

Time Management

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1. Goal Setting

Why is it a good idea?

The process of setting goals and targets on a routine basis

- Allows you to choose where you want to go in life.
- Gives you long-term vision and short-term motivation.
- Focuses your acquisition of knowledge and helps you to organize your resources.
- Makes it easier to overcome large tasks, and gives confidence, satisfaction and pride as you experience that the goals are being achieved.
- By knowing precisely what you want to achieve, you know what you have to concentrate on to do it. You also know what is merely a distraction, and you can anticipate obstacles.
- By spending the time it takes to organize your time, you will find enough free time to provide quality work and have time off.

Goals are about direction – if you don't know which way you are going, you are lost (or at best inefficient).

What characterizes goals?

Your goals should be based on a SWOT-analysis of you as a person, ensuring that they can be achieved by you specifically. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. You identify these characteristics of yourself (the internal factors) and your situation (the external factors). You can put them into a table, as drawn below, adding many points in each box.

	Use:	Beware:
Internal factors:	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
External factors:	<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>

Goals are S.M.A.R.T.:

Specific: they are precise and clear, not prone to be misunderstood even years later (write them down).

Measurable: it must be possible to see when you have reached them (include quantities/clearly defined qualities).

Achievable: beware perfectionism, keep them realistic.

Relevant: they must relate to you and your situation at the moment.

Time bound: they must have a deadline at some point (include dates or time periods).

How do I start?

Goals can be made for many areas of life, which are all connected:

- Personal life: Family, physical health and appearance, mental health, spiritual, personal qualities of character, artistic, pleasure, hobbies, intellectual, emotional.
- Professional life: Education, career, colleagues, finances, material goods (house, car etc.)
- Social life: Friends, extended family, social ability, communication skills.
- The outside world: Public service, volunteering, donations.

You make goals on many levels: Lifetime goals, goals for the next 10 years, 1 year, 1 month, 1 week, and goals for the next day.

Your lifetime goals for yourself are like a vision, but you must keep the many different goals S.M.A.R.T. - what would your life be like if it was successful, seen with your eyes? The shorter period of ten years becomes a little more concrete – what things (career etc.) do you aim to achieve in the next ten years, in order for your life to turn out according to your lifetime goals? Short-term goals for the next year and month are even more concrete, and the goals for the next week and day are more like sub-goals or objectives, being as specific as possible without being tasks (to keep your room tidy is a goal, to do the laundry and vacuuming are tasks). The shorter the time span, the more focused your goals become, but they should all point towards the lifetime goals. Beware of becoming so specific that you are no longer listing goals, but listing tasks or actions that you are to do in order to achieve your goals. We will get to actions later.

For this to work, you must do it yourself! Do the SWOT, make the lifetime and 10-year goals, and then get started on the short-term goals. It can help you formulate the goals to start with “By the end of the year, I aim to...” and so on, writing each goal as a positive

statement (to have passed, to have done, to have found, to have seen etc., avoid “to be on schedule with...”). Review your short-term goals continually and your long-term goals periodically – they should be flexible and focused on things you enjoy.

Miscellaneous food for thought:

Irish poem

Take the time to work,
for it is the price of success.

Take the time to think,
it is the source of strength.

Take the time to play,
it is the secret of youth.

Take the time to read,
it is the seed of wisdom.

Take the time to be friendly,
for it brings happiness.

Take the time to dream,
for it will carry you to the stars.

Take the time to love,
it is the joy of life.

Take the time to be content,
it is the music of the soul.

“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”

Behavioral studies have shown, that to develop a positive habit or to break a bad habit, it has to be practiced for 21 consecutive days – if it fails before the 21st day, you have to start over on the 21 days.

To protect your self-esteem, remember that you can *be* good at something even though you don't *do* everything right (otherwise there would be no good mothers!).

“Life is what happens to you, while you're busy making other plans.”

2. Prioritizing

How do you prioritize?

You will not be able to do everything! For each level (time period) you have your list of goals which includes the different areas of life that are important to you. The process of prioritizing those lists is described here. The priorities in the more general goals you make for your lifetime will not always be reflected in your short-term goals, as some things will be more important this week than in the big picture. In the lifetime goals you may have prioritized family things over professional things, but this order may be reversed in times when the professional life is more demanding.

For the long-term goals (lifetime goals and 10-year goals) you label your list of goals with the letters A-F or A-C, “A” labeling the highest priorities. Once you have prioritized your goals, write the list again in the priority order.

For the short-term goals prioritize by asking yourself the following:

1. Does it fit into the plan I have for my life?
2. What would happen if you didn’t achieve the goal? (Realistically).
3. Is it urgent and/or important? Put your goals into this table:

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important		
Not important		

Your goals can now be put into the following order:

- I. Urgent and important
- II. Not urgent, but important
- III. Urgent but not important
- IV. Not urgent and not important.

Other tips

When prioritizing your goals, also consider these questions: What would be especially appreciated by loved ones? What would improve my physical or emotional health best? What school or clinic assignments are due and most important? What kinds of things could I do that would really thrill me or inspire me or turn me on?

For both long-term goals and short-term goals, make sure you still have the balance of the different categories that you had when you designed your goals; beware of only prioritizing professional, personal or social categories.

When you have practiced time management for a while, you may be so aware of your short-term goals, that you skip the list of goals and prioritizing them, and go straight to to-do lists. The danger here is that you miss the greater perspective, the reason you are doing the many little things that make up your day, and maybe do things that are not getting you any nearer to achieving the goals you had to start with. Setting goals and prioritizing them is a tool which also provides motivation for the tasks that come your way now. If you only make to-do lists, you may forget that the reason you are studying this hard is to have an education, get a job someday. Keeping your head up, looking forward, you can handle more tedious tasks. “The person who concentrates entirely on sawing, is likely to forget to sharpen the saw.”

3. To Do lists

To do lists are made for the periods of one week and one day. What tasks must be done to successfully achieve my major goals? You are now translating your major purposes in

life—your aspirations—into concrete actions. You can't *do* a goal, only actions that are likely to get you to a goal. You need to address three major themes regarding your goals:

1. What? Your goals need to be split up into more manageable tasks (objectives). Breaking the tasks up in even smaller bits will reveal the number of smaller things that make up the task. It makes the goal more easy to attack and very concrete.
2. Who? Are there some tasks you can delegate? Some tasks you don't like or don't have the time for, or those tasks others are simply better at. Be realistic about your own abilities and available time. What can your boy- or girlfriend, your study-partner, or the secretary do? Also important: Learn to say NO.
3. When? Set deadlines and sub-deadlines for the tasks and parts of tasks that are on the list.

To-do lists are to be done at the same time every day (e.g. the night before) and time of week (e.g. planning the following week on Fridays). Based on your prioritized list of goals for the next week and the next day that you have made earlier, make a to-do list. Include specific tasks, who will do them, and a deadline for when they at the latest have to be done. Again, you need to prioritize in your lists. Use the A-F/A-C method or the urgent/important table. Rewrite the list in priority order.

4. Planning:

Time is the one thing you can never get more of – there will always only be 24 hours in a day. It does take time to plan – but it is worth it, and it becomes easier as you get into the routine.

Making a master plan

For an average week, make a schedule for all hours of the day/night. Fill in the steady things that you do. Things such as sleep, showering, eating, classes (if you have a steady schedule), job hours, and evening courses could go into the general schedule. Having filled this out, you can see how much time you have “free” to complete your tasks in – the time you can plan yourself. It can be a real eye-opener to see how much or little time you have to get things done.

From your to-do list to the daily plan

Here are some tips to help you put those things from your to-do list that you yourself were supposed to do into your planner:

- Set aside some time for planning – 30 minutes each week, and 10 minutes each day, preferably the night before.
- Knowing your ability to concentrate, put breaks into your day to keep you focused when you are working on something.
- Make the plan flexible, and open to opportunities that reveal themselves during the day.

- Put similar tasks into blocks – one block you are making phone calls, another block you are checking e-mail etc.
- Don't be too optimistic about what you can do in the available time.
- Be aware of your rhythm – some are morning-people, and others don't function very well until later in the day. You may have “slumps” after meals or in the middle of the afternoon, and you should not put the more demanding tasks in those time slots.

Tools

Get a calendar that suits your need for space to write down when you are going to do what. Personal organizers are the traditional means of doing this. Whatever your preference, make sure sufficient space is allocated to include all relevant information and, more importantly, that you're not replicating the information in another place.

By this point, you should have integrated your to-do list into your planner.

5. Sticking to the plan

When it doesn't work

What goes wrong when you don't get the things done you wanted to?

Maybe you are too tired, sleep too late, sleep at the wrong times, you have a bad day, traffic gets in the way, you find the task boring, you plan too tightly, you get caught in front of the TV, your mother calls, the computer crashes, there are too many e-mails, spam, beer or unexpected thing come up. A whole lot of things can affect your plans!

How do you solve those problems? When your time doesn't seem to be sufficient, *make a log of what you actually spend your time on*. Are you doing low-priority things, have you placed the more demanding things at a bad time of the day? What is wasting your time? Analyze where the plan slips. Having found the problem, the solution is usually also evident.

Tips for making it work

You have to review your plans continuously; after having reached a goal, when new tasks or opportunities arise, and when some things become too late to do. The following are suggestions that will help you stick to your plan.

- You can make a record of how things are to be done, so you don't start from scratch again next time you have to do something similar – or the person following you in that task is doing it (white paper).
- Remove or limit distractions by moving them or your work/studyplace,
- Get help from others or delegate tasks.
- Learn to say no. Dare to take decisions. Sort the tasks, and throw those out that you can skip.
- Keep things tidy, get a good night's sleep, give yourself quality breaks, enjoy what you do and think positive.

- In case your surroundings are limiting you, consider the practical stuff: get a dishwasher, cell phone and computer with internet-access, sell the TV etc. (if this lets you reach your goals).
- “Concentrate on results, not on being busy”.
- Don’t try to do a lot of little tasks first (“clear your desk”) so you will be free to do important work later. That wastes prime time – do the toughest things first.
- Alternatively, do the easier parts first if you need to gain confidence or if you are a slow starter.
- The best is to recognize the tendency to “put it off” and, instead, do it now! Recognize that putting off an inevitable chore just generates more stress and embarrassment.
- Another approach to finishing the overwhelming job is called the “Swiss cheese method.” You poke holes in a big project by finding short tasks to do whenever you have a few minutes that will contribute to the completion of the lengthy project. Maybe you can get some needed information or a book. Maybe you can at least write the first paragraph.
- If you are avoiding an unpleasant task, perhaps you can get started by telling yourself “I’ll quit in 5 minutes if it is really terrible.” It might not be as bad as you imagined.
- If nothing else works, take 15 to 20 minutes to do nothing! Don’t fudge, do absolutely nothing. By the end of 20 minutes, you will be so bored and so anxious to “get on with it” that you will start working on the difficult task immediately.
- Being organized and productive in the areas that are important to you will be rewarding, but you need more rewards. Consider these suggestions: build into your daily schedule rest breaks or friendly interaction, give yourself 15 minutes for exercise or relaxing or light reading, mix pleasure with work, at the end of the day take time to review with pride what you have done, and so on.

6. Take home messages:

Having set your goals, prioritized them, made a to-do list, prioritized it, and put the things to do in your calendar, you are well on your way to managing your time effectively.

These are the take home messages:

1. Have a **plan**, and spend some time on making it.
2. Designate time to the different aspects of life, find a **balance**.
3. **Prioritize**.
4. **Split tasks** into smaller pieces, **delegate** and set **deadlines**.
5. **Know yourself**, your rhythms and limitations.
6. Buy a good **calendar** and use it.
7. **Review your** short-term **plans** continually and your long-term plans periodically.
8. **Evaluate** what goes wrong if your plans fail, **and reward** yourself if they work out.

7. Additional literature:

Covey, Stephen R (1990) The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Simon & Schuster

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