

Time Management

It was my music teacher who gave me my first lesson in time-management. For my theory class, when asked to learn by rote, the names of the 72 basic Carnatic ragas and the rhythmic structures of the main seven *thalaas*, I procrastinated for months as most 14-year-olds do. My main excuse was that I did not have enough time because of exams and homework. At that age, most of us attended classes and practiced only to keep our mothers out of our hair!

Finally, my *guru* threatened us with a deadline- Learn it in three months or find another teacher. It was then that I realised my excuse was not valid. For three months, I woke up two hours earlier than usual and managed to learn the music.

If we prioritise things, set goals together with a deadline, we can manage our time to get virtually anything accomplished.

As most management experts say, and most parents and teachers say as well, all of us have only 24 hours, no more and no less. God might have shown some inequalities in the distribution of his bounties like good looks, intelligence, special talents like artistic aptitude or a great voice, but He was and is totally impartial when it comes to the resource of time given to each of us.

So, if someone is getting more out of his day and accomplishing more, it is all because of the way he is managing his time.

And yet there are so many of us who do not use this most precious resource properly, either out of ignorance or sheer carelessness.

So what do experts have to advise those who want to manage time effectively? We have distilled their wisdom here for you:

Prioritise and focus: You truly can do it all. So, drawing up a list of priorities and focusing on them is one of the surest means to optimise your output. I remember both Paula Horan, pioneering Reiki teacher and author, and yoga expert Bharat Thakur telling me that unless we focused our minds on the most important tasks, we would in all probability be pulled in several different directions reaching nowhere or, at least, making little headway in any direction. These important tasks, in turn, are identified once we have got our goals clear. So goal clarity is a vital step in time-management.

Activity logs: Another effective way of changing your lifestyle to make it a time-efficient one is an objective assessment of how you currently spend your day. In short, you understand where all the time is going. It is called keeping an activity log. Note it down every time you do a certain activity and how much time you spend on it. Every time you change the activity, even if it is for beginning another job or stopping for coffee or lunch or going for a walk, or chatting on the phone- you have to make an entry. A study of this record, later, will help you identify the areas where you are wasting time or using it on low-value / low-relevance jobs and activities, and also where you are indeed optimising it. Armed with this feedback, you can make the requisite changes in your day.

Scheduling your time: You can allocate your time wisely and make a realistic division of your day for different tasks, avoiding both unimportant commitments and too much of commitment. Also, have some contingency time, just in case everything does not work out as planned since these things do happen. Not everything

works by clockwork precision all the time.

Delegate: Find the right person and entrust him with the work you really need not do yourself. Many successful CEOs say that delegation of the right task and responsibility to the right person is the secret of much of their success in successfully managing huge enterprises. Ask the smart homemaker too who manages a huge house, demanding in-laws, two or three tough kids, and an ever-busy husband and she will tell you she managed by effectively delegating work to the right servants and sometimes to children besides getting the in-laws to chip in too. Great musicians will tell you they manage their celebrity status and hectic concert schedules only because much of the nitty-gritty of their schedules and tours has been handed over for management to a carefully selected manager or family member.

To-Do lists: These lists made for the day or even twice a day as well as on a larger scale like a week or month for long-term goals, work wonders for your time-prioritising and focus. Ask those who use them and you will know it works! Once you begin to do this, it becomes an addictive habit.

Love what you do: When you enjoy doing something, you might have noticed, how you will amazingly find time for it. Have you noticed kids who whimper and drag their feet over homework, having a bath, or eating their food, taking ages to do these things, are all enthusiastic and passionate when they go to play that game of tennis, the chess game, their guitar or violin or do that painting? They have to be literally dragged away or they would spend half the night on it. It is the liking that makes all the difference to their concentration and speed both of which mean they are making the most of their time then.

And every great achiever in sports, music or academics will tell you he reached this level because of how he spent endless hours at his chosen activity because he loved it so much. So find a hobby, a career or a job you love and you will notice you will somehow find time for it. And equally important, your enthusiasm will ensure you work at a pace that extracts the most out of your time.

Be realistic: For all your newly found knowledge of time-management, before applying it, do remember that you are just human, and perfection in anything, including time-management, is hard to attain. Don't over commit and don't get stressed if sometimes things go wrong despite perfect time-plans. After all, the best-laid plans sometimes get foiled. Dr. Keshav Chatterjee, Kolkata-based psychiatrist, says that there is lot of needless stress nowadays because of:

- a) over commitment out of a failure or refusal to understand one's limitations and
- b) inability to take a little delay and frustration

Insomnia too can hamper effective time-management though it may sound like a strange connection. Dr S. Chandrashekar, Professor of Psychiatry, National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, tells us how. He says that sleeplessness results in lowered concentration during the following day, restlessness, irritability and drowsiness. All of which prevent one from performing at your optimum level and at the pace one is capable of. In effect, the person wastes a lot of time.

All the above tips can be useful in an intelligent day-to-day management of time that can help you make the most of everything you do. □

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