

TIME MANAGEMENT VS SELF MANAGEMENT

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<http://www.freearticles.co.za/personal-development/time-management/time-management-vs-self-management.html>

Are you someone who makes lists of all the things you need to do? At the end of the day when you review your list, are you disappointed because you haven't accomplished as much as you would have liked. Does this sound familiar to you?

We hear a lot about time management and how we need to organize ourselves and manage our time more effectively. In order to regulate our time, new ways of thinking and being need to be developed. Our attitudes and beliefs need to be identified and at times altered in order to make beneficial changes. We need to develop self management strategies. When we manage ourselves better we tend to be less overwhelmed, more productive and happier.

There are various models for time management. One is making daily and/or weekly lists, then prioritizing which items are the most important and tending to those first. Of course the challenge is that is if you don't like some of the tasks, you probably tend to avoid doing them. (I know this strategy intimately.) It also does not account for all of the complications which arise nowadays on our job. Emails, voice mails urgent requests which must be dealt with immediately, or conference calls; all of the modern technology which has made our lives easier and more complicated at the same time. We are generally expected to do more in less time and with less support.

Steven Covey in his book, First Things First breaks tasks down into 4 quadrants:

- Urgent and Important
- Not Urgent and Important
- Urgent and Not Important
- Not Urgent and Not Important

There is a great deal of value in this model and certainly gets one thinking about how to define the many things one has to do. The difficulty is that important projects can become urgent if one has procrastinated and that isn't necessarily a helpful way to operate. It would also be relevant to identify what is important to you and spend time doing that as well, because it might never become urgent. For example, your family may be very important to you, but you frequently miss your child's school or sporting events. Or your partner wants to spend more time with you, but somehow you don't make it happen. It's important, but not urgent. The other concern is when do unimportant things get tended to.

So how can we get things done in ways which are more productive and less stressful? David Allen, author of Getting Things Done, states that it is not about managing time, but rather about managing our actions. What would it be like for you to fully dedicate 100% of your attention to whatever task was present, of your own choosing with no distraction? Allen says it is possible to get things done with minimal effort in both your personal and professional life while staying relaxed. Athletes describe it as being in the "zone".

His strategy is to first get you thinking. What is something you want to accomplish? What outcome do you want to achieve and what is the very next action you need to do in order to move your project forward? Try this exercise and notice if there were any changes in your mood and perspective.

In addition, Allen has identified a five stage method for managing workflow.

These are described as:

- Collect things that command our attention
- Process what they mean and what to do about them
- Organize the results
- Review as options for what we choose to
- Do

This way of looking at things seems reasonable and many of us probably do something which resembles this. However, difficulties arise if there is a breakdown in any of the stages and ultimately it leads to what we choose to do or not do.

Allen's model for choosing actions in the moment include the following:

- Context - Does it require a particular location (office, home) and what tools are required (computer, phone, etc.)
- Time Available - When do you have to do something else? If you have a conference call in 15 minutes, then there many things you won't be able to do.
- Energy Available - Evaluate how much energy you have in the moment. Some tasks may require more physical energy, while others need creative energy
- Priority - Given your context, time and energy what action will give you the biggest payoff? You are at your office and you have 30 minutes before a meeting and your energy level is low. View this as an opportunity to rely on your intuition to determine what to do next. Perhaps reading your emails or proofreading a report is the most you can manage.

We need to think about our work before we do it. Planning for it, as well as paying attention to what we are thinking and feeling leads to greater productivity with less effort. What better way to then have the time to do more of what we really enjoy!