

SPECIAL
REPORT

7 Time Management Pitfalls

What NOT To Do To Get
Dramatically Better Results



**7 Time Management Pitfalls
That Are Costing You
Money, Results, and The
Most Precious Commodity
Anywhere – TIME**

by Kerul Kassel

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What NOT To Do To Get Dramatically Better Results

1. DO NOT use fancy time management systems

If you’ve been frustrated by trying to use special processes and systems promoted by authors of time management books, you’re not alone. I hear that sad tale from a lot of people. Just as in exercise or diet, we often look for the “latest and greatest” techniques. And while always seeking to improve our habits and methods is a great practice, making yourself wrong for finding other people’s systems awkward and unwieldy is counterproductive.

When you first experiment with a new or different time management device or tool, it will certainly be uncomfortable and somewhat time-consuming for the first week or three. But if it’s still a chore and a time-sink after that, it may be better to take whatever is useful from that new tool, and trash the rest.

Like some filing systems that are all the rage, a number of “recommended” products for mastering the use of your effort and time incorporate some fancy system that helps to make them seem innovative and justify their prices. But if they’re counter-intuitive for you and you feel like you’ll never get the hang of how to use the system, it may be time to rely on your own wisdom. The failure to use a touted new instrument, system, or device with expertise and efficiency reduces your overall effectiveness, and degrades your sense of confidence about being able to learn new things and get the most out of your time. It also increases energy-draining self doubt. Not a good space for mastering your most precious resource.

When it comes down to it, the most effective means to achieve your goals is to create a plan that incorporates your values and heart-felt objectives,

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then to move daily, weekly, and monthly toward those objectives in manageable, sustainable increments, always asking yourself what your priorities are at each time you finish a task, and always incorporating support from outside to help fuel your progress. Clarity about how you spend your hours and days, as they relate to what is meaningful for you, is all you really need to optimize your energy and effort and create the most satisfying results.

2. DO NOT use your calendar for appointments only

This is a very common pitfall for many small business owners and professionals. We sit down in November or December to create an **annual** business plan, then review it in the middle of the next year. That’s definitely helpful, especially if you have a staff that will be responsible for implementing the plan. But unless you’re clear about how that plan dictates your important actions, and unless you integrate your own personal plan into the mix and review those plans each week – breaking them down into smaller increments and actions – it’s probable you’ll have difficulty achieving your goals and dreams.

We fail to establish plans because we get daunted by the idea of creating them, or we get so busy with details that there’s little time to devote to something that feels less urgent. We also think it will take too much time and be troublesome and awkward to implement our plans, and we get overwhelmed by all we need to do.

Some of us create to-do lists, which in the end frustrate and shame us – that’s not a very productive strategy! (Request my Special Report “3 Simple Secrets To Tripling Your Productivity Sustainably” at www.StopProcrastinatingNow.com for more on effectively and efficiently completing to-do’s).

Others fill their calendars with recurring daily and weekly tasks which they then ignore, usually because these actions aren’t sustainably designed or scheduled.

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Once you accept these initial reactions, and how normal they are, you can get beyond them to the few minutes each day it will take to focus on the critical and important actions that will give you the results you want.

Composing a plan for the day, using your calendar and longer-term objectives, takes just 5 minutes or so, and can easily result in a 50-300% increase in productivity. Doing this in the morning, or the evening before at the end of the previous workday, gives you a head start and sharpens your focus. When you take a few minutes to plan each day ahead of time, using hoped-for weekly and monthly milestones as a guide, you automatically prevent a whole lot of poorly-used time. Regularly glancing at that daily plan 4-6 times during the day, you'll be able to weave in any newly developing circumstances, while still making swift advancement.

3. DO NOT stick rigorously to your plan and schedule

Adhering to your calendar can be costly to your productivity! If you're pretty good at using your time well, it's likely you're using your calendar to enhance your effectiveness. And it works...up to a point. If you stick to your calendar too rigorously, though, you'll reach a point of diminishing returns.

One of the criteria for effectiveness is that you're able to flow and adapt to changing circumstances, to acknowledge and integrate change at an almost cellular level. That means you have to re-prioritize frequently and on the fly. Asking yourself “What is the most important thing that needs to be done at this moment?” when you're done with one action and are ready to take the next is not only a maxim of intelligent business leadership, but also of high-level self-management.

Your calendar is your servant, and you must not be a slave to it. It is meant to be a tool to help you be most effective, efficient, and productive, not a dictum you must stick to at any cost. Feel free to switch things around, reschedule, even postpone when appropriate (not

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just convenient or easy!). Most people do often schedule more into a day than is reasonable, so keep that in mind, and make sure to focus first and foremost, in each hour, on the important tasks that are of most value to your long and medium-range goals, rather than just the urgencies of the moment. Just because you told yourself earlier in the day (or last week or last month) that you would do something in particular at this scheduled hour doesn't mean that it's the wisest choice at this moment. Calendar flexing is vital to optimize effort and produce the highest level results.

4. DO NOT put energy and time into “shoulds”

Being effective, efficient and productive is wonderful in general, but not so much if what you're producing isn't giving you (or your organization) what is needed and wanted. Getting things done is wasted effort (and time) if the things you're doing are hollow victories or, worse, not directly aligned with the results that are really being sought after.

If your organization has policies or goals that are means to ends, it may be time to revisit the ends and see if there are better ways to achieve them, or even if they should be modified. Are they “canned” or industry standards? They may be preventing you or your business from reaching its potential in its unique way.

As far as professional, career, and personal goals, most of us are laboring under culturally-defined definitions of success, one that isn't serving us or our families and our businesses. If you want to be both optimally effective, get breakthrough results, and feel completely fabulous and satisfied with them, it's critically important to always be focused on the top five values that are most essential to you. Otherwise, you'll be living someone else's life, and a sense of meaningful accomplishment will elude you.

5. DO NOT aim for 120% efficiency

Face it, you're not going to be at your best every single day, and you'll burn yourself out quickly if you endeavor to push yourself past what is

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reasonable on a daily basis (and then be at 50% efficiency or worse). There's a difference between pushing yourself to implement continual upgrading and tweaking to enhance effectiveness versus endless punishing long hours and working well beyond the limits of productivity.

Even though most of us are overburdened with business and personal responsibilities, and there are always improvements we can and would benefit from putting into practice, there is a point of diminishing returns, and it will be different every day, both for you and for any employees or team members. You know where that point is – you can feel it in your body and notice it in your mind, and you can sense it in others. It's the moment when you've gone from flow into dissonance, and you sense a need to get up from your desk. Studies have shown that the ability to be attentive and focused over time steadily diminishes when there are no breaks, even over as little as two hours.

The benefit of taking “refresh” time is that you'll be more focused and productive without needing as much time to be effective – in other words, better results in less time.

There will be days when you're just not feeling as good, physically or mentally, or when personal or professional circumstances or emotional upsets that are slowing you down. Humans are animals, not machines, and while we can certainly ignore or put aside some distractions and degradations to performance, there is a limit that's reached and we do pay a price.

Simply work to the best of your capability, whatever that is on any given day...no more and no less. Keep aiming for continual enhancement, but stop making yourself wrong for not being superhuman.

6. DO NOT be independent

Do you think extremely successful people get that way by doing everything themselves? Not a chance! They understand that they have

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particular gifts, and that’s where they focus their efforts. They leave the rest to others because they know that doing otherwise will hamper their effectiveness, and reduce their potential for success.

If you’re not effectively and continually delegating whatever you can, wherever you can, you’re limiting your results, and your satisfaction. Don’t use lack of funds as an excuse. Whether you have money to pay other people or not, there are ways to delegate or barter that don’t require the exchange of funds. Use your imagination and reach out to others – there’s always a way. These days, with the advent of Elance.com and Guru.com, and in these days of professional organizers, and virtual and personal assistants, there is a huge pool of skilled, experienced, and inexpensive helpers. If applicable, negotiate with your superiors by proving you’ll be more valuable to the company by delegating.

Yes, I know that there’s a risk that someone else won’t do a task as well or as quickly as you could, and that there will be an initial investment of time to find the right people and get them up to speed, but it’s a better investment than doing it yourself.

Activities you hate doing or aren’t good at are two areas to start picking from to delegate. After all, how much time are you losing by not applying yourself to what you **are** good at? There are also the activities you might not mind, but they may still not be the most productive use of your time. Start small and experiment, and you’ll find that your life won’t fall apart, nor will you become a snob, if you start removing tasks from your plate that someone better suited could be doing for you. Don’t expect that all experiments will go well – some, perhaps many, won’t. Don’t let that stop you.

7. DO NOT spend most of your time focusing and planning ahead and pursuing goals

What? This really doesn’t seem to make sense, right?

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The truth is, it doesn't take much time to plan, as well as tweak and adjust as appropriate, nor does it take a lot of dedicated time to achieve most goals. While success is almost always the result of consistent and regular actions toward the most important objectives, those actions don't need to take up 12 or 10 or even 8 hours each day. It's the more trivial and urgent-but-not-important stuff that takes up so much time.

If you're not spending 3-5 hours each day taking time for fun and enjoyment, and acknowledging and celebrating your progress, you're making a time management mistake of huge proportions.

After all, if we set aside our enjoyments, what's left. Sure, you may love your work, but life is not only about work. When your time is up, will you regret not having had more time for work or not having set aside more time for enjoyment and celebrations of your blessings?

Ignoring or putting off time spent in enjoyment, fun and gratitude wears you down. It has a detrimental effect on your health.

When you spend time in fun and when you recognize and honor your achievements – tiny, huge, and everything in between – you're creating a physical, mental, and emotional environment of inspiration and rejuvenation. That “re-creation” will not only strongly boost your productivity levels when you apply yourself to work, but immediately adds satisfaction and fulfillment to your life every day. You don't have to wait for the weekend, and you don't have to wait for retirement. You can start having what you really want today.

It isn't necessary to set aside large blocks of time to do this. Taking a ten or twenty minute walk (outdoors, if possible) and observing all that's around you, playing with a pet for a few minutes, looking out the window and watching the clouds pass by a few times each day, having lunch with a friend, spending some cuddle time with your sweetie, making a list (on paper, electronically, or mentally) of the day's little victories or of the many small blessings you've experienced that day, and putting on the

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radio or stereo or iPod and singing or dancing are all minute but considerable ways to start experimenting with this essential practice.

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