

INEFFECTIVE TIME MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, CAUSES, AND SOLUTIONS*

Attempt Too Much

Causes	Solutions
Unaware of occurrence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze your tendency to take on tasks that others could be doing.
Lack of priorities and planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reassess your priorities and objectives. Set objectives and deadlines. List your objectives and prioritize them according to their long-term importance and short-term urgency. Focus on top priorities and ignore tasks that don't contribute to your objectives.
Unrealistic time estimates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize that tasks may take longer than you think they will. Analyze common tasks for which you frequently underestimate the time they require. Allow for leeway in your schedule to attend to pressing or unexpected issues.
Responding to the urgent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distinguish the urgent from the truly important. Limit your response to tasks that are both urgent and important first.
Over-response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit your response to the real demands of the situation. Stay uninvolved if others can handle it. Delegate if subordinates can handle situation.
Desire to appear cooperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize the difference between being cooperative and doing others' work. Learn to say no without offending. Use your own priorities as a reason to say no and offer alternatives when appropriate.
Desire to achieve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize that, if you unrealistically attempt too much, you may not achieve anything. Determine what you really want to achieve and focus on that.
Desire to impress superiors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss what your superior really wants. Recognize that long-term success is more important to your superiors than short-term impressions.
Understaffed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balance the workload. Demonstrate to superiors that additional help could be cost-effective. Counsel subordinates on time management strategies and advise them to take this lesson.

Crisis Management

Causes	Solutions
Unaware of occurrence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document crises and analyze source, causes, seriousness, and controllable factors of each crisis.
Failure to anticipate problems and develop contingency plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List potential problems. Categorize potential problems by seriousness and probability. Develop steps to prevent potential problems, if possible, or limit consequences if not.

Causes	Solutions
Treating problems as crises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore problems that don't require attention. • Handle only those that you alone can take care of. • Delegate all those that others can handle.
Fire fighting or "everything a crisis" mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that it's more important to prevent new fires from developing than to spend all your time putting out old ones. Preventive action is preferable to remedial.
Procrastination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that putting off key tasks can lead to deadline pressures later.
Unrealistic time estimates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that tasks may take longer than you think they will. • Allow for leeway in your schedule to attend to pressing or unexpected issues.
Failure to establish controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a timeline for all major assignments. • Establish milestones at intervals to confirm targets are being met.

Ineffective Delegation

Causes	Solutions
Lack confidence in subordinate's competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train, develop, and trust subordinates. • Use milestones and progress reports for monitoring.
Giving unclear, incomplete, or confused instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that subordinates may not know all the details of a task. • Give clear and complete instructions. • Ask subordinates to backbrief instructions to ensure they understand the task.
Belief that you can do the job better and faster yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set realistic and reasonable standards. • Avoid perfectionism.
More comfortable "doing" than "leading"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that practice leads to success, which leads to comfort. • Remember the job of the leader is leading, not doing.
Failure to establish appropriate controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish plans, milestones, progress reports, and monitoring of deadlines.
Over-control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relax. • Emphasize goal-accomplishment. • Measure results, not activity.
Failure to follow up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check progress in time to take corrective action.
Work overload on subordinates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance the workload. • Reorder priorities. • Counsel subordinates on time management strategies.

Poor Planning

Causes	Solutions
Failure to see the benefit of planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize that every hour in effective planning saves several hours in execution.
Lack system to plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a system for planning, including daily objectives, priorities, and deadlines.
Lack time to plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take time to plan – recognize that planning takes time initially but pays off with better results in less time. Assign planning the priority it deserves.
Assume crises are unavoidable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize that most crises are relatively predictable. Allow for leeway in your schedule to attend to pressing or unexpected issues. Plan ahead for contingencies.
Lack self-discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set objectives and priorities. Establish milestones and deadlines for your objectives and priorities. Ask others to assist in monitoring your progress. Evaluate the results.
Difficulty assigning priorities to tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish your objectives. Determine where efforts should be concentrated. List your objectives and prioritize them according to their long-term importance and short-term urgency. Focus on the top priorities and ignore the tasks that don't contribute to your objectives.
Assumption that planning is futile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize that crises can be minimized more easily if the day is planned and the most vital tasks completed before or returned to after the crises.
Having plan in mind but not writing it down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize that no memory is infallible and that no to-do list is complete until priorities and deadlines are set.

Procrastination

Causes	Solutions
Unaware of occurrence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze your tendency to put off or delay tasks without justification. Ask others to help you identify instances when you procrastinate.
Thinking “I work best under pressure”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize that this assumption is pure rationalization.
Habit of doing the easy or trivial first, postponing the difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize that pressure and crises may result from engaging in this strategy (e.g., you may not complete the most vital tasks).
Lack self-discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set objectives and priorities. Establish milestones and deadlines for your objectives and priorities. Ask others to assist in monitoring your progress. Evaluate the results.

Causes	Solutions
Fear that the task will be too difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Divide the task into very small and specific tasks.• Block out set times to complete each small and specific task.• Tackle the first small and specific task, focusing only on this task rather than the overall task as a whole.• Note your success and then complete the second very small and specific task.
Fear of boredom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify the value the completed task will have for you personally.

*** This material is adapted from *The Time Trap: The Classic Book on Time Management* by R. Alec Mackenzie**