

Eat a Frog for Breakfast!

9 Tips to More Time for YOU!

By Gail Lowney Alofsin



Do you ever feel that despite being skilled, proficient, bright and ambitious, you're still not "keeping up" or completing all that you need to in a day, week, month, or year, both personally or professionally?

Stop for a minute and assess your situation. Hmm...why are you so busy? What are you gaining from your current actions and activities? What are you losing or missing out on? What can you change to increase your productivity and gain more time in your day for the people that count most and the activities you most enjoy?

Time management is a myth – we do not manage time, we cannot change the 24 hours that comprise our day. We can simply manage *ourselves* and the *choices* that we make.

9 The Little Train that Could

One of my favorite books growing up was the "Little Engine that Could" – *I think I can, I think I can, I think I can*. The reality is, we can't.

As we grow older, we learn that no matter how talented or energetic we are – we can only do so much. Before you launch on a new project - what are you going to stop doing? Think about how you are honored when you are asked to join a committee, non-profit board, attend a meeting or guest lecture. After the initial elation, the new responsibility can be overwhelming.

Take a look at your calendar – what have you committed too? When you over commit, nobody wins and you lose the most – sleep, self esteem, self respect, free time! Ask yourself what the conse-

quences will be if you say "yes" or "no" to the requests that are being asked of you. What is the "consequence" of spending time on this project or request rather than spending it on something else? This is called your "opportunity cost" and you only have 24 hours each day. Make your decision accordingly.

This leads to learning to say "NO"... nicely. There is a way to say "no" that does not make the person asking feel insulted or hurt. We have all had times in our lives when we have said "yes" to many things, making our plate very full. While a full plate is attractive, and perhaps in a sense, comforting, we only have so much time in a day. We want to do our best to avoid "buyer's remorse," regretting that we signed up for an activity or program that we do not have time for.

When you do say "no," say "no" nicely without a dissertation on how busy you are. No one cares how busy you are – busy is not a contest! We all know people who rant on and on about what they are doing and how busy they are. Honestly, who cares? Who are they trying to impress?

By the time that you hear how busy they are, they could have helped you!

Let's review an example. Being in the event business, we may be asked by other organizations, non profit groups or our children's schools to assist with their events. We may be asked to sell sponsorship, run a silent auction, or join a board or committee. If you do not have time to commit, there may be something you can do. Perhaps you can procure a few great prizes for the silent auction or beverages for the event rather than run the event.

Do not apologize, offer to do what you can. Believe it or not, the person asking you has a list of names and when you cannot do it – they are calling the next person on the list!

#8 Eat A Frog for Breakfast –

Author Mark Twain professed, "If you eat a frog first thing in the morning, this will probably be the worse thing you do all day."

Do you make your "to do" lists and conquer them by doing the easy tasks first? Whew – that feels good – checking 10 actions off your list! However, the frog, the big project that needs to be addressed, is looming! If you eat that frog earlier in the day, your day will be much more productive.

Making a "to do" list is not enough. Rank your list and focus on the most important items. I recommend A,B,C,D,E steps. A are the things you have to do today, if not right now. B are the things that you need to get done but not immediately. C would be nice to do but are not necessary. D can be delegated and E can be eliminated if you run out of time!

It takes 21 days to start a new habit and if you use self-discipline to get into the habit of eating frogs, after 21 days it will become second nature. The result – productivity!

#7 Frito Bandito!

Frito Lay had a commercial featuring the "Frito Bandito" who would sing "I yi, yi, yi...I am the Frito Bandito." While we cannot focus on "I" all day long, it is important to make appointments with yourself and focus on YOU!

Carve out time for what you want to do or need to do and add this to your calendar. Block these appointments and activities with your family as if it were a mandatory meeting. Spend time with your family – your spouse or partner, children, parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles and friends.

Identify and mirror successful people who are doing what you want to do or have the knowledge to assist you in reaching your goal. This can be as simple as reviewing attributes that you admire in other people and would like to emulate. If you don't have anyone in your circle of influence that you can mirror, go online and find a career you're interested in and you will find someone through there. Model successful people. Spend time on developing you.

Create a personal board of advisors and keep in touch with these people. Stay current on events in the news and on events in the lives of your friends and family. This will make you interesting and people enjoy talking to and being around interesting people.

#6 Be known for “getting it done.”

It is important to build a foundation of good work habits. Start your project and stay with it until it's done. You will discover that you can do it! Many people have “ideas” or start projects that they do not complete. When there is a project that is important to you or imperative that you get done, stay with this task until it is 100% complete.

If you are having difficulty starting it, identify the source of procrastination. Is it lack of interest? Lack of knowledge? Just start it!

The way to grow personally and professionally, is if you challenge yourself. Practice productivity. We all have habits that are not productive. Do you watch too much television, procrastinate major projects, sleep too much, spend too much time shopping, complain office to office?

When you study time, you will discover where you are wasting time and begin to make the appropriate adjustments.

#5 Gotta minute?

We are all familiar with the time trap of “Gotta minute?” These are colleagues, clients, and potential customers who call or enter your office asking “do you have a minute?” These minutes can turn into hours. Couple this with distraction, lengthy phone calls, hallway “chit chat,” unexpected visitors, unanticipated crisis or “fires” to put out and you have a recipe for serious time attrition!

Think about your personal and professional time traps and start addressing them. For instance, if you are distracted, identify the sources of distraction so you can elimi-

nate them. Is it a messy desk, noisy office, lengthy phone calls, or frequent visitors? Make the time to organize your desk and office with the assistance of a friend or colleague. If your office is too noisy, ask for cooperation from your colleagues or wear headphones! If phone calls are too lengthy, suggest to the caller that “I realize YOU are very busy, I will let you go.”

In an office, there will always be the water cooler “chit chat” and while a great deal of business can get done, this can also be a source of wasted time! While socialization in the workplace is important, blow by blow details of a colleague's child's sporting event or brilliance on a daily basis is a waste of time. When conversation has gone on for too long, excuse yourself. With unexpected visitors, acknowledge them politely, address their needs and stand up and start walking out of your office with them. “Gotta minute?” can turn into hours of unproductive and wasted time. When there are “fires” to put out, quell the fires you can and enlist the assistance of others with fires that are too powerful.

#4 Procrastinate Later!

Have you ever experienced the deadline inspired RUSH of adrenalin? We get things done – projects, final exams, proposals when we are on deadline! The question is, if you will do it later, why not do it now? This also applies to positive achievements we would like to add to our life – education, learning a new sport or instrument, enjoying more time with friends and family.

Once you identify the source or sources of procrastination, you can add the projects to your “TO DO” or goal sheets. Practice the power of positive thinking. Try not to doubt yourself, you can do it! If you put things off to “later,” they are never going to happen. Celebrate the small gains on the path to the major goal.

#3 Delegate!

It is only as we develop others that we permanently succeed. Why do the work of ten, when you can get ten people to help you?

The best way to delegate is to choose people who can accept responsibility. When delegating in terms of their skills and interest, teach “why” (the purpose) not just the “what” (desired outcome). Manage the delegation by keeping a list of items delegated and request a progress report (daily, weekly, monthly) on what has been accomplished. And finally, appreciate the personal touch on the delegation.

#2 Managing Deadlines

Create timelines for goals, projects, and events. This will assist you in tracking time so you do not miss a deadline. When you build white space and flex

time into your day, you add time to your day for unforeseen challenges or opportunities. Do your best to start a project and complete as much as you can so you have time when a unique or exciting opportunity presents itself!

#1 The Pareto Principle

In 1906, Italian Economist, Vilfredo Pareto deduced the 80/20 rule. The Pareto Principle attests that you can divide people and activities into the “vital few” vs. “trivial minutiae.”

For example, according to this principle, 20 percent of your customers will give you 80 percent of your business, 80% of your problems come from 20% of the people that you know. 80 percent of the clothes you wear come from 20 percent of your wardrobe! With this in mind, what 20% of activity will provide 80% of the value in your life both personally and professionally?

In closing, reflect on the activities that require practice – learning an instrument, language, how to cook. We do not stop practicing or learning when we are finished with school. Practice time management one day at a time. Time management will become second nature and you will be able to add more activities to your life that you enjoy doing. The result is feeling more accomplished with the things that matter to you.

Time management is a completely learnable skill, however, in the words of my son, Samuel, “Nothing begins until you start.” Yes – you can do it all...but not all at once! What are you waiting for?

As the Director of Corporate Partnerships for Newport Harbor Corporation, Communications Professor at the University of Rhode Island, Active Board member serving on 5 boards, national educational and inspirational speaker (gailspeaks.com) and “the best” mother and wife, Gail Lowney Alofsin practices work life balance on a daily basis! Between “eating frogs”, she can be reached at 401-640-4418 or gailalofsin@gmail.com!

