

Five Mistakes to Avoid When Planning Your Day

By Kathleen Barton, MBA

Taking just five minutes at the beginning of each day to plan your day can make a tremendous difference in your productivity. However, many people do not plan their days effectively. Writing a “laundry list” of things to do is not enough! Here are some common mistakes that people make in daily planning.

- 1. Over-Planning**
Most people try to do too much (myself included). They have high expectations as to what they can accomplish. They write a “to do” list an arm’s length long. Be realistic about what you can (and cannot) achieve in a given day. When you estimate the time it will take to accomplish a task, a good rule of thumb is to double the time. You’ll find that’s a more realistic estimate. I’ve learned this lesson over the years.
- 2. Not Allowing for the Unexpected**
Some people plan 100% of their time. We rarely have that much control over our time. Stuff happens! Things will come up, so allow for interruptions and the unexpected. Therefore, it’s a good practice to only plan about two-thirds of your available time. That allows you some flexibility. Therefore, when important things come up, you’ll be better able to modify your priorities as needed.
- 3. Failing to Prioritize**
Some people will write their “to do” list, then pick one and dive in. The danger in doing this is that they often choose the easiest and quickest items on the list first. Then they can check them off and feel more productive. The problem is that they never get to their most important priority. So how productive are they really? Not very! To be truly effective, it’s critical to prioritize your task list, and then start with the most important tasks first.
- 4. Too Many “A” Priorities**
Of those who do prioritize their task lists, they often label too many “A” (most important) priorities. To them, everything is important and needs to be done right away. In order to determine if it is truly an “A” priority, ask yourself these questions. “Do I absolutely have to get this done today?” and “What is the consequence of not completing this task today?”
- 5. Failing to Review at the End of the Day**
Most people skip this step altogether. By taking a few minutes at the end of the work day to “close out your day”, you can go home with a feeling of accomplishment and not have to think about work. Take time at the end of your work day to review what you’ve accomplished, and then transfer tasks that you did not complete to the next work day. This gives you a sense of closure at the end of the day.

By avoiding these mistakes and following the suggested tips, you’ll be more productive and effective each day.

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