



Time is ticking; manage it well! Eight steps marketing professionals can take to improve their time management skills.

By Anne Scarlett, first printed in the *AE Marketing Letter*.

As an independent consultant, I create a self-imposed “structure” to organize my time. Even when I walked in your shoes, as director of business development for AEC firms, I recall that same challenge: choosing how to spend my time in order to achieve the firm’s bigger business goals. No one tracked my hours, and no one knew— or seemed to care— where I was at any given time. I either reported to the CEO or the managing director of the office/department. They trusted my judgment that time would be reflected within my results. In both scenarios— self-employed or working as a marketing leader— the independence requires one to persevere with diligence, purpose, and organization.

Then there are marketing coordinators, whose time is more similar to technical staff. They are often assigned finite, time-sensitive tasks. And while some coordinators have access to peer or administrative staff support, others must rely solely upon themselves to complete their work.

Over the course of our lives— from childhood to university to career— we develop personalized approaches to manage our time and self-organize. This article proposes ideas to sharpen these skills. None are brand-new, and there are alternatives to these suggestions. My goal is to motivate you, regardless of your position, to make time management changes for the mutual benefit of your firm and yourself.

* **Conduct an honest assessment.** When measuring your current time management, ask: Which techniques serve me well? Which (bad) habits result in stress and frustration? Applaud your successes (waking up on the first alarm, blocking out time on the calendar to complete tasks), and tackle the bad habits (lengthy chit-chat with co-workers, meandering on the Internet) two or three at a time. Don’t get bogged down trying to eliminate all of your bad habits at once.

* **Limit your multi-tasking.** Multi-tasking is a fantastic skill for when we hit roadblocks within a given assignment, or when we are managing the execution of multiple teams or projects. Unfortunately, many of us find ourselves multi-tasking unnecessarily— bringing tasks to 60% to 80% completion, and then moving onto something new. Unless there is a valid reason to stop, this shift in focus actually makes it harder for us to ramp back up when returning to the original effort.

* **Delete distractions.** This is a biggie; just a few are listed.

1. Spend a Saturday (I know, ick) to purge your files. Go through and skinny them up. Better to do it all at once to keep up the momentum. Reward yourself afterwards.
2. Only respond to e-mail at designated times of day. This is tough when you are either bored with your work, or constantly receiving requests by e-mail. At a minimum, silence your automatic reminder bell.
3. Close all programs on your computer that you are not using. This will keep you from the temptation to switch from Internet research to CRM entry to e-mail when you’re really trying to complete a simple press release.
4. Clear your mind through sharing. Just like any other sort of distraction, a cluttered mind is a disability. If you don’t

meditate regularly, then at least confide in a mentor, especially if it is someone who understands the dynamics of your work environment.

* **Create and use your lists wisely.** At a minimum, don't leave the office until you have prepared and printed your daily plan for the following day. Even with computers and PDAs, hard-copy lists still are the most in-your-face technique, and they allow for the satisfying "cross out" upon completion of a task! Ideally, you will have two notebooks: one for "right away," and one with less urgent tasks (with a prioritized coding system). The latter is perfect for when you discover a pocket of free time.

* **Maintain a visible calendar.** Whether you are a business developer constantly on the go, or a marketing coordinator with piles of items to complete, you are in demand. By allowing full access to your electronic calendar, and by posting your projects with status or deadlines on a whiteboard in your work area, others will be clear on your availability.

* **Stand ready to reprioritize.** Internal marketing staff often fall victim to demands from multiple sources (restructuring this process to ensure that all requests flow through a single, all-knowing manager is another topic all-together!). By keeping your calendar or workload visible, and by knowing your own capabilities well enough to make suggestions in terms of reprioritizing when surprises arise, you will be able to better manage up.

* **Be a nurturing delegator.** If you do have support, then invest time and effort upfront to truly guide them. Be patient, and make sure to kindly— and in person— debrief on pros or cons post-task. Further, get a sense for their strengths and challenges, then adjust your training and your expectations accordingly.

* **Make these changes stick!** They say that true behavioral change is most likely to happen when you do something for 30 consecutive days. Why not put that cheesy gift calendar from your bank to good use by marking each day that you maintain your new good habits. If you deviate, then start over with your counting. Imagine the sense of accomplishment once you've made it 30 days straight applying your new time management or organizational habits!

The ideas posed here are not all-inclusive. Instead, I chose to highlight a few that may be less top-of-mind for your consideration. Best of luck in this time management venture; please write and share your own ideas and results!