

Productive to the Max

Productivity

Performance

Profitability

Having trouble completing your tasks

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Do you have a problem with completing your tasks? Do they lie scrambled on your desk in piles? Do they float in your subconscious until you retrieve a few or suddenly become aware of their urgency? Is your to do list so long that you eventually chuck the whole thing?

Whether you print your tasks out, drag or in a folder, leave them as to-do's in your inbox, BCC them to yourself and wait for a response and drag to a to-do list, it is essential that you practice good task management to be more productive. From your daily activities to long-term goals, you need to understand, capture and organize these actions to accomplish your objectives.

A task is defined as " a usually assigned piece of work often to be finished within a certain time" or" something hard or unpleasant that has to be done". How often does that former definition become the latter because you have procrastinated? The following tips will assist you in becoming more efficient in task management.

- **Are you really the person who should be performing this task?** Does this particular type of work fall into your job description or are you just taking on anything that is handed to you? Should this task be performed by someone else? Can it be delegated or assistance provided from others?
- **Determine the length and difficulty of each task.** If the task requires a small amount of time, between 5-15 minutes, you can accumulate like or common tasks and perform them all at one assigned time in your calendar. Set aside three specific times per day to complete administrative tasks. Email, faxing, photocopying and returning phone calls fall into this category as do those small tasks requiring 10 minutes of time and energy. This leaves the rest of your day open for the larger more complicated projects.
- **Break the tasks into chunks of time.** One of the reasons you procrastinate is because you take a look at a task and find it too long, too difficult or too scary to complete. You need to overcome these fears and the best route is to treat each task like a salami. You wouldn't be able to eat it whole (unless you are my dog!) so you must break it into palatable chunks. Also, if the task is too difficult a smaller chunk

will enable you to obtain the assistance or research you require for completion. You will then be motivated to go on to the next chunk and the next.

- **Prioritize.** Assign a number or a letter to each task to signify the order of importance and when it needs to be done (or in some cases who it is being done for!). Your priorities may change during the day but at least you have a starting point.
- **Plan each and every task out on your calendar** It will prove disastrous if you do not follow this essential key to productivity! You must plan EVERYTHING on your calendar, whether it takes up a time slot or has a place in the to-do section on the side. This way you will never forget and you will be able to move uncompleted items to another day. You will be able to see quite clearly whether you are planning too much in one day and adjust accordingly.
- **Organize your environment.** You cannot complete a task unless you have all the materials at hand. Don't use disorganization as an excuse for procrastination. For each large task you are required to complete, establish a file or a system which enables you to keep track of each portion of the project. Electronic systems like Microsoft Project Manager are ideal for large projects. Outlook tasks can assist you with smaller items. If you are paper-based, a file folder with an excel spreadsheet could be the system that would work for you. Even a wall planner would work. A system is a necessity to keep you on track and focused on the end result.
- **Make a game of completion.** Tell yourself that you will allocate 15 minutes to each task today just to get you started. Start the timer and go like the wind. You can do a lot in 15 minutes: Clear a drawer, sort through an inbox, return items that do not belong to your area, make a few phone calls. See how much you can accomplish in a short amount of time. Promise yourself a reward after completion.
Ah! You will be able to experience that feeling of satisfaction when you complete a task more often if you follow these tips. All those little tasks do add up and completion will lead you further toward your goals and dreams for your life. Good luck!