

Make the Most of Your Time

By Kathleen Barton, MBA

Do you make the most of your time? How we spend our time impacts our productivity, effectiveness and our sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. The value of time cannot be underestimated. We all have 24 hours in a day – no more and no less. Many of us have so much to do that we wish we had 34 hours in a day. How can you make the most of your time? These tips for planning will help you spend your time wisely.

I recommend you spend time at the beginning of each week to plan your week. Find a time and place where you will not be interrupted for at least a half hour. I always do my weekly planning on Sunday night after the kids have gone to bed. Then I'm ready to start fresh and dive right into my tasks on Monday morning.

In order to ensure that you're spending your time on the most important things, set weekly goals that are aligned with your mission and values. I set goals for each important role in my life (such as wife, mother, business owner, speaker, coach, etc.). By doing so, I'm better able to balance my various roles in life. Therefore, I won't spend all of my time on business and then neglect my family. Think about the various roles you play in life – both personal and professional. Maybe you're a husband, a manager, a soccer coach, and friend. Don't forget the role of "self". We need to put our own self-care at the top of the list. Once you've identified and listed your major roles, then you're ready to set goals.

Set 2-3 weekly goals for each role in your life. Ask yourself, "What is the most important thing I can do in each role this week that will have the greatest positive impact?" Goals related to personal relationships (i.e., role of wife, mother, friend, etc.) may involve spending one-on-one time with significant people in your life. Goals related to your work may involve strategic planning, completing projects, meeting with key people, etc. Goals related to yourself involve anything that refreshes you physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually; such as exercise, reading, recreation, prayer or meditation.

Once you've set your weekly goals, you're ready to plan your week. Transfer your goals to your daily calendar. Either list an item as a goal for the day or schedule it on your calendar. Be sure to schedule time to refresh yourself each day, whether it is physical exercise, time with friends or family, or just some quiet time to yourself.

Each morning list your tasks and activities that you want to accomplish that day. Be realistic about what you can and cannot accomplish in the given time. Once you've listed your tasks, then prioritize them. Prioritize them according to importance (A, B, or C). "A" priorities are those things you must get done today or there will be a negative consequence. For example, let's say you have a report that is due today. Your boss needs this information for an important customer meeting tomorrow morning. If you don't get it done, it will negatively impact the outcome of the meeting and your boss' perception of your performance. "B" priorities are those things that are important, but not necessarily urgent. And "C" priorities are those that you would like to accomplish, however there is no real consequence if they don't get done today, such as filing and updating records.

The biggest mistake people make is labeling too many tasks as “A” priorities. Ask yourself, “Do I absolutely have to get this done today?” and “What is the consequence of not completing this today?” These questions will help you determine if it is truly an “A” priority. Another mistake people often make is trying to do too much (myself included). Be realistic about how much you can accomplish. When you estimate the time it will take, it’s a good practice to double the time. Also allow for interruptions and the unexpected. You never know when something important will come up. When things come up, be flexible and willing to modify your priorities if necessary.

Once you’ve prioritized your list, you’re ready to get started. Start by completing your “A” priorities and then move on to your “B” priorities. Once you complete a task, put a checkmark next to it. You’ll gain such satisfaction just by checking it off. By following these tips for planning your week and your day, you’ll be more productive, effective, and satisfied.

*Kathleen Barton is a keynote speaker, workshop presenter, and life coach specializing in life purpose, career success, and work-life balance. She is the author of **The Balancing Act: Managing Work & Life** audio/workbook. Kathleen can be reached at www.YourLifeBalanceCoach.com.*