

# Making the Most of Your Time

You lead a busy life and there are probably times you have felt “swamped.” **An important first step is to analyze** whether or not all of the activities you do are providing the payoff you want. There may be a need to eliminate some of what you spend time on if what you are doing is not getting you where you want to be. Start by identifying your goals. Time will always be filled by something and wouldn't you rather be the one deciding how to spend it?

Most of us have been taught to **focus on SMART goals** that are specific, measurable, attainable, rewarding, and timebased. Keep these principles in mind as you define your goals now.

**Know your current time usage habits.** You may want to keep a written log for a week of your activities during the day and the time you spent on them. Keeping a log may seem tedious and feel like extra work but should pay off in the long run.

**Begin prioritizing activities.** It is helpful to distinguish between the “A” (*must do* items that are critical to your success and must be performed immediately) and “B” (*should do* items important for success but do not need to be done immediately) activities, because failing to perform an “A” activity often has serious consequences. “C” items are *nice to do* but not critical for your success. Prioritizing should help you gain more hours of productive time.

Now that you understand which activities contribute and do not contribute to achieving your goals, you are ready to **develop a strategy** for making the most of your time.

**Eliminate non-essential activities.** One way to test the importance of an activity is to ask, “What are the consequences of not doing this?” Remember that just because you have spent time doing something in the past does not mean that you have to continue to spend time that way.

**Consider how an activity is being done.** Evaluation of any process can be a valuable time saver. Is this the best way to do this? You may find the same results can be achieved with a different method.

**Consider who is doing the activity.** Perhaps you are unable to accomplish as much as you would like because you have taken on too much. If this is the case, consider delegating to others.

**Create a list** of all the activities you want to do, rating them in order of importance. The list provides a tracking system for activities that are already in progress as well as those you have yet to attend to. Use the technique mentioned earlier to prioritize your list with A, B, and C value.

**Use of a Daily Planner** whether it be on your computer or in a binder will help with organization. Be prepared to view the to-do list as a living document that will likely change as things come up in your schedule or in life.

**Be on the lookout for “gifts of time”** when meetings are cancelled or project deadlines are shifted. Most importantly, go easy on yourself and maintain flexibility. Schedules and to-do lists should always be an aide to you, not a reminder of what you are not accomplishing.

Regardless of how well you plan your activities and no matter how committed you are to sticking to your schedule; you will be faced with distractions in your day. Let's look at some common time management challenges and see how you can learn to overcome them.

**Manage drop-in visits.** They may be social chats or they may be requests for your assistance. Politely acknowledge your visitor and find ways to keep the conversation brief and focused.

**Beware of procrastination.** Time spent avoiding takes away from time we can spend accomplishing, so why do we do it? Sometimes we just lose focus and need to redirect ourselves. Sometimes we get overwhelmed with the big job and can't seem to break it down into smaller, more manageable tasks.

Don't forget that EAP has a wealth of tools on our website and coaches available to meet with you. **EAP is ready to partner with you as you set goals to achieve success with managing the valuable resource of time.**