



## Improving time Management Skills

By John Thompkins

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There's a meeting in 10 minutes. Time cards need to be signed and sent to your payroll folks. And there are about 50 e-mails and phone messages that have stacked up on your desk since this morning.

Does this scenario sound familiar? For many small business owners, the reality of trying to cram all they have to do within a business day is disheartening. But it doesn't have to be that way. Learning to manage your time can be as easy as developing some new habits.

Three Houston-area consultants say the secret to effective time management is in the system.

"You should have some type of system," said LaQuishe Wright, owner of Wright Consulting Firm. "(If you have a system) you should come up with a more efficient system."

The main reason for implementing a system is that it can be a cornerstone for organization.

"Time management and organization work hand in hand," said LaNita Filer, an organization specialist in Missouri City. "They need to have a system so they know where things go. It's all a matter of setting up a system."

She said even if a business already has a system, it should be evaluated so that it is always operating efficiently.

"Some people have no system or they may have two or three systems," she said. "It's the discipline of using the system that's important."

Another important aspect to time management is having a planner to chronicle important tasks and contacts for the business.

"They have to use some type of time management tool like a personal digital assistant or a paper-based planner," Filer said. "There has to be something in place otherwise you won't be using your time effectively."

Wright has had many PDAs since she opened her own business and said it is the most important aspect of her time management.

"The biggest thing I do is I'm an avid Palm organizer," she said. "I religiously put down everything in it and it takes a lot of stress off of me. It has helped me immensely."

Filer said having a planner or a PDA helps to organize tasks, addresses and schedules. She said if these things are not written down, they could cost the business owner time and money.

"If you have nothing in place it will be utter chaos," she said.

Wright said the biggest detriment to her business process is lack of planning and organization.

"I'm at my most disorganized when I keep things in my mind," she said.

Procrastination and lack of discipline are the biggest things that will throw a business owner off course in time management.

"Procrastination is big and key but if you can be disciplined (the system will work)," Filer said. "It's a lifestyle change and it's about intention and commitment."

Another issue that needs to be resolved for better time management is filing.

"I would start with having you paper under control," said Denise Landers of Key Organization Systems in Houston. "There should be nothing on your desk that doesn't have a home."

She also said business owners should make sure their system matches the type of business they have.

"There are basic systems and we tweak it for every type of business," she said. "Focus, prioritize and have one block of time where you can really focus on the business. You will get 80 percent of your work done in that time if you plan for it."

The biggest advantage to having a solid time management system is that it allows you to focus on other aspects of the business.

"It helps you save time in the long term," Filer said. "It gives you more time to be creative. It allows you to let things run themselves."