

MANAGING FOR SUCCESS

Learn To Beat The Clock To Boost Productivity

By [Morey Stettner](#) Posted 07/02/2010 06:19 PM ET, www.investors.com, Investors Business Daily



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The best time managers know the time, all the time. They rarely check their watch and say, "It's so late! What happened to the last few hours?"

To boost efficiency, heed the clock. Reserve time for critical tasks, and leave a cushion between demanding assignments to decompress.

Customize your time management to fit your preferred approach to getting things done. If you're like most people, you operate more productively by blocking out uninterrupted chunks of time for higher-level activities.

Uninterrupted Minutes

"It's better to say, 'I need 30 minutes to work on this project' and then carve out 30 minutes rather than try to squeeze in five or 10 minutes here and there," said Joelle Jay, senior managing partner at Pillar Consulting in Reno, Nev.

Jay suggests using those five or 10 minutes of downtime to complete minor but necessary tasks such as returning phone calls. That way, you're in better shape to set aside longer blocks of time for work that requires concentration.

Research shows that once you're interrupted, even briefly, when immersed in a challenging task, it takes about 11 minutes to return to your previous level of concentration, Jay says.

Eliminating potential distractions — by closing your office door and silencing your computer beep tone that signals new e-mail — enables you to heighten your focus on what matters most.

Five Options

Like many time-management experts, Jay has a system to help you tackle your to-do list. She recommends that you choose one of five options: Do it now, delete it, delegate it, decide on it or assign a date when you will revisit it.

Dithering works against you. Rather than waffle about whether you're going to attend a meeting or authorize an employee's request, weigh the pros and cons and decisively render a decision.

"If you're not in a position to decide yet, don't keep the material hanging around so that it stays on your mind," said Jay, author of "The Inner Edge." "Instead, get it out of your mind. Date it and then take care of it on that day."

Managers often prioritize the wrong way, Jay warns. When facing a torrent of tasks, they may run through each item competing for their attention and ask themselves, "Who asked for it?" and "How urgent is it?"

"The better question to ask is, 'What's the most valuable use of my time?'," Jay said. "When you start by identifying your most valuable activities, you maximize your time."

If a retailer's most valuable activity is generating new business, for example, then reaching out to shoppers makes more sense than responding to a vendor's "urgent" request. Stick with your top priority until you've made sufficient progress to shift gears.