to it! Take at the quadrant below and put it on a big piece of paper, but keep the squares empty. Now what are these quadrants all about?
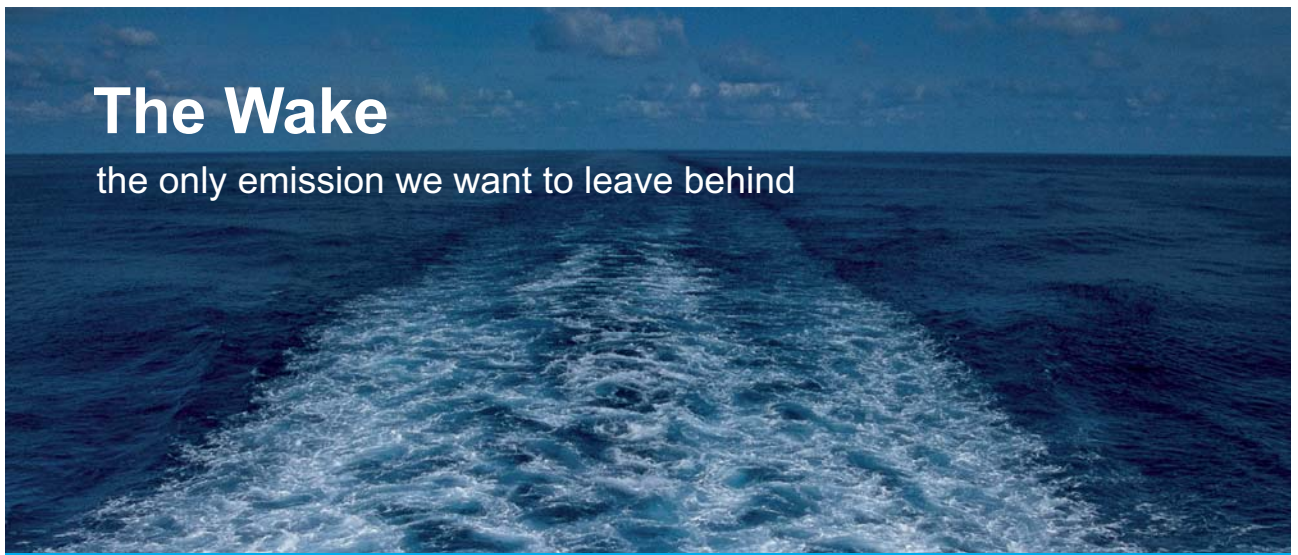
I	II
Important and Urgent	Important, Not Urgent
III	**IV**
Urgent, Not Important	Not Urgent, Not Important

Sector I: Urgent and Important

Crises

Urgent problems

Deadlines from above

Sector II: Not Urgent but Important

Prevention and Planning
Relationship building
Business and Personal Development
Long Term Goals

Sector III: Urgent but not Important

Interruptions: mails, calls, reports, meetings…
Other people's problems

Sector IV: Nor Urgent Nor Important

Trivia, entertainment
Things that might become important one day
Distraction (Facebook, the window)

Things in Sector I are both Urgent and Important. These are most often things that come from others: deadlines for clients, reports for you manager… Things that need to be done yesterday, or things will blow up. Sector II contains things that are important, but not urgent. It's our real goals, the things we want to realize in life. Sadly, it's also the things that we delay because of things in Sector I – or worse, in Sector III: things that are urgent but not important at all.

A good planning creates a balance between sectors I and II. Ideally, you should clear out Sector I completely and work only in Sector II. As for Sectors III en IV: it may sound harsh, but I think it's best you let them go. Especially as long as there are still things to do in Sector I or II.

6.1.1   Tip: put deadlines on Sector II

The things in Sector II are often what makes us tick and love our work. And yet, often we can't seem to get them done. One of the main reasons is often no-one will blame or fire you if you don't do them.

You can add extra pressure for yourself though, by setting deadlines. You're slowly bringing them into Sector I, and increasing the pressure to realise them. Don't forget: the most important appointment you have is the one with yourself!

6.1.2   Tip: Are your priorities your own?

Other people would dare to 'delegate' their problems and tasks to us. By making them seem urgent and important, they're dropped into your Sector I. Don't let them fool you! You may recognise these sentences: "It'll only take a minute"; "Who else is going to do it?!"; "It simply has to be done by tomorrow or…"; "They told me you had to do it NOW."…

Often those things aren't all that important or urgent at all. You find you've set your work aside, made things happen and two weeks later, you still haven't heard back about it. Learning to sidestep or delegate these things back can be a handy skill. Here are some useful lines:

I'll do it right after I finish this important assignment!

Sorry, I'm fully booked until tomorrow evening. Things that are even more pressing than this.

Who exactly said it needed to be finished?

I'd love to do it. I'll need XXX first though, can you send it to me and then I'll start on it.

6.1.3   How to decide what's important (or not)

If you find you have nothing to put in Sector III and IV, you're probably taking on too much. Choose what you really want to get done, and what you could live without. Let them go for the time being. Focus on those things that are essential to you, and forget about all the rest. Result: more focus, less clutter!

Assignment: fill in all of your work, projects, dreams… in these quadrants. Take a look at your planning and work: are they in concordance with your priorities? If not, adapt your planning!

Sector I	Sector II
Sector III	Sector IV

➔ **Which pattern do you see? Which tendency do you have?**
➔ **How can you make time for Sector II, what habit will you have to change?**

Let's make it even more interesting…

> ➜ **Imagine that, for some reason, you can only work for 2 hours a day. Which tasks would you choose. What would you drop?**

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> ➜ **Now imagine you only have 2 hours a week. Which tasks would you do? Which would you drop?**

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7   A few Time Management Systems in short

7.1   Benjamin Ball's Master Daily Calendar system

This is my super-simple way of keeping track of things. As most systems take a lot of time and effort to set up and run, they tend to only work in easy times. When things get stressed, maintenance of the system suffers and we run behind our schedules.

It takes three lists:

Your 'Master' List. This is where you throw in everything that needs to be done. I recommend using the two first quadrants of Covey's Priority Quadrant. That gives you a quick overview of what needs to be done in the near future, and what you want to work on long-term.

Throw everything in here, possibly including some more info and dates. But keep it short! Don't worry about ordering it, that work again. You could of course do it in Excel, and add a deadline for each thing that allows you to quickly order it with Excel's Order function.

Your 'Today' List. This is what you want to have done today. It contains 5 items at most! Make sure this list feels **feasible and light**. Our work tends to make things heavier in itself, no need to overload yourself in advance. For me, 3 solid tasks a day are perfect.

Your Calendar. There are always things you need to plan out in advance, or blocks of time you want to reserve for a particular task. I personally put these in my **Google calendar** (if you use OutLook, just as good).

It contains both my personal and professional appointments, as well as blocks of time set aside for certain tasks. In that way, I can run my to do-lists and my calendar side by side, with a minimum of hassle. What's more, I can assess the real workload of a certain period of time because everything is in there, from my dinner dates to reserved time for preparing a presentation.

That's it. It's very simple and it takes up little to no time to make and maintain. Integrating it into your calendar means you're just adding onto something you're already using. Don't spend too much time planning: often, it's an excuse to not be working on things.

I also use the Pomodoro system to make sure I stay focused during the day:

7.2   The Pomodoro System

Pomodoro is the Italian word for tomato and there are several tomato kitchen timers. This is what inspired Francesca Pirillo in coming up with this productivity technique. It goes against the popular notion that multitasking can help you accomplish more things in a shorter period of time.

The Pomodoro technique is built upon the notion that you should do one thing and only one thing at a time. More specifically, you should only do one thing in every 25 minutes.

How does it work?

In the first place, you will need a timer. You can use the stopwatch of your mobile phone. Or you can get a timer from the closest department store. Set your timer to 25 minutes. Within that period, you should accomplish only one task.

What if you are working on a big task that will require more than 25 minutes? Simple, break down the big task into smaller tasks and give yourself 25 minutes for each task.

Francesca Pirillio calls each 25-minute intervals a pomodoro. You should be strict in completing your task within that pomodoro. Blot out all distractions as you work. If you get distracted and you start doing another task, then one pomodoro is wasted and you will have to repeat that pomodoro all over again.

After each pomodoro, give yourself a 5-minute break before starting on the next task.

Here is my summary of two more systems you can try out if you want something more advanced:

7.3   Chet Holmes

Chet Holmes is the author of the best-selling book "**The Ultimate Sales Machine**." He is also a top karate martial artist, corporate trainer and business consultant.

Chet Holmes' basic time management system is built on the mindset that time management should be simple and uncomplicated. He recounts a time management seminar he attended where the speaker told them to track how they use their time for three months. He couldn't believe his ears! He just rolled his eyes, gathered his things and left the seminar. He went on to devise a simple time management system that he could use in managing his businesses.

Here is the essence of it:

1. Touch it once.
2. Make lists.
3. Plan how much time you will allocate to each task.
4. Plan the day.
5. Prioritize.
6. Ask yourself: "Will it hurt me to throw this away?"

1. Touch it once. Do not begin a task if you aren't ready to deal with it. A concrete example is email. Once you open and read your emails, prepare to do the action items you find right there and then. With the prevalence of emails in our communication, we tend to just read the email, try to remember what it said and decide to go back to it later in the day.

That is a waste of time! If you could just allot 3–5 minutes to do what is asked by the email, you can discard that email right away and then move on with your other tasks. The lesson here is simple: once you touch it, deal with it!

2. Make lists. Lists are a great way to organize your tasks for the day, for the week, and for the month. You can prepare as many lists as you can, store them on your planner or your computer. Be careful though. If you list down too many things, you will end up not finishing them all by the end of the day. That will also have a negative psychological effect on you. You may feel as if you're doing everything you can and still it is not enough. Or that you may end up feeling that lists are nonsense!

Chet Holmes suggests listing down only 6 items that you must absolutely do for the day. No more. No less. This way, you could look back at the day and be satisfied that you have done your best.

3. Plan how much time you will allocate to each task. After creating a list, you need to estimate the number of hours (or minutes, perhaps) you need to allocate for each task. Ideally, each task should only take you up to an hour. Six tasks would then be done within 6 hours. That leaves you with extra time for checking your emails, going to meetings and other routine tasks in your office. If the number of hours exceeds ten hours, then perhaps, you need to reassess your work habits. Perhaps, you are not working as efficiently as possible!

4. Plan the Day. Now that you have your list and you know how much time you need to allocate for each task, you need to plot your tasks according to the time period that you want them work on them. You will need your scheduling skills for this. Do this in the morning for 5–10 minutes at the start of your day. Consider this time as your planning time so you can be more effective and more efficient throughout the day. Keep in mind though, that you have to stick to your schedule no matter what!

If an officemate stops by for a small talk, try to be polite and say that you are working on something. If that can't be helped, then give him 3–5 minutes and when that time is up, go back to your desk and start working again.

5. Prioritize! At the end of the day, look at your list and your schedule again. Plan for the next day and put the most important task first. When you have surmounted the biggest and most important challenge for the day, you can certainly move on with ease to the easier ones.

6. Ask yourself: "Will it hurt for me to throw this away?" We are inundated with emails and other forms of communication daily. No doubt, you also have lots of reports, reference materials and other documents on your desk, on your drawer, on your inbox and on your computer file folders. Most of these things add up to clutter. Clutter will make your life more difficult by slowing down your machine or by making it difficult for you to look for the more important files.

De-clutter! If you don't need a particular file or document, get rid of it. If you're a supervisor or a boss, most likely, you can still have those files when you need them.

For sure, there will be interruptions to your schedule. That can't be avoided. When there are interruptions, just deal with it and then go back to your sked. Wouldn't it be great to go back to your list at the end of the day and cross out all six items off your list?

I recommend Chet Holmes' time management system for people who are really swamped. It is straightforward and simple. And it does not require any special tools, timer or equipment. But this is predicated and built on an important concept that Chet Holmes also put forward: what he called "pigheaded discipline and determination."

7.4   David Allen's 'Getting Things Done'

Get a copy of David Allen's book plus his Audio book. It is a great productivity handbook! It is very detailed and it is not difficult to follow. While I'm traveling and I can't read the book, I even review the GTD system through my MP3 player.

Get an In-basket. This serves as the collection place for all that comes in – letters, ideas, bills, notes on a meeting, stuff I want to read – practically everything that comes my way.

Buy lots of envelopes and folders. Toss in some plastic organizers and boxes. By having these, you will be able to file and label all the files and references you need. You will also need these for the tickler file that David Allen described as well as for filing your reference materials.

Sweep your mind for all projects, thoughts and ideas that need action. List down all your "open loops." You can write them on paper, then put them into the in-basket. You can process each one individually and you can identify next action steps.

Gather all your stuff and put them in your in-basket. Go around your room, your home office area, and even your storage spaces to gather your stuff. All of them should go into the in-basket. If an item is too big, write its name on a piece of paper and off it goes to the in-basket.

Prepare to organize your in-basket. Set-up your tickler file, which is essentially a calendar of 43 folders – 12 for each month of the year, and 31 envelopes for the days of the month. You will use this as a means of sending something to yourself at some time in the future.

Set up your Reference file folders/envelopes. It is better to just use one Alpha system. It might be tempting to use a lot of categories but it's simply better to file your references from A–Z. It's simple and allows you to find your files easily.

Once you've gathered all your stuff and your mental open loops, process all the items on your in basket and determine next actions. If the item does not need any action from you, you can either,

Throw it away. If it's trash and you will not need it anymore, then just throw it away.

Incubate it. Put it in the tickler file or in your Someday/Maybe lists so you can look at it again at sometime in the future.

File it as reference. If the item has potential value for any of your projects and for your life, it's best to file it. Get an envelope, label it properly and then put it in your reference drawer.

If an item, however, requires action from you, you can:

Do it! If it will take less then two minutes, do it right away!

Delegate it. If you're not the right person to do it, then endorse it to the right person or organization for processing.

Defer it. If it will take more than two minutes, you should probably put it in your calendar, depending on the priority you assign to it. If the next action step, however, is urgent or should be done anytime soon, put it in your Next Actions List for processing right away.

The GTD System also helps you manage your projects – items that require multiple actions from you. The GTD Project management system advocates a simple and natural planning model away from complicated systems used by most companies. For every project that you have, you also need one folder for those and file them where you can see them right away.

8   Specific Areas of Time Management

8.1   How To Manage E-mail Overload In 3 Easy Steps

Do you have control over your email, or do you suffer from email overload? You may actually be neglecting your work and losing incredible amounts of time. Many people could safely change their job to 'Email Specialist', because all they seem to do all day is send emails to and fro.

See if you recognise this story:
You're working on something and a mail comes in. You lose focus and read the email. You may be busy for five minutes writing a reply, or performing a quick task. When you're done, you have to return to the work you were doing. You need to get into your work from scratch again, losing you time again regaining your focus and flow. Getting started is the hardest part of any job and we make ourselves do it over and over by allowing email to distract us.

Tired of e-mail overload? Ready for a new way, with less time spent finishing tasks and less time handling emails – and at the same time getting more done? Let's get it on!

Lesson One: Email is not your friend. We instinctively look forward to email because it brings us exciting news and fun tasks. Sadly, most of the time it brings you routine stuff that just distracts you from what you could be doing. Keeping your mailbox open all the time is one of those universal habits that doesn't make any sense. If you want things to happen to you, you need to make them happen.

Email is like an unruly child that you need to take charge of. If you don't, it'll take over your life with its endless interruptions and often senseless requests. So let me show you a way to deal with email that takes only five minutes to set up. It'll help you keep your email in check and give you more space to do your real job.

First Aid for Email Overload

You have a serious case of email overload and you're losing the pedals. No worries, here's what to do!

Create an 'Action' folder in your inbox.
Go through your mail, pick out the 10 to 15 most important ones and put them in the 'Action' folder. Work from here as long as your inbox isn't cleared.
Create a 'Temporary' folder. Put your complete inbox in here. Everything! You'll be working through this in parts later, for now you can stop worrying about it.

Hey presto, your inbox is empty! Add the most important email tasks to your todo list and start with Email Overload Prevention.

Email Overload Prevention

When dealing with email overload prevention, carry out the following steps.

Work from top to bottom, from recent to older.

Go through your COMPLETE inbox every time you open it. So don't leave your email open all the time; open it and then deal with the inbox. That means you can't just 'check your mail' anymore, there's work to be done!

Process quickly. Take one of the following actions with every mail. Don't spend more than half a minute on any given email.

Delete (as much as possible)

Archive (when it contains information you may need later)

Answer (quickly, in maximum four lines) and delete/archive

Put in the 'Action' folder and add to your to do list. IMPORTANT: DO NOT work on ANY of your to dos while processing your mail! No, not even the small ones.

Clear the inbox, close your email programme or turn of the internet.

Limit your email time. Open your inbox a couple of times a day to process it, then close it again.

Only do email. Think of the Golden Rule of Productivity: choose one thing and dedicate yourself to it. There is a difference between emails and the work that they contain – keep them separated. Make a list while you process your emails, then close your email and start on the work (according to your priorities).

Taking care of old business

So now you've got your emails under control. Great! You're still sitting on a giant pile of emails that may or may not contain something important. Here's how you deal with it:

1. Process it in little parts. There's nothing more deadening than quickly going through hundreds of emails. Do it in little blocks of 5 minutes and it actually becomes fun! It's an ideal break from some other work, a no-brainer with instant results.
2. Use the same procedure as for your inbox. Start on top, 30 seconds max per mail, delete as much as possible, only do email…

Do this and your inbox could be cleaned within the week, and the email monster tamed. Congratulations on regaining your freedom! Here, have a badge.

8.1.1   Managing Email Overload: 8 More Fast And Easy Techniques

1. Delete newsletters. Face it: you're never going to get through all those interesting newsletters and offers. Let it go, you can find whatever you need in Google when the time is right. So delete all those daily, weekly and other digest mailers from your 'To process' and press that Unsubscribe button.

2. Send less emails. Call, or visit. Get your answer from the horse's mouth, and avoid endless email conversations with half the world in CC. Do not mail someone who is sitting across from you! A good test: when you feel the impulse to send a mail ask yourself: 'Can I solve this myself?' You probably can, can't you!

3. Summarize. Some people are addicted to email. They're like living status updates, including every thought they have and sending it to everyone even remotely connected. Very tiring, especially when they contain small to do's for you. How to deal with them? Scan the contents quickly, don't answer them and collect them in your 'Action' folder (see the previous post on email management).

Plan some time to process them. Then group them by sender, go through them in one go and write down the todos. You can even send that person an email with your list, just so they know you're on it.

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> **4. Send shorter emails**. Do not rewrite the bible. Long emails are tiring to read and no one really gets what you're saying anyway. Less is more. **Keep it under 4 sentences**. Or how about this for a short answer: resist the urge to answer at all. If you want a friendly chat with lots of fluff, call them.

> **5. Check your emails less**. 3 to 5 times a day should do it. You can always be on top of things and make sure everything is take care of. Even better: you can let things run their course while you get your work done.

6. Make rules. You could apply a CC filter that makes mails that aren't addressed directly to you go to a separate folder. You can plan some time to go through it, without wasting time on email conversations. Stop being irritated with it, just ignore it.

7. Feel free to delete a lot of emails. Emails are like stuff in the attic: very hard to get rid of. What if you ever need any of it again? I can personally say that I've hardly ever needed any of my emails again, and when I did I found another way to deal with the situation. Live in the present, let go of the past. You can do it!

8. Avoid working double. When you get the same question all the time, write down your answer in a document or email template. Or put it on the website, and refer to it in your answer.

8.2   Telecommuting: How To Increase Productivity From Home

Congratulations, you can work from home! It's a great freedom to be able to combine your household with work, to not have to commute… But with freedom comes responsibility. What if you spend all day caught up in home affairs? Or you're sitting there in your pyjamas with no-one to check on you and you find you're not getting much done at all?

1. Create a divide between home and work. It can make a world of difference to have a separate work space. Ideally, you have an office or studio at home or in the neighbourhood. Failing that, just a room with a door you can close.

2. Put on your work clothes. Don't keep running around in your pajamas! Dress like you would at work. Because you know what? You actually are. The clothes bring you in the right mood to work, and it's a lot less embarrassing when your colleague pays you an unexpected visit.

3. Be extremely punctual. So you don't need to do traffic jams – enjoy that extra cup of coffee! At the same time, respect the working hours that you've set out for yourself. If not, you could end up being one of those people that loafs around all day and then when there's fun to be had, 'has to finish something'. Shame!

4. Don't watch TV. Don't go to the movies, or the launderette. You're working, so work. Of course, be sure to take a well-deserved break now and again and remind yourself how great it is to work from home.

5. Go out to lunch. Working from home is liberating but also isolating. Keep in touch with your friends and colleagues, forge new connections and connect to the world by going out to lunch. Better yet, go to business networking lunches!

6. Have someone to answer to. It's easier to work when there's someone watching and when we need to justify our time. So get one of these mechanisms to work for you (without making it disagreeable). Ask on of your colleagues or friends to check on you.

8.3   *Meetings*

Here are our short and sweet suggestions for meetings:

- Hold as little of them as possible.
- Make them as short as possible.
- Don't do 'e-mail meetings', i.e., CC'ing everybody and making it a group discussion.
- Have an agenda.
- Have someone take short notes and especially, write down practical todo's.
- Learn to speak concisely.
- Think solutions, not problems.
- Stick to the subject, don't bring up other stuff.

Here is some more material

> *"When the outcome of a meeting is to have another meeting, it has been a lousy meeting."*
> – Herbert Clark Hoover, 31st US President

Meetings… Lots of them are short and sweet. But a whole lot more are long, tedious and boring! Might you have attended a boring meeting once in your life? And wondered: what's the use?!

A meeting is a gathering of two or more people to achieve a common purpose or goal. At the end of a meeting, you and your organization should have come up with a better understanding of a problem or a situation, or a set of actions that must be taken.

Here are some **guidelines** to keep in mind when facilitating and managing a meeting.

Before the meeting

Know the purpose of the meeting. Why are you calling for a meeting? Take a minute to think about the outcome you would like:

- To inform the members or officers of the organization about anything that affects the organization.
- To discuss ways to achieve goals and objectives.
- To plan for an upcoming event.
- To get clarification and monitor progress of ongoing projects.
- To resolve problems and settle disputes.
- To make decisions.

Once you know the purpose of the meeting, you need to write down the **agenda**. It will help you focus on the tasks that must be accomplished in the meeting and prevent you from being sidetracked by other matters.

Identify the **participants** to the meeting. Will this be a meeting for the officers only? Do you need to involve all members of the organization? Is it a General Assembly? An emergency meeting for decision-makers? Do you need to invite other people to serve as resource persons? As you go through the agenda, you will be able to identify who exactly needs to go to the meeting.

If you know the participants to the meeting, you will also be able to anticipate how they will react to the issues to be raised in the meeting. This is called **'Lining up the ducks'**: prepare your arguments and case in such a way that it will meet the minimum of resistance.

Set the **time and venue,** and then **send out the invitation** for the meeting to the people concerned. The venue should be conducive to the kind of meeting you will be organizing. For creative endeavors, you could do outdoor meetings – perhaps in a park or any place that stimulates creativity. It could also be the office of one of your colleagues. This should include the items on the agenda so that they could prepare for discussion and materials they may need to bring to the meeting.

Prepare all the handouts, materials and equipment you need. Reports need to be printed and photocopied and/or encoded in a Powerpoint presentation. Projectors, microphones, writing pads, pens and recording devices should be present in the meeting room before the meeting starts.

Rules of Order

When you are meeting ten people or less, it is easy to give everyone a chance to speak, listen to arguments presented and decide on important matters. But if you are meeting twenty, fifty or a hundred people, it becomes difficult. You will need a Rules of Order. If your organization has one, then use it. If not, it could be handy to make one for future meetings.

During the meeting

Start on time. Set a new standard of professionalism. When you start on time, even if not everyone is there yet, you are showing people that you respect people's time. And you also show that you intend not to wait for those who don't respect your time.

Go through each item of the agenda. Avoid distractions as much as possible.

Facilitate discussions smoothly. This means giving everyone a chance to speak. Don't let anyone dominate the discussion and the meeting. Otherwise, other people will not be able to air their thoughts and opinions.

Sidestep endless discussion. Don't let people take over the meeting, or go on a tangent. Some discussions can't be won. Defer to another time, keep your purpose for the meeting firmly in mind.

Record the discussions. Thank you mp3 players and laptop computers! Don't forget to transcribe it soon though. If you don't put in writing, you will soon forget about it.

Take the Minutes of the Meeting. Taking minutes of the meeting could be as simple as jotting down highlights of discussions and the actions taken. Or it could be a formal Minutes of the Proceedings. Formal minutes and proceedings can include the following items:

- Title of the meeting, including the date and time.
- List of all members present during the meeting.
- List of members who sent their apologies for their absence.
- Confirmation that the minutes of the previous meeting had been accepted and agreed as accurate record.
- Amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting.
- Matters that arose from the minutes of the previous meeting should be listed down in the order that they were discussed in the meeting.
- The actions taken for each of the items in the agenda. In some instances, the number of votes for decisions must be noted down, too.
- The time of the adjournment.

After the meeting

Summarize the decisions made and next steps that must be taken. You can just look at the minutes of the meeting and you will easily see the next steps that must be taken. List down these action steps and identify the right person who can do it. If you don't do this right away, the members of the organization may forget about it.

Send out the minutes to the members. When you do this, you can include the list of action steps and the people in charge of them. Remind the members of their commitment to these action items.

If you catch yourself in too many meetings, you probably need to review your minutes. Look at the action steps if they are being done. If not, then that means that you should probably be implementing the results of the meetings, instead of holding another meeting.