

ENTREPRENEUR FEATURE

# DECLARE WAR ON CHAOS

**MANAGE YOUR TIME,  
DO MORE & DO IT BETTER**

You've got 24 hours in a day, seven days a week, but your to-do list is starting to look like a Russian novel. Why are you not getting all your tasks done? Productivity, output, efficiencies – these are the watchwords of today's workplace as more and more people struggle to manage time, control information overload, stop procrastinating and try to do everything. But don't despair – help is at hand. *Entrepreneur* has rounded up the time management experts to bring you a five-step guide to organising your day – and your life – so that you can get the best out of both.

BY MONIQUE VERDUYN

# STEP 1.

## GET ENOUGH HOURS OUT OF YOUR DAY

*Does it seem like time is slipping away from you?*

In *Time Management from the Inside Out*, time management expert Julie Morgenstern explains how you can overcome time management obstacles so you can get everything done. Implement these suggestions and watch how your day changes.

### CREATE A TASK/TIME JOURNAL

Start by keeping a task/time journal. For one week, write down all the things you do and make a note of how long they take. Include all work tasks, errands, interruptions, calls, emails, coffee breaks and so on. Write them down in order. At the end of the week, you'll have a very good grip on how you manage your time. Probably for the first time ever, you'll be confronting chaos and poor structure. Next, you can go on to start planning your time better because you have made it tangible.

You'll see why a schedule of your day must have boundaries. If you start to think of it as a container into which you need to fit a limited number of objects – your tasks – you start to be more selective about which you'll put in. And if you group similar tasks by category, you can have a better handle on the kind of balance you're achieving.

This is particularly important for entrepreneurs who often have to wear a lot of hats. Entrepreneurs tend to lose their balance very easily. You have to juggle your time between billable work, marketing and admin, and create a structure to your week to keep that balance or you'll really suffer.

### DEALING WITH UNEXPECTED TASKS

Don't over-schedule yourself. You need to build in time cushions, and that's going to vary depending on you and your business. Don't schedule more than three hour's worth of work in an eight- or nine-hour day if you're in a service-based business where clients call and you have to jump.

If you're in an environment where someone asks for something and you have to respond, alternate hours. For every hour of scheduled activity, keep the next hour completely open, and then schedule an hour of planned and an hour of unplanned activities. That spreads your availability across the whole day and you still have enough private time to get uninterrupted work done.

### OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination results mostly from two things. One is that the task is overly complex and you're trying to do too much at once. You're overwhelmed. The solution is simply to break

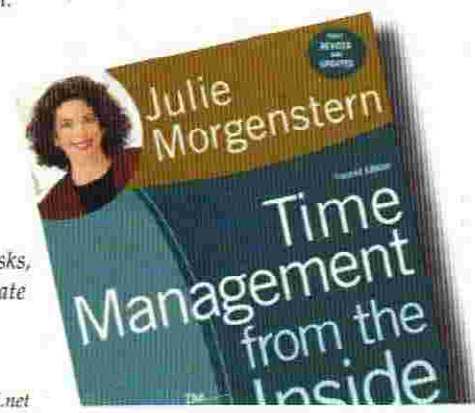


the project down into manageable work sessions. Turn your four-hour task into eight half-hour tasks and then just do one half-hour task at a time.

People may also procrastinate because they simply hate the task. Ask yourself if you're procrastinating because you're not good at the task. The next question is, can you get someone else to do it? If you can, this will free up your time for the things you're good at. Then procrastination disappears.

### AVOID THESE MISTAKES

Don't underestimate or deny how long things take. Writing one email, making six phone calls? If you don't quantify how long things take, you'll end up spending the wrong amount of time on a task and not getting to something that's really important. Learning to estimate how long things take is a breakthrough skill.



#### Learn more

*Tools to combine tasks, delegate and eliminate unnecessary time wasters.*

Available from [Kalahari.net](http://Kalahari.net)



## STEP 2.

### ORGANISE YOUR TIME WITH THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF PRODUCTIVITY

*How productive you are each day depends on how well you organise your 'blocks' of time.*

**D**enise Landers, productivity trainer, organising specialist and author of *Destination: Organization*, has spent years speaking, training, consulting and coaching on the topics of time management and effective work flow. Landers likens time management to playing with building blocks: start with the biggest size and you'll be better able to use all your bricks without having the construction come tumbling down.

#### **LARGE BLOCKS:** **Your Day's Foundation**

Make your day's foundation an uninterrupted block of time where you can focus on difficult, involved projects. The ideal length is an hour and a half, or approximately 20% of an eight-hour day. If you can't possibly find that much time, try for at least an hour. During this uninterrupted block of time, don't answer every phone call and turn off your email alerts. When you can block 20% of your time to focus on what's really important, you'll accomplish about 80% of your work for the day.

#### **MEDIUM BLOCKS:** **Multi-tasking Isn't Always the Best Option**

When determining what tasks to work on each day, group as many like activities together as possible, such as returning non-urgent phone calls, processing your email, filing or reading. You're actually four times more productive when you

can focus on one type of task rather than switching among varied tasks – multi-tasking slows you down.

The length of each session of 'like' tasks depends on the exact type of work you'll be doing. If you need to make five short phone calls, you may only need to block out 10 to 15 minutes to complete them. For responding to email, you might need as much as 30 minutes. Any of these medium blocks can be repeated throughout the day. For instance, you might spend 10 minutes checking your email first thing in the morning to handle urgent issues, then spend 30 minutes before lunch and another 30 minutes later in the afternoon.

#### **SMALL BLOCKS:** **New Items and Lower Priority Tasks**

New items and lower priority tasks can be worked on between the other blocks throughout the day. These might include requests for help from an employee, quick answers to questions, and other project components that didn't fit into your major blocks but are still necessary.

Structuring each day starts with locating a space for that large block, followed by several medium blocks of grouped activities. Small blocks then fill in the gaps. If you do the reverse and clear out the small items before you find time for your most important work, you may wrap up the work day without ever handling your priorities.

## STEP 3.

### TURN YOUR DAY FROM REACTIVE TO PROACTIVE

*Put a stop to endless 'got a minute' meetings that take up all your productive time*

**C**het Holmes has worked with over 60 of the *Fortune 500* companies and is one of America's top marketing executives, trainers, strategic consultants, motivation experts and business authors. His time management system is simple. It's premised on ending the 'got a minute' management style – stop people from coming to your door and asking if you have a minute. Here's how it works.

#### **SAY NO TO 'GOT A MINUTE?'**

To successfully run and manage the divisions under your control, you have to be more organised and less reactive. Send out a message to your staff and let them know that they are no longer able to come to your door and ask if you have a minute for them. Tell them the answer will be no. All thoughts, ideas, issues and concerns must wait until the weekly division meeting. Holmes advises making yourself available once or twice a day for 'got a minute' meetings.

# STEP 4.

## MANAGE YOUR EMAIL

*Guess what? You don't have to respond to all your email. Prioritise your mail and reply to the ones you must; lower value mail and messages that are really intended for other people can be safely ignored.*

**E**mail is a remarkable tool. It was meant to simplify our lives and liberate vast deposits of time and attention. Instead, it now has everyone on the run. There's too much of it and most of us lack the training and skills to do more than react emotionally and basically let it push us around like a typical bully.

Merlin Mann, an independent writer, speaker, and broadcaster, is best known for creating 43 Folders, a website about how to improve the quality of your life by managing your attention in a way that allows you to work hardest on the creative projects that matter most to you. Here is some advice from him on how to deal with email.

### FIVE FAST EMAIL PRODUCTIVITY TIPS

#### 1. Shut Off Auto-Check

Either turn off automatic checking completely, or set it to something reasonable, like every hour or so. If you're doing anything with new email more than every few minutes, you might want to rethink your approach. Process, tag, respond to the urgent ones, then get back to work.

#### 2. Pick Off Easy Ones

If you can retire an email with a one to two line response, do it now. Remember: this is about action, not about cogitating and filing. Get it off your plate, and get back to work.



#### 3. Write Less

Get better at keeping the conversation moving by responding quickly and with short actions in the reply. Ask for more information, pose a question, or just say "I don't know."

#### 4. Cheat

Create templates to help manage answers to frequent email subjects. Templates let you create and use boilerplate responses to the questions and requests to which you usually find yourself drafting identical replies over and over.

#### 5. Be Honest

If you know in your heart that you're never going to respond to an email, get it out of sight, archive it, or just delete it. Guilt will not make you more responsive two months from now, otherwise, you'd just do it now, right? Trust your instincts, listen to them, and stop trying to be perfect.

### IMPACT AREA MEETINGS

Segment the business into impact areas – these are parts of the company that have a direct impact on the bottom line, such as sales, customer service, product development, and marketing. To develop and perfect each of these areas, give them a dedicated one hour per week when everyone involved can focus exclusively on improving that area.

### JOTTING DOWN IDEAS

Now that you have your staff holding onto ideas until the appropriate meeting, give them each a note pad with your name on top. They can use this to make a note of the things they would normally interrupt you with and keep the pad in their desk drawer until the weekly meeting.



### BE PIGHEADED

It's likely that your staff will heed your call for a few days and that the madness of constant interruptions will then resume all over again. Don't be discouraged – just have the determination and discipline to retrain your people. You'll go from running the business reactively to proactively managing and growing it in a quarter of the time because your regular weekly meetings will be formal, structured and results-oriented.

# STEP 5.

## GET THINGS DONE

*Formulating to-do lists and organising tasks*

**A**uthor and productivity guru David Allen's *Getting Things Done* (or GTD) is probably the most well known method for organising your tasks, your time and your life. Here are his key principles and how you can implement them to not only do more but be more.

### CAPTURE

Start by capturing, collecting or gathering anything and everything that has your attention. How? First, collect any items that are out of place, any papers that need filing, any trash that needs tossing. Next, list each and every thought that crosses your mind whether that is, 'I need to order a new PC', or, 'I should really get marketing to update the company profile'. Get all of your thoughts out of your head and onto paper. This is sometimes referred to as a 'brain dump' or 'mind sweep'. This first step allows you to see exactly what has been bogging you down.

### PROCESS

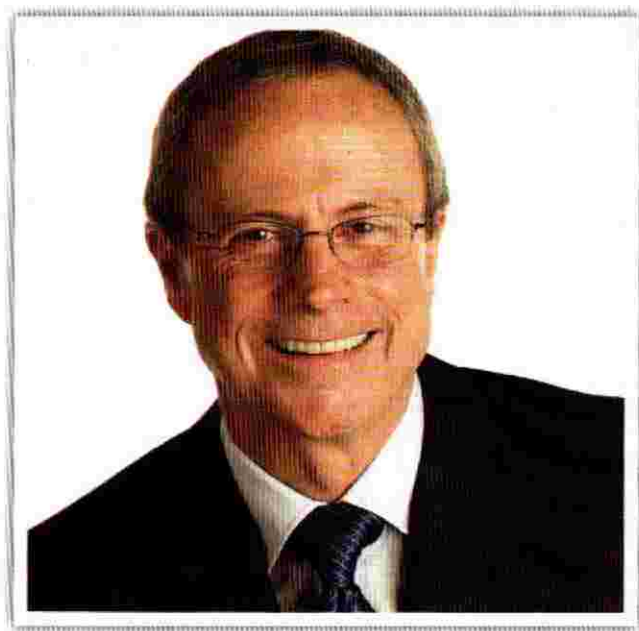
Once you know what you are up against you need to process your physical items and mental lists. This is really decision-making. What is this, and what do I do with it? Start with the first item; for example, a business book that has been sitting on your desk for months. What should you do with it? If you can't read it now, put it back on the shelf and make a note to do so in future. Next, take that stationery invoice and pay it. Then file the statement. The trick is to process each item by deciding what the item is and what to do with it.

### ORGANISE

You've decided what each item is, tossed out the junk, and maybe even completed a few to-do's. Next, organise. Set up your lists. This can be done any number of ways, paper and pencil, a planner, smartphone, excel spreadsheet, Outlook, or other software application. The key is to create a series of easily accessible lists, notes, reference materials, and calendar appointments based on the decisions you made above. Some examples would be shopping lists, contact information, project notes, and birthday reminders.

### REVIEW

Review your lists and action items. This step simply helps you to know exactly 'what' to do next. Ideally your lists will be organised contextually, in other words, store, work, phone, emails, so you won't be overwhelmed with a huge burden of tasks. By reviewing your 'meeting with Mike' list you know exactly where you are and what you need to accomplish.



Another benefit of review is making sure you didn't miss anything from 'capture'. You take a look at the phone list and realise that you also need to call Linda re: cancelling lunch on Friday.

### DO

Once you have collected, processed, organised and reviewed all of the clutter in your life, you are ready to actually 'get things done'. By going through the previous steps you have reduced your stress, maximised your time, and enhanced your focus. As you complete your tasks, cross them off your list. The simple act of striking a line through or deleting an action item will give you a sense of accomplishment and actually boost your self-confidence and increase your energy.

### REPEAT

The fact is you are never done. The secret to GTD is constantly repeating all of these steps in a cycle. New things will end up on your desk, in your mailbox, people will call you, and ideas will pop into your head. Capture them; keep on top of your 'stuff'. Life is ever-changing so to be truly productive and stress free we must constantly adapt. GTD gives us the framework to do just that. □

### Learn more

*The GTD 'manual' has overviews, examples and advice to get your system up and running.*

Available from [Kalahari.net](http://Kalahari.net)

