

# Getting ahead of the game – time management

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**M**anaging your time efficiently is a skill that is critical to running a successful business, unfortunately for many people it is a skill that they are yet to master. The key is to organise and prioritise your daily tasks effectively to maximise your productivity. Despite legend in the transport industry, there are not 25 hours in a day, and you shouldn't be working like there are. You need to work smarter, not necessarily harder.

The good news is that everyone can develop better time management skills, the following ideas will help you better manage your time effectively:

Write yourself a to-do list. There are different ways to do this. I regularly buy a pack of 10 lined A4 pads, and write my lists out by hand. Some people prefer to set reminders on their phone or computer, the main thing is whatever works best for you. Just the process of recording your 'to do list' will help you to remember. Set time frames to keep you on task. Don't make your lists like a novel of 'War and Peace', keep them to the point and most importantly achievable.

Prioritise your to-do list. Now you have completed your list, go back through it and work out the most important tasks and number them one to ten. Then start with number one because that is obviously the most important task.

Make sure you have the right tools for the job. Once you have finished your to-do list, make sure that you have all the resources available to do the job right first time. You

wouldn't start baking a cake without the ingredients, just the same as you wouldn't head off on a run in as truck without a tankful of diesel.

Keep things tidy. If you are wallowing in clutter, then it's no wonder you are struggling with effective time management. I work on theory of having three piles, whether it is on your desk or in the workshop:

Keep. This is the stuff that you need to get onto, or you need to keep. If it's not being used, put it away.

Give away. This is the stuff that you can delegate to someone else, or can be given to someone else. But get on to it straight away.

Throw away. This is the junk pile, get rid of it as it is obviously no use to anyone.

Work out the difference between 'urgent' and 'important'. 'Urgent' tasks may well demand your immediate attention, but they may not necessarily be important. 'Important' tasks need your attention, as not doing them may have serious consequences for your business. For example you may have a customer who is always leaving their freight to the last minute and demanding that you "urgently" deliver it for them. But if that customer is only one percent of your business, and this causes delay to the "important" customer who is 80 percent of your business, then the "urgent" is not so "important" after all.

Focus on the important stuff. Don't let the small tasks interrupt the important tasks. Email is a classic example, instead of spending all

day answering every single email, leave your emails till later in the day, once you have completed the important tasks. If you are anything like me, you are at your most productive first thing in the morning, don't waste this productive time answering emails. Close your door if you have to, to avoid interruptions. Learn to say no to distractions. Leave Facebook and the funny emails for outside work hours.

Multitasking is not the answer. If you want to get more tasks completed in less time, then you need to stop trying to multitask. Instead of trying to do many tasks that are either not completed or completed to a poor standard, concentrate on the most important tasks first, one at a time. You will find this is quicker in the long run, and you will make a lot less mistakes. Make sure you finish each task before starting the next.

Delegate tasks. Let it go, you can't be in control of absolutely everything in your life. The truth is, it doesn't matter how good we are, we just can't do everything. Delegating is not running away from your responsibilities, it's intelligent use of the available resources. Delegation is an effective means of growing the capability of your staff or service providers. Just make sure that they are up for the task.

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Don't Procrastinate. If the task is really important, get on with it. If the task is large, break it down in to smaller, easier to manage tasks, but stay focused on the larger task. Set yourself a deadline. Although we all like to do a good job, don't let being a perfectionist stop you from getting started in the first place. Don't put off to tomorrow, what you can do today.

Keep calm and focus on the big picture. Patience is a very important virtue when it comes to having a successful life, whether it is your business life or your personal life.

For some, patience is a challenge, and for others it comes easy. But patience is certainly something that we should all practice. There will be times when your patience is challenged, just take a deep breath, it is not the end of the world. You are never too old to learn; almost every person and situation has something that you can learn from. Whenever you are getting impatient, just remember the 'big picture', what is the most important thing to focus on?

Review your progress. Every now and then, take some time to sit back and evaluate how you are going with your time management. Are there still areas you are letting yourself down? If so make a list and look for solutions. If all is going well, then well done. Effective time management skills are an essential part of making life easier. Find out what best works for you and keep at it. ■

**If you would like some help in getting ahead of your game, then contact NZ Trucking Association on 0800 338 338 or [info@nztruckingassn.co.nz](mailto:info@nztruckingassn.co.nz)**

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