

How to Manage Your Time

Here's a technique for dealing with the distraction of a horrendous to-do list. This is also suitable for project managers. (Adapted from an article by Peter Axt)

Steps

1. Write down all the tasks you have to get done, if you haven't done so already.
2. Set priorities for each task.
 - P1: Red: Today/Tomorrow (Day)
 - P2: Orange: 3-7 Days (Week)
 - P3: Yellow: 2-3 weeks (Month)
 - P4: Pink: Later this year...(Wish List)
3. Be realistic. If you have fifty items on your list, no more than three should be marked with red and maybe six or seven in orange. You do the math to adjust this to whatever length of list you have (it's five percent and fifteen percent). Many people — maybe most — will have no red items. It's not true that we're all weighed down with tasks so urgent they can't wait 24 hours. That's just our love of drama and the sneaky wish to feel important. Let them go.
4. Start work on any red tasks first — however awful, boring or frightening they are. The trick to keeping calm and balanced is simple: forget about all the complex planning. Work out what truly needs to be done next and do it. When it's done, repeat the procedure.
5. Start on the orange tasks next. Don't even think about any yellow ones until all the reds and oranges are done. If any new tasks arrive, give them a color and put them on the list. Next morning, make a new list and reallocate the tasks into the colors.
6. Keep track of your progress.
 - After one week, take 15 minutes to go through the yellow (month) items.
 - Cross all those that have solved themselves off the list. Do the same for those that you can now see were never important anyway. You'll be amazed how many there are.
 - Underline those you can remove by: delegating them, using technology rather than your time and attention, or creating a routine for handling them so you can delegate or pass them to someone else. Make a red item to deal with them right away by whatever means is appropriate.

Tips

- Start your list again and revisit the yellow items in another week. Do the same weeding, only this time also remove or move to pink any yellow items that have been on the list for more than a month. If you haven't either done them or moved them into

orange or red in that time, forget about them. They aren't going to get done next month either...

- If you stick to this set of actions, you'll get an amazing amount of work done; you'll always be focused on what's genuinely important and your to-do list will be a real one, not a resting place for failed intentions.
- Manage your time in 15-minute increments. Be determined to accomplish something you set out to do or at least part of it within that time limit.
- Every 2 hours, take a 15 minute break to allow you to refocus your energies when you come back from your break. This works wonders to break up a mundane 8 hour work-day by taking a break after the first 2 hrs...then your lunch break just 2 hrs later, then two hours after your lunch another 15 min break... hey, what's that? 2 hrs left and then you go home? yep... good times

Warnings

- You have to take this exercise seriously, which means setting aside the "everything has to be done yesterday" BS and creating real priorities.