

Effective

Time Management



Managing time is equivalent to managing one's life-style

Prof Rafikul Islam

Let's start with a set of commonly observed stuff among people:

Finishing work late.

Submitting work that is not up to the usual standard.

Forgetting commitments.

Attending classes/meetings late regularly.

Finding that often you don't have enough time to complete a task.

Making excuses for why work is not done in time.

Asking teachers to extend the deadline for submission of assignments.

If any one of the above is true for you, then probably you need to manage your time better. So, possibly this article would be helpful to you.

Managing time is equivalent to managing one's life-style. Time is one of the scarce resources that a person have. Important resource must be managed properly in order to get maximum benefit out of it. There have been so many successful people in the history. The difference between those people and the people in the common category is that the first category's people have utilized their time in the best possible manner. It may be remembered that everybody has 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 30 days a month, etc. How to utilize this amount of time, which is equal for all, as said above, makes the ultimate difference.

It is widely known that time is an *amanah* given to

a human being from the Creator Allah (swt). Allah (swt) revealed a complete *surah* (Surah Al-Asr) in the name of time. In a *Hadith* Prophet Muhammad (saw) said that on the Day of Judgement, children of Adam (as) will not be able to step forward, until he/she answers five questions. One of these is how he/she spent his/her lifetime in the world. We do not know how much time has been given to us (i.e. our life time) in the world. Then it goes without any argument that we must utilise our time so that we can be successful in this world as well as hereafter. In the following, we have provided a number of tips, aimed at maximising our productivity and benefits.

Self-motivation: We do not need to go that far to find out that every great person, regardless of their area of achievement had a mission in his/her life. The person has worked very hard to realise this mission. Constant pushing someone may not lead the person achieving excellent results. Motivation must come from within. If you are a student, you need to have the self-motivation that you will achieve excellent results in examinations, as many things in later life depend upon academic excellence. Or if you are a businessman, you need to have self-motivation, that one day you will be able to setup a multinational company. Charles Garfield, a noted thinker found one thing common among the world class athletes, who have broken world records or world class business people who have achieved extraordinary business results, that they share extraordinary reserves of energy and they are passionately committed to a mission. One recent example is world renowned sprinter Usain Bolt of Jamaica, who made 'triple triple' in the last Olympic games at Rio de Janeiro. This extraordinary achievement has been possible due to his extraordinary, unfathomable self-motivation.

Have a list of goals: Captain of a ship sails it towards a pre-decided destination. Reaching the destination is his

goal. In the absence of this goal, which direction the captain would sail? You need to have a list of goals that you want to achieve in the short as well as long run. The goals should be SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-based). List down these goals on a plain paper. Read it often. Develop and workout strategies which will help realising those goals. Implementation of these strategies is actually our day to day activities.

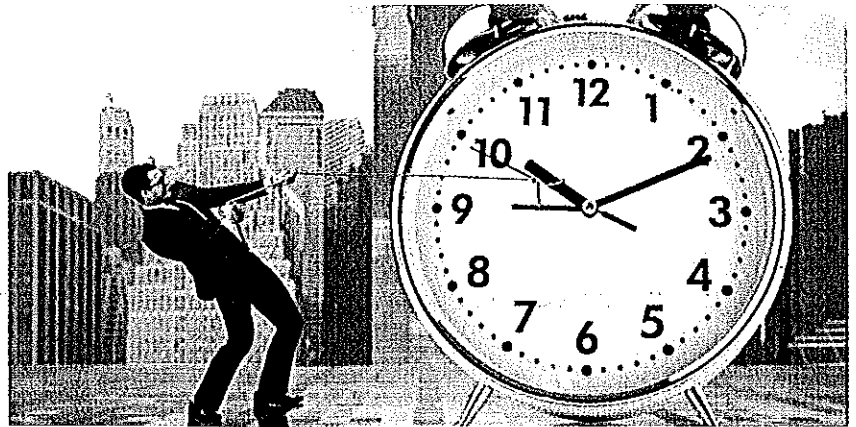
Have a to-do list: One day can be considered as a unit in our life. If we can effectively pass one day, one week, one month, then probably we are going to succeed in our life. There are possibly so many things that can be done in weeks time. Prepare a list of all the activities for a week. For a student, these can comprise the tasks related to several subjects including studying the topic, solving exercise problems or doing some projects. Whatever be your profession, you should list down all the activities that need to be carried out, say in next one week time. This list is called to-do-list. It can be done manually or using some device such as smart phone. Further remember that, a to-do list is actually a list of short-term as well as long-term planned activities.

Prioritization: It is necessary but not sufficient to have a list of activities. This list must be prioritized into three categories:

- Category A: Must do
- Category B: Should do
- Category C: Can do

As it sounds, the tasks in category A must be done first. It may take one day or few days to complete all these activities. The category A tasks must be updated constantly. That is, revise category B activities often and see whether time has come to promote some tasks from B to A. Same goes for the promotion of the tasks in category C to category B. Note that this is a dynamic process that needs to be done continuously.

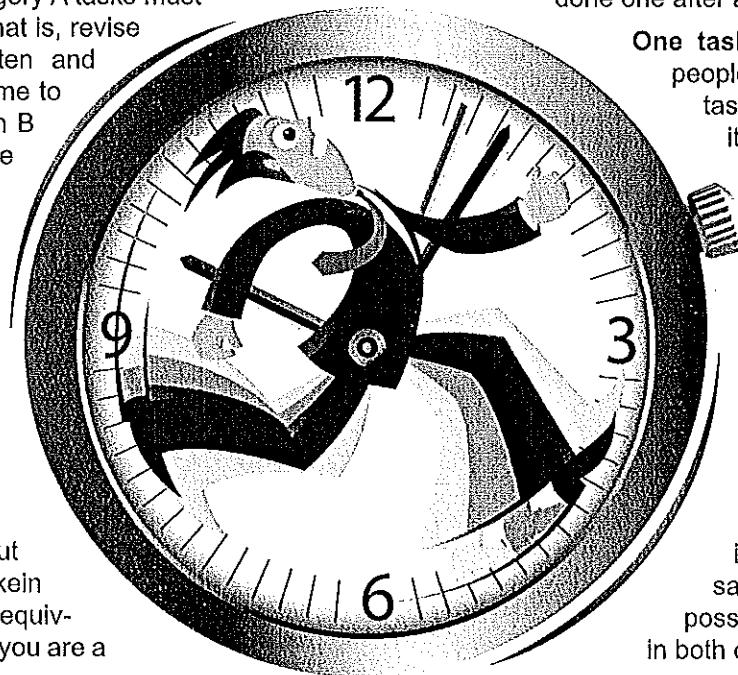
Planning, Planning, and Planning: It is not that you only plan for the number of activities, you also need to plan how you will carry out those activities. Alan Lakein said that failing to plan is equivalent to planning to fail. If you are a



student and you know you have exam after two months, so, you need to develop a plan how you will complete your preparation within this two months. Sometimes, Gantt chart is useful to put the main activities in writing along with their corresponding start and finish times.

Hardest thing first: One particular day's to-do list should be prepared in the preceding evening or latest by the morning of the particular day. It is extremely important to spend few minutes to prepare the list. This is essential for time management. This is to ensure that we do not forget to carry out some essential activity in that particular day. So, when the day begins, we have a list of activities. Which activity should be done first? Some say, well, we should begin the day by doing the most important task. True, but there is another suggestion from many experts. According to them, first of all we should carry out the toughest task (which is also an important one that should be done in that particular day) in the beginning of the day. The rationale is, once the task is done, we can exhale a sigh of relief. The rest of the tasks can be done one after another more comfortably.

One task at a time: While some people may think that multi-tasking increases productivity, but actually it is not. Multi-tasking may lead to loss of focus and quality of outputs of the tasks may be inferior. Imagine that someone is on phone call and at the same time he is typing a memo. Often we have experienced this in a typical office environment. How can a person concentrate on talking as well as typing at the same time? There is enough possibility of making mistakes in both cases. Note that it is illegal



as well as dangerous to attend phone call while someone is driving. World famous management Guru Peter Drucker said that multitasking requires 20% more time to complete the tasks compared to doing one task at a time. Engage your full energy, have your total concentration in doing one activity, finish it and then start the next one.

No Procrastination: Procrastination means postponing some activity which is supposed to be completed. In general, procrastination of activity is considered as bad. If it is repeatedly postponed, the activity may emerge as a nightmare. People postpone it due to a possible reason that the task is difficult or requires a long time to finish. Remember that the task may be difficult but if it is important, it must be done. So, better to do it as soon as possible. Again, if you are repeatedly postponing it, then there is a tip for you which is known as "15 minutes rule". This means that you just start the work and think that, well, I am not going to finish it today, but I will do the work just for 15 minutes. You will see that this is a head start of the work and very soon you will see there is a good headway in completing the task. The choice is yours whether you want to postpone the work for a long time or just start and do it for 15 minutes. It may happen that the work may take much less time compared to what you originally thought and there is enough possibility that the work will be completed soon.

Time Log: It is not essential but possibly important for some people. If you think that most of the time you feel too busy but at the end of the day you feel that you have not achieved much and your output is mediocre compared to many people, then possibly, you are spending too much of your time in unproductive activities. So, the advice for you is that you take a paper and a pencil and start writing your daily activities on the paper. This means that you write down what you did in the morning hour, then next and so on. Do it for all the days of two weeks. Then check carefully the logbook and see where actually you are spending your time. Ask yourself, if I don't do this, what will happen? If the answer is 'nothing', then next time better don't do it. In essence, you need to find out your own time wasters and use this time for more productive activities which are more rewarding.



Time wasters: One of the important things in time management is that we identify our time wasters. Time log will help to identify those. This may come in the form of some activities that are "excessive" prefixed, i.e., excessive phone calls, excessive dealings with Facebook or excessive socializing. While some sort of socializing is good and recommended but excessive socializing consumes a lot of time. Another big waster is gossiping or watching television program that are not that educative. It is recommended that you call people one after another on a particular time or you can open your e-mail box and reply e-mail at particular time of a day. This will enforce more control on your ancillary activities. Remember, if you are a student, time for study is more important than any other activity (except observing religious obligation such as salat). Of course, I do not mean that after salat you only study, study and study. No, that is not the case. You also need to relax possibly engaging yourself in some physical activity such as games or sports. Light physical activity at the designated time of a day invigorates the whole body and sharpens minds.

A polite 'No': You may be already overburdened but new things/requests keep on coming. Perhaps you have reached at the time to politely refuse, just saying no. It is better to say no rather than not being able to complete the task in time or worse yet completing the task with inferior quality. This will also enable you to focus more on the tasks at your hand. We should not be that kind of person who always says 'yes' and then disappears from the scene.

Delegate tasks often: This is especially true for managers or administrators. In fact, it is true for many other kinds of people. If you are spending too much of your time on activities which other people should be doing, then possibly you will not get time to do your core activities. But important thing to remember is that the task needs to be delegated to the right person who has the necessary skills to carry out the task effectively. In management theory, this is considered as some sort of recognition of the person's skills. Delegating task is a good time management tip as by doing so your overall productivity level can reach to a greater height. So, delegate as many tasks as possible. But ironically, this may not be fully applicable to students as they have to learn all the topics by themselves! Finally a cautionary note, it is an important decision making task whether one particular job should be delegated or not.

Important vs. Urgent works: 34th American President Dwight D. Eisenhower said all the works that are considered as urgent may not be deemed to be important. Stephen R. Covey, a celebrated management guru devised a matrix (a 2-dimensional dia-

gram) that puts all types of activities into two categories: Important and Urgent. The design of the matrix is the following:

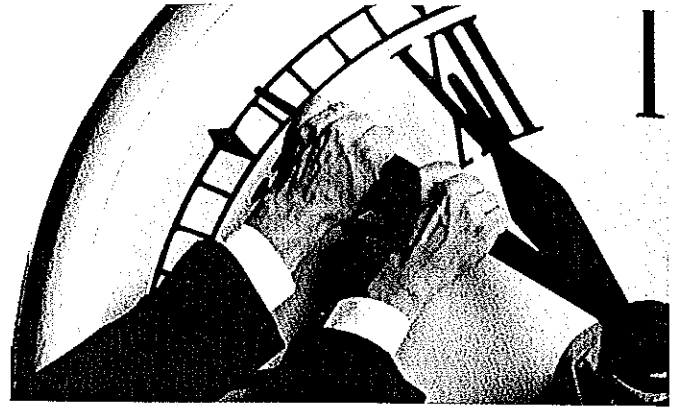
High I m p o r t a n c e	Important goals	Critical activities
	Distractions	Interruptions
Low	Low	High
	Urgency	

Many times, people are obsessed to carry out urgent works leaving the important ones. However, if the urgent works have low importance, then those may be considered as interrupters. Perhaps you can negotiate about the delayed deadlines of those acts, if that is at all possible. To maximise our productivity and achieving our life goals, we should be paying more attention to the important tasks. To do this, obviously, first of all we need to assign the levels of urgency and importance to all our tasks.

Pacing: Pacing means to keep buffer time for some activity. For example if your examination duration is three hours, you assume that your exam time is not three hours but two hours and 50 minutes. And put all your efforts so that you can finish by two hours and 50 minutes. Similarly, if your deadline is 30th of September, you assume that your deadline is say 28th of September and have plan to finish by this time. The extra buffer time of two days will allow you to accommodate any eventuality that may emerge in course of doing the task.

Use planners: Use of planners is essential for a person who have to carry out many types of activities. As and when the tasks come, this should be entered at the right date (specifying the time as well) of the planner. However, only important activities are to be entered into the planner. Small-small or petty tasks can come into the to-do list. Do not forget to browse through your planner often.

Physical Organization: Be wary about cluttered table. This needs to be put in order. The reason is simple. Searching an important document which is on your table but since there are so many things, sometimes it is hard to find it. So you lose some time and this kind of search



might affect the smooth rhythm of workflow. So arrange the stuff nicely and put on the table in order.

Make use of your waiting time: Everybody experiences waiting time: while to catch a train or bus or flight or at a government office. Especially, if you are waiting to get your connecting flight, you may have to wait for a long time, sometimes 7 or 8 hours. Always carry something useful with you, be it within your smartphone apps or clipping of important newspaper articles or simply may be funny story book. Further, you may know that in some particular day you may have some waiting time, so plan a priori how you are going to utilise this time. Use your waiting time by reading the material that you carry or simply do zikr of Allah (swt). For students, you can use your break time or time between two classes by reading or discussing something useful. As said earlier, time is an *amanah*, you need to respect it through proper and productive utilisation.

Punctuality: This is one of the great human qualities. Punctuality is the bedrock of time management. How many times you have seen that the meeting or the seminar did not start in time? Remember that when you are supposed to attend a meeting at 10 o'clock, be there at 9.55 am (pacing concept). If you think that you will reach exactly at 10 o'clock, most probably you will be late for few minutes, as we live in an uncertain world; you may get an important phone call or may meet some friend on the way that may make you late. Do not ever think that, ok, the meeting time is 10 o'clock but I know it will not begin before 10.10, so better I reach at 10.10. No, it is wrong to think in that way. Forget others, just do your job,



i.e., to arrive at the meeting venue no later than 9.55 am.

Put things in writing: We listen many things from many people. Put in writing some useful information that is expected to be referred in future. Otherwise you may forget those or you have to spend a plenty of time to recover those. So it will save your time if you develop your habit to put useful information or even new ideas in writing. My friend Professor Thomas Saaty of University of Pittsburgh once said that some night he needs to get up 2-3 times from sleep to put in writing new research ideas that may instantly crop up in his mind even in midnight. This is very true, as his busy mind might forget in the morning what ideas came into his mind in the midnight!

Reduce absent-mindedness: This is easier said than done. This is one of real problems of mine. To certain extent, all of us are absent-minded. In many cases, it happens that we lose inordinate amount of time in looking for stuff which we misplaced. This loss of time can be minimised if we place stuff to its designated location. It is said that we the human beings have our own houses; similarly, everything else has its own house. So, put the stuff in its own 'house' and while searching for it, be in its house. Further, keeping calm and coolness in mind and focusing one work or one thinking at a time, can reduce absent-mindedness.

Exercise, good sleep and healthy diet: Are these also related to time management? Yes, in a big way. Some of my friends once lamented that we don't have time to do physical exercise, but have enough time to be on hospital bed, unfortunately. Obviously, good sleep and healthy diet are also necessary to keep our brain fresh and body fit. A healthy body is essential to concentrate on our activities so that these activities can be completed at

a minimum amount of time and with impeccable quality.

Miscellaneous: Following are some extra tips:

Arrive mosque early for jamah prayer and pray with full concentration with utmost humility.

Do not forget to spend your quality time with your family members and visiting sick relatives.

Minimise watching television.

Gossiping – absolutely no. That does not mean that you do not need to have leisure time. Rather, to energise yourself, you need to have leisure time but use it prudently.

Go to bed at a reasonably fixed time of night and also get up at the same time in the morning.

Try to schedule all your phone calls (except emergency ones) at a particular time of a day.

In order to avoid disturbance in doing some important work, either switch off or put your mobile phone in silent mode.

Have a wall-clock in front of you.

Attend any activity with full preparation, that is, a student should attend a class after pre-class reading on the topic to be discussed in the class.

Be flexible so that eventualities can be accommodated in your schedule.

Spend about 10 minutes at the beginning of your day on what activities from your to-do list you intend to carry out in that day, sequence them and start doing one by one.

In conclusion, managing time is equivalent to managing one's life and a life is a full of activities. It is hoped that the tips discussed in this article can help in carrying out our day-to-day activities so that we can attain our ultimate success in both worlds. However, success does not come overnight; it requires a meticulous plan and its execution with patience, persistence, and perseverance. ■

The writer is a Professor of Business Administration & Management Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia.

