

4 Time Management Rules

By Pete DiSantis is an Effectiveness, Efficiency Expert and a Certified Management Consultant

Are you having trouble getting everything done? Are you looking for a better way to manage your time? Are you a slave to time? Here are four simple and useful rules to manage your time more efficiently and effectively.

1) Pareto's Principle - 80% of the outcomes result from 20% of the causes.

Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto, noted that 80% of the land in Italy was owned by 20% of the population. He developed this principle by observing that 20% of the pea pods in his garden contained 80% of the peas.

You waste your time on useless activities! If you are reading this, you do! You have the plague. We each have our own black hole of time: TV, video games, the internet, social media, email, fantasy sports, telephone, socializing face to face (old school), etc. Most of it in the name of entertainment. You name it and you have a rationalization for it. Whatever it is, it's holding you back from doing what you really need to be doing. What do you need to be doing? What is it that needs to get done and you don't have enough time for it?

It might even be work. You have too much urgent work to get your important work done. The question is, "Are you doing the right work?" Enter Vilfredo Pareto. Look at your work like you are making a budget. Where are you spending your time how? Where do you want to spend your time? There are elements of your work which contribute to outcomes. Some elements contribute to positive outcomes and some contribute to negative outcomes. Using Pareto's Principle, 20% of the elements you already do reap 80% of the benefit. And 80% of the elements you work on reap 20% of the benefit. Why are you wasting four-fifths of your time for 20% of the benefit? Couldn't you spend some of that time doing more beneficial work?

Check yourself out. Do an honest assessment of how you spend your time. See if it isn't true that you spend 80% of your time getting 20% of the results. Turn that around and do 20% of the effort and get 80% of the results. The following three rules will help with that.

2) Drucker's Declaration - Do first things first and second things not at all.

Peter F. Drucker was a writer and management consultant. His books and articles explored how humans are organized across the business and government.

"First Things First" is attributed to Stephen Covey. Before Mr. Covey, Peter Drucker was advising his clients and readers using the above adage. But even before Mr. Drucker, a famous efficiency expert, Ivy Lee, advised Charles M. Schwab, CEO of Bethlehem Steel on improving his personal efficiency and the efficiency of his staff. Lee suggested, "At the end of each day, write down the 6 most important things to be done the next day and number them in order of importance. Do the tasks from the most important to least important. After you've finished a task, cross it off the list. Any unfinished tasks are rolled over to the next day." It's very simple and effective.

Drucker's Declaration is a more elegant synopsis of Lee's advice. Once the first things are taken care of, you can move onto the second thing, which is now in first place.

The power of this incredibly simple technique is doing the “To Do” list at the end of your day. Assess the priorities for the next day and put them on your list. Otherwise, you will be reacting to urgent issues that are bound to pop up during the day, instead of dealing with the important ones you already decided upon.

Doing this “To Do” list will result in doing the 20% that counts the most.

3) Parkinson’s Law - Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.

Cyril Parkinson was a British naval historian, an author of some sixty books and a scholar in public administration.

You remember cramming. How about last minute term papers? Sometimes it worked well. That is a precise demonstration of Parkinson’s Law. You could have started and finished it sooner, but there were the inevitable delays.

Parkinson’s law is a symptom of not following Pareto and Drucker. If you are not following the two previous rules, you wait until the last minute to get your “real” work done? Your wasting 80% of your time on unimportant things is the root cause of the time mis-management disease.

The cure is making shorter and shorter deadlines. Don’t wait. Get it done and move onto the next number one item on your list.

Procrastination ties these last two time management rules together. It is also a symptom of time mis-management. Procrastination is characterized as ineffective, useless delay. The delay is due to some apprehension, fear it won’t be right, or it won’t be good enough or not seeing the way clear to completion. Whatever it is, it paralyzes us to listless inactivity.

Assuming you have set a tight deadline, the cure is to ask for someone to help you over this hurdle. That’s right, ask for help. When did you get too old to ask for help? Ask someone who can encourage and support you to complete this work on time. Someone may be able to clarify the path ahead or show you the next step to take. Progress is made, very often, in small steps, but progress is required.

And one for good measure

4) Campbell’s Commandment – Done is better than perfect.

Thomas Campbell is a very successful manager at a prominent transportation company. His adage was very encouraging as well as motivating.

Many are plagued with perfectionism. Some wear it like a badge of honor. Nevertheless, perfectionism is another delay tactic. Perfection is reserved for a Deity. We mere mortals will have to settle for excellence. And even excellence takes time. You won’t get it right the first time or maybe the first ten times. All you can do is your best with the information you have available, finish it and leave it open for revision when you get better information.

This is not an opening for shoddy work. Do your best while complying with Pareto, Drucker and Parkinson and keep working on it making it better each time. If you wait for perfection, you will get perfectly nothing done . . . perfectly. Progress is always preferred over perfection and usually required.

Make some progress. Get something done. Otherwise, you are right where you are now, fretting about all the time that is being lost and nothing is being done.

Any one of the Four Time Management Rules will move you ahead to accomplish more. Pick one that will work for you and try it out. If you can do it for 21 days, it will likely become a habit. If you like that one, try another and another.

Remember “do is half of done!”

How do you manage your time?

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