

TIME MANAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:.....Date:.....

The following questionnaire is designed to help you identify some of your personal habits and traits in relation to time management. To get the best value from the questionnaire, be as honest as you can, and think of examples in your workplace to help you decide on the most appropriate answer. Please mark YES or NO in response to each of the following. (Mark YES when the answer is frequently or always yes, and NO when the answer is frequently or always no).

There is a full explanation for each question and its answer on the following pages. Please do not refer to this until after you have finished scoring your answers.

DO YOU:

	YES	NO
1. Undertake work as it appears, rather than in order of priority?		
2. Accept unimportant interruptions when working on an urgent task?		
3. Say "yes" to work requests even when unsuitable or unreasonable?		
4. Put off tasks which are daunting or uninteresting?		
5. Allow your work surroundings to become disorganised and messy?		
6. Complete work yourself which should be delegated to subordinates?		
7. Accept work requests, which are really someone else's responsibility?		
8. Rarely take proper breaks at work?		
9. Deal with the same material several times, when it should have been dealt with in one sitting?		
10. Regularly take work home with you on evenings/weekends?		
11. Give subordinates very little feedback on their performance (positive as well as negative)?		
12. Not trust your subordinates with various tasks, in case they make mistakes?		
13. Maintain an inadequate filing system (can never find things)?		
14. Waste considerable time on unimportant phone calls/literature?		
15. Often assign work to "Pending" category when it should be dealt with on the spot?		
16. Keep an excessive (or inadequate) amount of paperwork?		
17. Often have disorganised, unnecessarily long or overly frequent meetings?		
18. Lack certain skills or equipment which could be reasonably acquired and result in considerable time saving?		
19. Neglect to communicate essential information to your staff?		

20. Have considerable difficulty making decisions?		
21. Allow your subordinates to become too dependent on you and not encourage them to use their own initiative?		
22. Not give your staff the training needed to carry out their job effectively?		
23. Work as a “fire fighter” or “crisis” manager, by responding to issues/crises as they arise, rather than taking time to establish goals and creatively seek the best ways to achieve these goals?		
24. Frequently lack the concentrative powers to see tasks through to the end?		
25. Spend an unnecessarily long time drafting correspondence, completing reports, etc because of perfectionist tendencies or fears of inadequacy?		
26. Not assertively express thoughts and suggestions for improving work effectiveness for fear of rejection, disapproval or “rocking the boat”?		
27. Let your career path just “happen” rather than taking positive steps towards achieving desirable and realistic life goals?		

RESULTS:

While every YES answer represents some potential for improvement, a couple of YES responses may be the result of matters beyond your control, e.g. Questions 18 and 20. You are encouraged to look closely at every YES response, in order to determine where your greatest areas of potential are for improving your time management skills. Generally speaking, the results of the questionnaire can be interpreted as follows:

SCORE	COMMENT
0 – 2	Congratulations! Others can learn from your positive time management techniques.
3 – 8	Reasonable, but no cause for smugness! Start working on those YES responses.
7 – 11	Don't feel sorry for yourself having such a heavy workload until you have brought this score down to the first category. (0 – 2).
12 – 18	It really is time you managed your time more effectively! Go through this manual at regular intervals and make those necessary changes.
Over 18	Really! You urgently need to make changes. A Time Management Workshop would be most appropriate.

RESPONSES TO THE TIME MANAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Each of the questions in the Time Management Questionnaire is discussed in the following pages, the numbers here corresponding to those in the questionnaire.

1. UNDERTAKING WORK AS IT APPEARS, RATHER THAN IN ORDER OF PRIORITY.

This is one of the most common sources of poor time management. Many of us work in a haphazard manner, too busy trying to cope with whatever comes our way to invest a few minutes daily in establishing our work priorities. It reminds me of a story of the wood chopper who was so busy trying to chop down trees with his very blunt axe, that he complained he could never manage the time to sharpen his axe. In a similar manner, so many of us work ineffectively, yet we complain that we do not have the time to improve our effectiveness through learning better time management and other stress reducing techniques.

Setting Priorities

Write down all those tasks which need to be done. Identify them by importance and urgency. If a task is urgent but trivial, give priority to it, but ensure that you do not spend any more time on it than you need to. A task that is both urgent and important should naturally be given high priority. Do not make the very common mistake of spending your time on less important and non-urgent tasks simply because you enjoy doing them or because the most urgent and important tasks appear boring and daunting!

2. ACCEPTING UNIMPORTANT INTERRUPTIONS WHEN WORKING ON AN URGENT TASK.

Many tasks require concentrated effort and there is nothing more frustrating than a barrage of relatively unimportant interruptions when you are trying to complete an urgent report or some other task requiring considerable concentration. People who complete a time log over a week's duration are often astounded at how much time is wasted through unscheduled and unimportant interruptions. Naturally, we cannot avoid all unscheduled interruptions, but we can often take steps to improve the situation.

Firstly, practice being assertive with those people who are insensitive to signs or hints that you are very busy. Saying "Sorry, I don't have time to talk now, because I have an urgent report to complete" can save considerable time and bottled up tension on your part. If you wish to work uninterrupted, advise your secretary or the switchboard operator that you will be unavailable for anything but the most urgent phone calls. If you have your own office, a closed door is also a reasonable indicator that you do not wish to be disturbed, although there are always a few who choose to ignore this sign. Sometimes it can help to set aside certain times each day for consultations and phone calls. It can also be useful to schedule some uninterrupted time for high priority tasks each day, picking those times (usually early in the morning) at which you operate most effectively.

3. SAYING 'YES' TO WORK REQUESTS, EVEN WHEN UNSUITABLE OR UNREASONABLE.

As Edwina C Bliss ("Getting Things Done") states, perhaps the most effective of all the time saving techniques ever developed is the frequent use of the word "no". Being able to say "no" (even to one's boss at times) is an assertion skill which can, and should, be developed.

4. PUTTING OFF TASKS WHICH ARE DAUNTING OR UNINTERESTING.

Too many of us are experts at procrastination, but keep postponing doing something about it. Albert Ellis maintains that many of us act upon the irrational belief that it is easier to postpone doing something daunting or unpleasant than to tackle it immediately. Such a belief is irrational because putting off daunting or unpleasant tasks only magnifies the problem – a molehill can become a veritable mountain in our own mind and through procrastination, we can help to make tasks become more difficult than they would have been had we tackled them immediately.

So often we let the power of negative thinking make a task appear more unpleasant or difficult than it is in reality. When a problem seems enormous or overwhelming, it can be helpful to try and cut it down to a more realistic size. One effective way to cut the problem down to size is to divide it into more manageable parts and then tackle these tasks one at a time.

5. ALLOWING YOUR WORKING SURROUNDINGS TO BECOME DISORGANISED AND MESSY.

The problem with a disorganised and messy work environment is that it can create frustration, a sense that you are not getting anywhere with your work and also be distracting when you are trying to concentrate on particular tasks. In addition, significant time can be wasted looking for items which should normally be easily located. In this respect, an efficient filing system can make a big difference and while everything else often tends to get precedence over filing, it is an important task and should be carried out systematically.

6. COMPLETING WORK YOURSELF WHICH SHOULD BE DELEGATED TO SUBORDINATES.

As stated earlier in the manual, many managers have problems with this one, for a variety of reasons. Some do not trust their subordinates with jobs of any importance, for fear of possible mistakes. Others will be reluctant to pass on any work involving prestige, challenge or enjoyment and will only delegate those jobs seen as boring or routine. Sometimes managers will not delegate tasks because they consider themselves to be able to complete those tasks more quickly and effectively. Some managers will not delegate because they are not prepared to spend the necessary time ensuring their subordinates understand what is required and providing assistance where needed. Other managers are not sufficiently assertive, being fearful of subordinates' negative responses to being given more work.

Sometimes your subordinates may not respond as positively to your attempts at delegation as you would like. It may be that they are lacking in confidence and a good deal of demonstrated trust and support is needed on your part. They may have fear of

failure, fear of being criticised by yourself or others if they do not perform adequately, or they may complain (justly or unjustly) that they do not have the time, knowledge or resources to complete the task you wish to delegate. In some instances, a subordinate may be just plain lazy and your assertiveness is needed to ensure the work is done. In delegating work and assessing its performance, it is important to be able to give negative or positive feedback, depending on which is appropriate. Unfortunately, too many managers are adept at giving the former, but not the latter. Both have their place.

7. ACCEPTING WORK REQUESTS, WHICH ARE REALLY SOMEONE ELSE'S RESPONSIBILITY.

Refer again to the comments made in relation to Question 3. The ability to say "no" is important, even if this applies to jobs inherited by you in a new position which are not rightfully your responsibility. If you are uncertain about whether certain work requests are your responsibility, check your job description or discuss the matter with your superior.

8. RARELY TAKING BREAKS AT WORK.

When you are grossly "overworked" it is tempting to cut out all breaks, including lunch, morning and afternoon tea. However, none of us can work effectively for 8 – 10 hours without a break and for the sake of both our sanity and effectiveness, we need to take reasonable breaks. Even a quick, brisk walk, some isometric or yoga exercises or a few minutes meditation/relaxation can often give your mind and body the break they need.

9. DEALING WITH THE SAME MATERIAL SEVERAL TIMES, WHEN IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN DEALT WITH IN ONE SITTING.

Are you sometimes guilty of starting a task, spending some time on it and then baulking at the complexity of the task or difficulty of the decision(s) to be made, you throw it in the "pending" tray or back to the in-tray? Many of us repeat this process over and over again, preferring to devote our energies to easier or more interesting tasks and waste considerable time in the process of doing so. Whenever possible, finish whatever you start. If a task is too large to be completed in one sitting then attempt to break the task into identifiable and manageable portions and complete one or more of these portions at a time. This procedure creates a great feeling of accomplishment and involves less waste of time re-orienting yourself each time you return to the task.

10. REGULARLY TAKING WORK HOME WITH YOU ON EVENINGS OR WEEKENDS.

It is very easy to get caught up in the habit of regularly taking work home with you on weekends and evenings. In so doing, it may be appropriate to ask yourself a few questions:

- "If I managed my time more effectively, would this still be necessary?"
- "Am I continually putting my work ahead of my family and/or friends as a priority?"
- "Has work become an escape from a certain unpleasant or difficult situation (e.g. difficulties with a spouse?) If so, is it making the situation worse?"
- "Has work become a means of filling a void in my life?"

- “Am I addicted to work because it basically provides the sole basis of meaning to my life?”
- “Am I driven by the need to prove myself to be indispensable, or be somewhat of a martyr?”

I don't wish to suggest that taking home work with you on a regular basis is a sin. Rather, it is important for you to question management of your time, the priorities in your life and the reason for your behaviour, if work is continually depriving you of most of your leisure time.

11. GIVING SUBORDINATES VERY LITTLE FEEDBACK (POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE) ON THEIR PERFORMANCE.

You will be able to manage your own time more effectively if your subordinates are doing their jobs properly. Being human, we all make mistakes at times and it is important to provide your subordinates with negative feedback when mistakes are made.

However, there are different ways of doing this. Giving negative feedback in a loud, aggressive manner to a subordinate in the presence of other colleagues is not the best way. Furthermore, positive reinforcement is a more powerful motivator for getting the best out of your staff than negative reinforcement. Let them know when they have performed a task well and you can be sure they will want to continue performing well.

12. NOT TRUSTING SUBORDINATES WITH VARIOUS TASKS IN CASE THEY MAKE MISTAKES.

As stated earlier, your subordinates are human and therefore have every likelihood of making mistakes occasionally (don't you?). However, they will not develop new skills and self confidence unless you provide them with learning opportunities. The chances of your subordinates making mistakes are lessened if you give clear instructions and appropriately monitor progress on any delegated tasks (this does not mean breathing down their necks all the time). It is obviously important to give your staff tasks which match their capabilities and skills (or capacity to acquire new skills).

13. NOT REQUESTING EXTRA STAFF OR RESOURCES EVEN IF EXTREMELY NECESSARY.

Some of us suffer from a martyr complex, being determined to tackle an exorbitantly high work load for extended periods, even if it kills us (it sometimes does). Others have poorly developed assertiveness skills and are not prepared to make a case for extra resources, even when there is a crying need for them. Inadequate staff or resources can often occur if an organisation is either rapidly expanding, with increased workload not being matched by increased staff numbers, or experiencing difficult times (a reduced number of staff being required to cope with the same workload). You owe it to your staff and yourself to request extra resources if your section is overworked and there is some likelihood (however small) of obtaining additional resources.

14. WASTING CONSIDERABLE TIME ON UNIMPORTANT PHONE CALLS/LITERATURE.

The best way to determine how much time is wasted on unimportant phone calls and literature is to keep a time log for a week. Like many others, you may be surprised at how much time you can save by being more disciplined in this respect. If an abundance of glossy, relatively unimportant magazines and reports passes over your desk each week, consider reading them while going to and from work or during breaks.

Alternatively, your secretary (if you have one) can be instructed to peruse such literature and mark any relevant items for your attention. Likewise your secretary can also be directed to pre-screen telephone calls thus saving you the time of having to attend to unnecessary ones.

15. ASSIGNING WORK TO “PENDING” CATEGORY, WHEN IT SHOULD BE DEALT WITH ON THE SPOT.

The danger with a “pending” tray is that it can become the easy way out – you consequently delay making decisions that could be made immediately. Avoid the temptation to develop a massive “Pending” tray (or one at all, for that matter) by making immediate decisions on all incoming mail and tasks, as indicated in the response to Question 9.

16. KEEPING AN EXCESSIVE (OR INADEQUATE) AMOUNT OF PAPERWORK.

Several years ago, the British retail chain, Marks and Spencer, led a war on excess paperwork, by scrutinising all procedures and relying on the motto “if in doubt throw it out”, to dispense with any unnecessary paperwork. Within a year 120 tons of forms, sheets, cards, etc were thrown out by the firm and the subsequent emphasis on simplified procedures appeared to be at least partly responsible for the substantial profit improvements in the following years.

17. OFTEN HAVING DISORGANISED, UNNECESSARILY LONG OR OVERLY FREQUENT MEETINGS.

The fact that films are made on this specific topic by John Cleese and other celebrities, indicates that meetings can be significant time wasters. While well organised, properly directed meetings can be highly effective, the reverse is also true. Some important questions relevant to whether or not particular meetings are effective are:

- Are they really necessary or have they become a substitute for action?
- Are agendas concise, specifically indicating areas to be covered and the decisions needing to be reached? Are they sent to all meeting participants sufficiently in advance of the meeting?
- Do meetings start and finish at the scheduled times?
- Are decisions made and responsibilities assigned, whenever possible, for each item covered in the meeting? Are all participants quite clear about these decisions and responsibilities?
- Are concise minutes of each meeting sent within a reasonable time?
- Do you need to attend the meeting or can this responsibility be delegated?
- Have the meetings ceased to serve the purpose for which they were originally established?
- Does the meeting comprise of an appropriately sized group and do all participants have a chance to contribute, or do one or two people tend to dominate the meetings?

18. LACKING CERTAIN SKILLS OR EQUIPMENT WHICH COULD BE REASONABLY ACQUIRED AND RESULT IN CONSIDERABLE TIME SAVING.

The last twenty years have seen tremendous changes in the workplace, with most offices now using standard equipment that did not exist two decades ago. A large variety of electronic and computing equipment is now within reach of all businesses and there is no excuse for not taking advantage of at least some of these time saving devices.

More and more managers have found basic keyboard skills to be of great use, and their subordinates would also do well to upgrade their report writing and letter writing skills. One final point – many people carry a portable tape recorder and use this on the way to and from work to record ideas, letters for typing and so on or simply to learn a language or listen to inspiring tapes.

19. NEGLECTING TO COMMUNICATE ESSENTIAL INFORMATION TO YOUR STAFF.

As a manager, you will be in frequent receipt of information which is not normally accessible to your staff. It is very easy to overlook the importance of providing your staff with such information. Keeping your staff informed, either on an informal basis or through say, weekly meetings, will not only keep them in touch with organisational developments, but will also positively motivate them in their work, as it will give them an increased sense of being part of the team.

20. HAVING CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY MAKING DECISIONS.

If you fall within this category, bear in mind that continual indecision might have worse repercussions than abiding by a decision and subsequently discovering that your rejected alternative was preferable after all. If finding it hard to make a particular decision, you may benefit by asking yourself the following questions:

- Have I made this decision bigger and more stressful than it needs to be? What is the worst thing that can happen if I make the wrong decision?
- Do I have an exaggerated fear of failure? Do I always tend to imagine the worst possible scenario happening? How often does the worst scenario happen and to what extent am I encouraging it with my negative thinking?
- Is my indecision related to my difficulty in being assertive with those people who will be affected by the subsequent decision?
- Have I properly explored the various possible solutions for this problem or am I caught in a rigid line of thinking?
- What decision would a totally objective person make?

Some decisions are obviously more important and have more far-reaching consequences than others. Such decisions will need more careful consideration of the various possible consequences than would more trivial decisions. Ultimately, however, there is no substitute for action!

21. ALLOWING YOUR SUBORDINATES TO BECOME TOO DEPENDENT ON YOU AND NOT ENCOURAGING THEM TO USE THEIR OWN INITIATIVE.

The answers to Questions 6 and 13 are also relevant here. Your attitude to your subordinates will largely determine the extent of their dependence and lack of initiative. A demonstration of trust, support and keenness for them to develop skills and initiative will have a positive effect with most workers. Some of your subordinates may have come from a work environment where initiative, positive reinforcement and two way communication is not encouraged. In such cases, extra patience and understanding will be needed on your part, while these workers gradually start to act upon the more positive messages they are receiving.

22. NOT GIVING YOUR STAFF THE TRAINING NEEDED TO CARRY OUT THEIR JOB EFFECTIVELY.

It is particularly important for new staff to be given the necessary training and support for them to be able to work effectively and to feel an identification with the job, the department and organisation. During the first weeks, a new employee will probably feel stressed and insecure as she/he grapples with the demands of the job, the codes and the practices of the organisation.

Clear instructions, continued support and friendly faces make all the difference during these initial weeks. As stated elsewhere in this manual, new staff may be reluctant to approach you regularly for assistance, either for fear of appearing stupid or because they do not wish to place an extra burden on an already over worked boss.

In these cases, you may need to reassure your staff that their ability to come to grips with the requirements of their job is of prime concern to you and that they should not hesitate to seek support when needed.

23. WORKING AS A 'FIRE FIGHTER' OR 'CRISIS' MANAGER, RATHER THAN TAKING TIME TO ESTABLISH GOALS AND CREATIVELY SEEK THE BEST WAYS TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS.

Many managers have difficulty in concentrating their energy on larger, important tasks, because of the numerous interruptions they have to contend with each day. In similar fashion, managers often find they are so busy responding to requests and pressure from various sources that they spend very little time on establishing and achieving longer term goals.

24. FREQUENTLY LACKING THE CONCENTRATIVE POWERS TO SEE TASKS THROUGH TO THE END.

Many of us waste considerable time attempting to do more than one task at a time, when a particular task might require a sustained period of concentration. Different tasks, be they the drafting of minutes or an agenda for a meeting, the writing of a report or extensive correspondence, etc, require sustained concentration. The principle of priorities applies to these tasks – in other words, depending on the priority of these tasks, interruptions generally should not be allowed unless they are particularly important or of a higher priority than the task being undertaken. Wherever possible, tasks should be completed in one sitting, rather than coming back to them numerous times and having to re-orient oneself each time.

25. SPENDING AN UNNECESSARILY LONG TIME DRAFTING CORRESPONDENCE, COMPLETING REPORTS, ETC BECAUSE OF PERFECTIONIST TENDENCIES OR FEARS OF INADEQUACY.

While it is very normal and advisable to strive for excellence in whatever you do, an excessive striving for perfection can be both stressful and counter productive. While certain practitioners (such as doctors, research scientists and air traffic controllers) cannot be content with 'near enough is good enough', managers need to be able to refine their quest for excellence with a pragmatic understanding of when 'near enough' is not just good enough, but in fact the appropriate course of action. For example, auditors were obsessed with such matters as ensuring that a company's petty cash was balanced down to the last cent. They have now become realistic and cost effective and are presently more concerned with ensuring that a company's procedures and policies are properly adhered to. As a consequence, random checks rather than comprehensive analyses are now made of petty cash and similar items.

26. NOT ASSERTIVELY EXPRESSING THOUGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING WORK EFFECTIVENESS FOR FEAR OF REJECTION, DISAPPROVAL OR 'ROCKING THE BOAT'.

Your work group may be less effective than it could be, simply because you (and other members) are hesitant to contribute suggestions for improving work practices (and consequently, a better use of time). If this is so, it may be that your boss has never actively encouraged positive suggestions or is rigidly set in the traditional way of solving problems. In such a case, you have my sympathies, but you may nevertheless find that suggestions put forward in a very tactful and diplomatic way might meet with some approval. It may be that your organisation is very hidebound by traditional practices and procedures, by the "right" way of doing things. It is obvious that individuals who are normally creative and resourceful will not use this faculty if it is never encouraged or accepted by the organisation.

Managers have considerable potential for either harnessing or stifling the creative abilities of their subordinates, depending on whether they actively encourage or discourage two way communication and the sharing of ideas. Which type of manager are you?

27. LETTING YOUR CAREER PATH JUST 'HAPPEN' RATHER THAN TAKING POSITIVE STEPS TOWARD ACHIEVING DESIRABLE AND REALISTIC LIFE GOALS.

Many people who feel trapped in a mediocre job or organisation are extremely good at rationalising why there is nothing they can do to change the situation. Some examples:

- The job's terrible, but I've only three years to go until long service leave.
- People my age can't change jobs. In fact, I'm lucky to have a job.
- I'd need a degree to get any further - all those years of hard work are not worth it.
- My boss treats me like dirt, but at least the money is good and the other staff are OK.
- I've become too specialised, there is no way I could change careers now.

Nobody is suggesting that making career changes is easy, but be aware of those situations in which you are simply choosing the path of least resistance, even though you are thoroughly dissatisfied with where your job is now taking you. If you feel you are getting nowhere in your current position, take some time to consider what steps you can take to improve your career, either within or outside your present organisation.

You may need to undertake further study, make appropriate contacts or develop extra skills over a considerable time frame to achieve your goals, but isn't it worth the effort? Since we spend such a high proportion of our waking life at work, surely it's worth a reasonable investment of time and energy to ensure that we obtain a reasonable (and preferably high) degree of fulfillment from our work? As one wise man once said:

TIME MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

ITEM FOR ATTENTION	MY SPECIFIC ACTION PLAN	PROGRESS EVALUATION