

An Effective Game Plan for Time Management

Gain precious time for what matters most



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Summary:

We all know of researchers who are constantly inundated with tasks and wish for more time. We've oftentimes been there ourselves. Quality, strategy and innovation often slip away at the expense of a person merely trying to get by.

*The impact this article can have in helping researchers gain incremental time efficiencies can have a large exponential increase in time. As an industry, can you imagine us **gaining precious time to do what matters most**? This can be the difference that makes the difference in how we all work and live.*

***Time management** is vital to the market research industry. Why? Because time is the most valuable resource any person can have, and we all hold equal amounts of time.*

Yet, it is often taken as a scarcity in our industry. We have all experienced some form of overwhelm, under-resourced, lateness, demanding clients and last minute rushes.

Unlocking barriers to time and self mastery will enable one to perform effectively and exceptionally. Time-related 'delay traits' like procrastination and perfectionism can result in increased unnecessary stress and anxiety for everyone around them.

Others include the ability to focus and prioritise, say 'No', systemise and being resourceful.

*In conclusion, **time mastery is really about self mastery**. We can achieve exceptional results when we **master our mindsets**.*

Importance of time management in market research

Market Research is one area where you always find your people sighing to themselves, “There just isn’t enough time.” This seems to be a perpetual opinion of most of your people and you may find it quite exasperating and a feeling of helplessness creeping in at times.

And at the same time, you know that the results you produce for your clients are time-sensitive and some times, millions of dollars are invested in decisions taken based on the findings of your market research!

So, time management is a crucial skill for the market research business and you can be assured that you are not alone in the disappointing experiences with managing time efficiently!!

Most people in the market research field tend to be overloaded and under resourced (when was the last time you had the entire team available for the research drive that you planned?).

But all that can change if you can train your people on managing their time.

But hey, just a minute – can anyone manage time?

Barriers to time management

There a number of barriers to time management and the main barriers are described below:

a. Lack of ability to prioritize

Being able to prioritize the daily activities, short terms objectives and long term goals is vital to managing time effectively. If we are not able to prioritize them properly, then we get stuck with schedules that will not allow us to move forward, thereby decreasing our efficiency and productivity.

b. Lack of ability to say “NO”

Some of your employees might be experiencing circumstances where they are not able to meet deadlines because of the simple fact that they are not able to say “no” to tasks or activities that intervene in their pre-

Interesting facts

Despite the current economic turmoil, 47% said better work/life balance would be even more important in 2009.

*By age levels this broke down to:
58% of 18-34 year olds
46% of 35-54 year olds
30% of 50+ groups*

How did they plan on accomplishing this?

*49%: Use all vacation time
44%: Prioritize projects
42%: Create a weekly To-Do list
41%: Leave work at a reasonable time
36%: Take lunch breaks*

*FedEx Office, 11/2008
(<http://www.keyorganization.com/time-management-statistics.php>)*

planned schedules. Their concern might be that by saying 'no,' relations might be affected or their own sense of being helpful may not be fulfilled!

c. *Lack of adequate work-life balance*

Another important barrier to time management is the inability to maintain the right balance between work and life – your employees involved in market research activities might either be neglecting or overindulging in some of their daily activities; might be avoiding social activity or physical activity while being overactive in mental activities, or the other way round!

d. *Lack of understanding of the difference between needs / wants and desires*

Often people fail to manage their time effectively because they are not able to distinguish their wants from their needs; are unable to plan properly to fulfill them. This leads to chaos that impedes their ability to manage time.

e. *Lack of focus*

People are found to struggle with respect to time management because they lack clarity about their goals and objectives - this leads to unnecessary wastage of time on misdirected activities, and ultimately they find that they are unable to meet the project timelines.

Procrastination, perfectionism, resulting in last minute work, being overwhelmed, stressed and late consistentlyunderlying all that behavior or non behavior may be the fear that the work produced may not be good enough. We as coaches often recommend that these traits be addressed as soon as possible for the well-being of the executive as well as the teams involved.

Differentiating between Urgent and Important

If we plan to become efficient in time management, then we should be able to prioritize our tasks, which is possible by learning to distinguish between the urgent and the important.

Urgent tasks are those that are based on deadlines and you usually do not have a say in such tasks, and are often driven by others; the urgency of a task has no relevance to its importance. The important of a task helps you decide the amount of time that you will spend on it; it is not dependent on the urgency of the task. Based on the urgency or importance of a task, you can classify it into one of the following categories:

a. *Urgent and Important*

They are critical tasks that directly impact the achievement of your goals and hence should be done immediately. If you have planned well, and have learned to manage your time well, then you would have very few of such activities on your priority list.

b. Urgent but not important

These are tasks that are driven by others but may not be directly related to your goals, so might want to delegate them to others whenever possible.

c. Not urgent but important

These are tasks that need to be done definitely, but are due to be completed at a later time – you should plan adequately while prioritizing your tasks otherwise you might end up having a lot of activities under this category on your list!

d. Not urgent and not important

They constitute tasks that can be postponed until a later date, and are trivial – but you need to be careful while paying attention to these tasks because though they may not be critical in the immediate present, if you neglect them and put them aside, they may result in crucial and undesirable consequences later!

*"On a typical day, office workers are **interrupted about seven times an hour**, which adds up to 56 interruptions a day, **80% of which are considered trivial**, according to time-management experts. - Wendy Cole, TIME Magazine, 10/11/2004.*

(<http://www.keyorganization.com/time-management-statistics.php>)

To-do lists

They are prioritized lists of all various activities that you need to complete, in order of importance. Such lists help in ensuring that you do not leave out any of the vital tasks, while facilitating good planning for their implementation.

Once you make a list of all the tasks you need to do, you have to categorize them into one of the four categories we discussed above, based on their urgency and importance. Then, you need to renumber the entire list in the order of priority, which will help in ensuring that:

- a. All vital tasks are completed
- b. Time is not wasted on trivial tasks
- c. You do not get stressed up due to mounting pressures from unimportant tasks

A reputed management professional once said that no one can manage time – all of us get the same 24 hours in a day. So, the best we can do is to manage ourselves!!

Time mastery is self mastery - Achieving exceptional results through time mastery

By managing ourselves, we will be able to manage the time we have at our disposal. Once your people learn to do this, they will be able to produce exceptional results as follows:

- a. *Increase in personal productivity:* What if you could get twice as much done every day as you do currently, without having to work any harder or longer? This is not just a possibility - you can make it a reality by learning to manage your time! You will be able to delight your clients by producing every single report they want way before the agreed deadlines! Or, layer in other pieces of work as you give yourself a breather, pace yourself easily and effortlessly to produce work on time.
- b. *Reduce stress for your teams:* Do you know the main reason why many people undergo stress? Part of the reason is that they are unable to focus on or organize their activities properly – often, they find themselves rushing to meet deadlines and trying to live up to the client's every expectation. Once they learn to manage their mindset and hence their time well, they will become better focused on what is really important to them, understand what drives them, and will be able to drive away stress from their lives. There are often deeper underlying issues around stress, yet at the symptomatic level, time mastery can help alleviate stress levels.
- c. *Freedom to progress with full steam:* When people get themselves entangled in the daily firefighting activities, they do not have time to look at the future, check in on their goals and work towards it. Every effort gets focused on solving current problems, rather than strategically thinking about the long term plans and initiatives. Life seems to stand still, without any visible progress. There seems to be so many things to be done in so little time!

By learning to manage them selves and hence manage time, your people and your teams will be able to free themselves from the burden of problems that develop due to disorganization or procrastination, and will be able to focus on moving forward with full steam!

To conclude, time management has today become a vital skill which is essential not only to ensure that deadlines are effectively and efficiently met, but also to ensure lesser stress levels through appropriate work-life balance.

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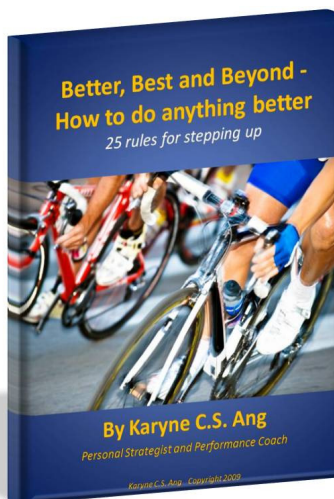
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