Time Management for Freelancers

published by http://www.FreelanceWriting.com

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Introduction

Just about every freelancer has heard of time management. Countless books have been written on the subject and countless motivational speakers emphasize the idea. You can find television shows that occasionally use time management as the main focus of a program, either demonstrating how to do it, why to do it, and what happens if you don't do it.

The problem with this overload of exposure and information is that many freelancers are still left wondering what they are doing wrong. They try all the tricks, tips, and procedures that various experts urge them to incorporate into their daily workloads. Yet, they still can't seem to organize their workloads so that they are masters of their time.

Part of the issue is that freelancers sometimes are not clear on exactly what time management is and what it can do. As with many things, we sometimes attempt to make this concept much more complicated than it actually is. As a result, we become so rigid in how we attempt to manage our time that we defeat our own purpose. So is it any wonder that we decide that the effort is just not worth it, and go back to simple reacting to what is happening around us rather than proactively taking control?

If you've not completely given up on integrating sound time management ideas and strategies into your life and business, keep reading. Rather than attempting to rehash all of the many concepts, theories, and other complicated presentations of this simple principle, instead let's explore the basics of time management. We will come to some conclusions on how to pick and choose the right approaches and

the right settings to make use of them.

Before we get into any theories on how to engage in time management, it's important to define just exactly what we mean by the term. Once established, it will be easier to move on to what to do and when to do it.

Just What Is Time Management?

Forget all the complicated and sometimes confusing definitions you've heard in the past. Time management is very simple. It is the way you choose to spend your time.

Whether you realize it or not, you already do engage the process of time management. You simply can't help it. If you are living and breathing, and make any move to do anything, you are applying a process in time management. In short, you are choosing what to do with your time.

What this means is that you can choose between good time management and bad time management. When you choose to engage in productive or good time management, you are organizing the tasks or actions you want to accomplish into a logical and cohesive progression; this will allow you to complete each and every task within an equitable time frame. At its best, this type of time management does not create stress or drive up your blood pressure. Instead, it makes the day run smoother, and empowers you to strike more action items off your list.

Good time management is a proactive process. You define what you

must do within a given period of time, prioritize those action items, and then develop a plan of action that will make it possible to successfully accomplish each one within the time allotted. With your plan laid out, you then take the initiative to start at the beginning and keep going until you complete everything on your list.

By contrast, bad time management does not make the day pleasant at all. You are much more likely to feel constantly stressed out, as action items appear as if from nowhere. Freelancers are constantly demanding to know why an important task was not completed or why an overdue project is still on the desk.

Bad time management leaves you feeling powerless to do anything to improve the situation. The hopeless feeling continues to grow until you more or less shut down, deciding that those action items weren't that important anyway. You put yourself into a state where you move through the work day, never quite getting a handle on what is going on and only accomplishing something when pressured by outside forces to do so. At the end of the day, you have many action items left to accomplish, leaving you with a general feeling of having failed.

If you are still reading, then there is a good chance that you recognize a bit of yourself in both of these scenarios. Most of us tend to engage in both good and bad time management from time to time. The goal will be to rethink the way we apply time management principles so that we are exercising good time management more of the time and not finding ourselves bogged down due to bad time management.

Why Do I Need to Manage My Time Effectively Anyway?

As busy freelancers, we seem to drift through our work, never worried about anything and never seeming to accomplish anything. At some point, we swoop in and pick up our slack. Or we simply role with the punches, do no more than we have to do to get by, and let everything else take care of itself.

Is that the way you want to work? If so, stop reading and take a nap.

There is only one good reason to take control of your time and manage it to best advantage: you want to get things done and make work better for yourself.

Is that a selfish thing? You bet it is! But just think of all the benefits that come out of this type of selfish behavior. Because you proactively manage your time, you benefit from creating more spare time to spend doing the things you love. If you have family or close friends, that means more time to be around people who make you laugh and who care about you. It can also mean you acquire a reputation for being an efficient freelancer who gets the job done on time -- or even before the deadline. As a result, you have a better chance of making more money and increasing your productivity.

So go ahead and be selfish about the way you manage your time. You benefit, your loved ones benefit, and as a freelancer, you benefit. That means there is not much of a down side for you.

What Happens When We Don't

Manage Our Time Effectively?

When we make a choice, either consciously or by default, to not take hold of our time and use it to our best advantage, life can get pretty rough. You will most certainly miss out on a lot of good things, many of which will never come your way again. Even everyday tasks will become overwhelming and seemingly impossible to handle.

It doesn't matter whether we are talking about work, things around the house, your friends, or conditions at work. If you don't manage your time well, you will lose a lot.

Here are some examples of how failing to manage your time properly can have a negative impact on your workday:

1. You're twenty minutes starting work this morning. That's because you didn't set the alarm clock last night and overslept. If that wasn't bad enough, you have a bunch of e-mails to respond to. And one of your clients has left four messages on your answering machine, asking you to call him back ASAP.

2. There is a good reason why your client wants to see you. Your weekly project is already two days overdue. What your client doesn't know is that you are only half way through the task, since you seem to get sidetracked by something else every time you attempt to finish the project. Things look pretty bleak as far as getting it done today, since you are already behind with today's tasks, thanks to starting late once again.

3. Poor performance and a growing reputation for tardiness is not winning you any new clients or impressing your existing clients.

4. Want to make more money? Forget it. Your existing clients are not about to recommend you to their colleagues because you are habitually late and can't handle your present workload. In fact, one of your clients has threatened to halt work and find another freelancer to complete the task. You will soon be spending extra time and stress looking for new clients to maintain your business.

Before too long, things begin to fall apart, creating a lot of stress and inconvenience that you could have avoided if you had simply managed your time better.

Freelancers sometimes think the process of time management focuses on tasks that are somewhat complicated and have a series of steps that they must complete. While there is no doubt that time management principles apply to detail and labor intensive tasks, they also apply to the everyday mundane tasks as well. This is where many freelancers trip up and get themselves into a lot of trouble.

If you don't get anything else from these examples, take away this one simple fact: Poor time management creates a snowball effect that eventually causes you and others around you a lot of grief. Life is a lot easier when you master the little things and keep the boat on an even keel.

How Do I Get Started With Good Time Management?

As with many roads, the path to effective time management is paved with all sorts of good intentions. Freelancers sometimes have the dream, but lack the drive to take that first step and then keep moving

up the path. Often, the lack of progress is for no reason other than a failure to prepare themselves. Here is what you need to do if you are serious about leaving your slovenly ways behind and becoming the master of your own time.

A. Adjust Your Attitude

This is the step that many freelancers leave out of the equation when they decide to get on the road to good time management. Unfortunately, not all those self-help books and seminars include any ideas on how to begin to change your outlook on life so that you can embrace the basics of managing your time effectively.

One of the easiest ways to initiate this change of heart is to make a list of the benefits you will immediately receive if you start managing your time better. Don't make the mistake of thinking that you have to load the list with all sorts of impressive advantages or big events. After all, it is the day to day tasks that usually give freelancers the most satisfaction anyway.

For example, your list could include benefits like:

- More time to complete projects.
- More time to market your services.
- More time to serve clients.
- More time to find new clients.
- More time to relax during the day.
- More time to clean up the clutter in your office.
- More time to complete administrative work, like bookkeeping, invoicing, and paying bills.

Zero in on what poor time management has taken away from you over

time, and how much fun it will be to have all those things back. If that's not enough incentive to make some changes in the way you look at things, then you are probably dooming yourself to failure once again.

B. Start Small

It's hard to break old habits. That's what poor time management is, nothing more than a bad habit. As with many habits, you have to start with small changes if you want to succeed over the long term.

There are a couple of good reasons to begin with the little things and gradually incorporate more of the bigger things in your new time management scheme:

* You'll gain confidence. Nothing motivates freelancers like a sense of accomplishment. It doesn't matter that it is only one small change. The important thing is you did it. And if you did it today, you can do it tomorrow, and the day after that. Each day you manage to repeat that one small time management process, you will feel more empowered to make another change for the better.

* Your clients will notice. Clients will see you are serious about completing tasks on time and begin to refer you to other prospects. True, your clients' support may be tentative at first, especially if you've tried to become more organized in the past, but you had abandoned the effort after a day or two. But as you become consistently more dedicated to setting the little things in order, your clients will come around and compliment you on your time-saving efforts.

* You'll discover strategies and ideas that might work with some of

the bigger things. As you master the little tasks that come during the day, you will probably begin to notice that you can address some of the larger tasks with the same approaches. This can be a good thing, as it helps you to brainstorm on ways to deal with different situations by using a tool you already have on hand and know how to use effectively.

* You'll become better at prioritizing your action items. It won't take long for you to notice that the day went much smoother when you performed Task B before Task A. Finding just the right order for those small daily tasks will allow you to move through them quicker and with more proficiency. As a result, you will begin to develop little pockets of time that you can devote to other endeavors.

* Your stress level will begin to decrease. The more in control you are of your time and tasks, the less you will feel overwhelmed and unable to cope. This ties directly back into building a sense of empowerment and confidence in your ability to manage your time effectively. One feeds off the other two, giving you a strength and focus you may have never experienced before.

C. Reward Yourself

Think of it this way: if you won a prize, wouldn't you celebrate at least a little? Making forward strides with learning how to manage your time is something worth acknowledging and celebrating. Sure, the fact that you start work on time every day for a whole week might not seem like much to anybody else, but that is not the point. The point is you made a positive step that put you back in charge of a part of your life and you are now managing it properly.

Of course, it is important to make sure your reward does not create

yet another time management disaster that you have to straighten out. Assuming you have some spare time on Friday afternoon, why not reward yourself with something you will enjoy, like a cup of your favorite coffee or picking up a copy of a magazine you really enjoy?

Keep in mind that a reward does not have to be big, splashy, or expensive. As you are learning by taking control of the little tasks in your life, a lot of satisfaction can come from little things. So go right ahead and allow yourself a small reward and enjoy it to the fullest. And if you want to have more rewards, continue to incrementally expand the control you have over your time.

D. Expect The Occasional Setback

Even the most proficient time managers don't always hit the mark. As you begin the process of learning how to do a better job with your time, you will overlook situations or encounter circumstances that temporarily derail your newfound ability to get things done.

At this point many freelancers choose to decide they simply can't change and slip back into their old habits. While you certainly don't want to brush off a setback as being nothing of consequence, you also don't want to allow it to undermine all the progress you've made.

Instead of burying the setback or allowing you to lose confidence, try this third approach. Take a long look at all the circumstances surrounding the setback. Were there extenuating circumstances that you did not notice on the front end? Did something completely unforeseen arise as you were attempting to complete the task?

Knowing what happened and why it happened can be turned into a learning experience. By stepping back and examining the situation as

dispassionately as you can, there is a good chance you can learn a few things from what appears to be a failure in managing your time effectively.

You may learn such valuable lessons as:

* Points to clarify or data to double-check before you attempt the same or similar tasks again.

* Additional tools or resources to assemble before tacking a task of this type.

* A more effective process to deal with the situation.

* Ways to defuse factors that led to the problem in the first place.

Never allow a setback to stop you in your tracks. Acknowledge it, learn from it, and then move on. Remember that you have other things that occupy your time.

Learning to implement solid time management practices and attitudes is an incremental process -- it involves the acquisition of knowledge, the application of what you learn, and the accumulation of personal experience. As you continue to move forward, your supply of all three components will increase, and your ability to manage your time will increase right along with them.

Refining the Process of Time Management

Some freelancers look upon time management the same way they would a crossword puzzle, a short story, or a math problem. Puzzles, stories, and math problems have a defined beginning, a middle, and an end that is clearly identified. While the process of time management certainly does have a beginning, there is no real end to the process. It is ongoing, much like the way that a river continues to flow when there are no dams or other impediments to stop its flow.

Once you have created a solid beginning to your time management mindset and approaches, you will continue to refine them for the rest of your life. That is, you will do so if you do not make the mistake of assuming you have learned all there is to know about the subject.

Just as time continues to flow, the process of time management continues to evolve. Part of the reasons for this is that the world continues to change. As new situations arise or old situations are changed in some manner, methodologies and approaches that worked very well a few years ago may not be so effective today. Hence, the need to create, learn and implement new ways of applying the basic principles of time management.

Not everyone who claims to be an excellent time manager grasps this basic understanding. They continue trying to fit new situations and settings into the same old mold they've used successfully in the past. Often, the result is much like attempting to shove a square peg into a round hole. It simply doesn't fit and slows progress down to a crawl.

In order to keep evolving in your understanding and use of time management, you must prevent yourself from getting too attached to any one way of doing things. You must always have a sense of openness to new ideas, new strategies and new ways to handle different tasks. Without this openness, there is a good chance that

some very productive approaches will slip past, leaving you unprepared to deal with a number of situations.

If you are serious about continually refining your grasp of time management, you must:

* Keep an open mind. New situations are sometimes handled effectively with proven approaches. At other times, they call for you to learn brand new methodologies. If you are flexible enough to consider these alternative solutions, you just might find a new way of saving time; this will help you with other tasks on your list as well as this new one that just cropped up.

* Know your stuff, but remain teachable. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking you know everything. True, you may know a lot. But there is always someone who knows something you don't. If you are serious about expanding the scope of your knowledge, be willing to listen and learn, even if the source appears to be an unlikely one.

* Give new ideas a test drive. It's not enough to consider new ideas or even learn the basics of them. You need to try them out before you decide your old way is better. Take the example of typing a letter. When word processing software became widely available, it was met with a considerable amount of opposition from typists who were able to type a business letter at an impressive speed and with no errors. If they could produce a professional letter using a typewriter, what good was using a desktop computer? Fortunately, people soon found that using the word processing software was much more efficient than the old reliable typewriter; after a brief period of transition, excellent typists quickly came to love the resources that were suddenly at their disposal. What would have

happened if they had rejected the new technology out of hand?

There is always the potential to learn something new that will make it easier to organize your tasks and put your time to better use. Embrace this fact rather than fight it, and you are very likely to find that the process of time management becomes all the easier.

Can Time Management Become An Obsession?

While time management is a very good thing, there are situations where freelancers tend to take the whole idea of using time wisely to the extreme. When this happens, the essential goal of managing your time gets lost in all the busyness and drive to cram too much into too little time. As a result, the process of time management ceases to be a help and becomes a severe hindrance instead.

There are several early warning signs that you are beginning to abuse time management rather than use it to best advantage:

A. You Multitask A Lot – All The Time Actually

In today's world, it is not unusual for freelancers to handle more than one task at a time. This is perfectly all right, as long as the tasks in question can be conducted concurrently without causing a great deal of stress. For example, it is possible to participate on a conference call while also sending instant messages to the moderator of the conference. The two activities actually work together without any real

difficulty.

However, many freelancers attempt to conduct two or more labor-intensive tasks at the same time. This can lead to a great deal of inner conflict and possibly have a negative impact on the quality applied to all the tasks involved. In other words, instead of ending up with one task done well, you have two tasks that you may complete but are barely acceptable.

Some freelancers find themselves unable to stop multitasking even when it is not necessary. The idea behind this approach is that the multitasking will make it easier to finish all the action items currently on the agenda and enjoy some well-earned downtime. Unfortunately, freelancers who have become obsessed with multitasking to manage their time never get around to having any downtime. Instead, they finish one set of projects and immediately start looking for another set to do at once.

Multitasking as part of time management is fine, provided the tool is used with wisdom and discretion. When it becomes an end in and of itself rather than a means to reach a goal, it is time to step back and re-evaluate the situation.

B. You Feel Guilty If You Are Not Doing Something

Guilt can be an effective tool when it comes to keeping us on track. However, guilty feelings when we have nothing to feel guilty about is another matter altogether. When guilt creeps into the time management process, it is usually an indicator that the individual has begun to believe on some level that unless they are not actively engaged in some task, they are not managing their time well.

While it is important to take care of necessary tasks in a timely manner, freelancers also need some time to simply relax and recharge. From this perspective, failing to include time for rest and recreation is actually a breach of good time management policies. By denying your mind and your body of what it needs to be healthy, you are actually defeating the purpose of time management, and setting yourself up to fail at some future point.

C. You Become Hyper-Critical Of Others Who Do Not Do As You Do

One of the ways many freelancers validate their actions is by comparing them with what other freelancers do. After all, if others are employing the same approaches and methodologies to time management that we are, that means we are on the right track. However, when freelancers do things differently from us and we immediately assume they are wrong and we are right, something has gone terribly awry with our sense of time management.

Every freelancer brings different talents and abilities to a given task. This means you may find more than one right approach when tackling the same tasks or projects. Freelancers who have a balanced view of time management realize this and may even welcome the opportunity to learn something new. However, freelancers who assume their way is the only right way will immediately be on the defensive and find fault with as many aspects of the alternative method as possible.

Again, this negative point of view is not in keeping with true time management principles. Not only does this mindset make it impossible to expose yourself to new ways of managing tasks and possibly saving

time, it also can create a great deal of stress and friction for everyone concerned. As a result, everyone's ability to manage time effectively is impaired and no one progresses as quickly as they would if all parties would attempt to learn from one another.

The bottom line is that you can become so obsessed with time management that you actually begin to undo any good you've created and put yourself in a position where you are more likely to fail. When this happens, you may be worse off than when you didn't attempt any type of structured time management at all.

So How Do I Stop Obsessing And Get Back On Track?

Your first step in overcoming obsession is to realize you have a problem. Without admitting that you have lost your sense of perspective, you have no hope of ever recovering it. Understanding what your obsession is doing to yourself and those around you can serve as the motivation to make changes and begin the road back to using time management in a positive way.

To get yourself back on track, take the following actions:

A. Step Back and Attempt To See Yourself Through The Eyes of Others

This can be very hard to do, but it will make a huge difference in how quickly you regain your equilibrium. Look at how you've been applying time management basics for the last week, month, or six months, however long you suspect that a problem has been forming. Pretend

someone other than yourself was taking those same actions or approaches. Do they make sense? Were they productive or counter-productive over time? Did they lead to a sense of fulfillment or only create more issues to deal with? Some of what you see may come as a shock. That's okay, because at this point in time a little shock is a good thing.

B. Get a Grip on the Multitasking

While there are certainly times when doing two or more things simultaneously is in the best interests of using your time wisely, that is not always the case. Identify some instances when you had to redo tasks because you did not do them as well as you could have. Were you attempting to juggle too many tasks at the time, resulting in the inferior outcome? If so, now consider how much time you would have saved by prioritizing those tasks rather than multitasking. You are likely to find that handling one task, then moving on to the second one would have actually used only a little more time than the multitasking, and quite a bit less than having to go back and redo one or both tasks.

C. Stop The Guilt

Remind yourself that you do a good job and that you do get things done properly and on time. That means you deserve the chance to shift gears and read a book, have a walk, or go for a swim. You are not wasting your time when you engage in these kinds of activities, or any other activities that blow the cobwebs out of your head and reinvigorate your body and mind.

You are simply preparing yourself to manage your time effectively

tomorrow as you take care of necessary tasks at the right time and in the right order. There is no reason to feel guilty about lingering over dinner, watching television or having a nap, as long as your tasks are on schedule or even completed for the day. Just remember that when tomorrow comes, you will feel refreshed and ready to take on anything the day should bring.

Just as it is hard to develop productive time management attitudes and practices, it is likely to take some time to divest yourself of any bad habits that have crept in over time. Don't expect to make a complete recovery in a day or two. But just as when you are first learning how to manage your time well, reward yourself when you move closer to a balanced perspective and minimize your obsessive behavior a little more.

Keeping It Real – Setting Realistic Goals With Your Time Management

One of the best ways to not get discouraged with your time managing efforts is to be realistic about how you approach your list of things to do and schedule time to accomplish them. This means understanding how long you need to complete each task, how much concentration you need, and whether or not you can work on another task at the same time without impairing the quality of your efforts.

In some cases, it is relatively easy to combine necessary tasks and save time. For example, you may find that instead of making a trip to the supermarket and then moving on to a drugstore, you simply choose to buy groceries at a supermarket that has a pharmacy department. This effectively allows you to manage two tasks at one

time, and still enjoy the same level of quality with each.

However, not all situations are as simplistic as combining a couple of errands. At some point, you will be faced with tasks that require your full concentration and cannot be balanced with other tasks at the same time. The trick is to know the difference between the two scenarios.

You can identify a task that will require your full and undivided attention by the following:

- The task requires attention to a great deal of detail. Projects of this type are usually best accomplished by themselves. For example, it is not a good idea to make client calls while you are posting payments to customer invoices. Because it is important to apply the right amount to the correct invoice number under the correct client account, you don't need interruptions until you complete the job. Otherwise, your company receipts will be out of line, making it necessary to find time to isolate the origin of the problem and correct it at a later date.

- You are unfamiliar with the task. In general, it is not a good idea to attempt to multitask when learning to handle some new responsibility. In order to master the new task, all your focus should be on that task. This will help to keep the learning curve to a minimum and allow you to begin the process of integrating that new task into your daily agenda. Attempting to learn how to handle the task in a piecemeal fashion will only drag things out and put you further behind.

- The timing for the task is urgent. For example, your client needs a report in time for his or her meeting right after lunch. Instead of working the report into your other and less important tasks,

reorganize your schedule and make the report your priority. As soon as you complete the report and e-mail it to your client, you can get back to your other action items and continue on with your day.

Sometimes, the issue is not so much figuring out how to arrange your tasks to your best advantage, but rather setting reasonable time aside to accomplish each one. To an extent, this can be forgiven when you are first taking on a new task. After all, you've never done it before and must rely on second-hand information to estimate the time you will need to do a good job. But failing to set reasonable time limits for tasks you have done for some time can make a good day into a bad day in no time at all.

There are two different ways that freelancers tend to get in trouble with assigning time values to specific tasks:

* You don't allow enough time to complete the task properly. When this happens, one of two things is about to happen. First, the entire day may be thrown out of kilter because other tasks back up and create a bottleneck that you cannot address until you finish your current task. The other alternative is that you become frustrated and lose even more valuable time attempting to focus and get on with the task. Either way, your time management process will suffer.

* You allow too much time to complete the task. There is no real value in allowing yourself a half hour to do a task that you know you can complete in five minutes. While it is important to always build in some spare pockets of time into your schedule throughout the day, keep it within reason. You will still be able to deal with unexpected events that crop up at the last minute by setting aside

ten to fifteen minutes for that five-minute task. At the same time, you will use each hour to your advantage and get more done.

There is also the danger of trying to cram too many action items into a given time frame. Even the most efficient time managers realize there are only so many hours in each day. Cutting corners to save time on various tasks may appear like efficient time management on the surface, but this approach can easily backfire. Tasks that are only half-done in order to move them out the door more quickly are much more likely to come right back. As a result, the time savings you created before is quickly gobbled up as you have to sit down and redo the task, this time without taking the short cuts.

While setting reasonable goals seems to come naturally to some freelancers, others struggle with this part of effective time management. Here are a few suggestions that may make it easier to evaluate each task and carve out an appreciable amount of time to devote to each item on your agenda.

A. <u>Begin with a defined start and end time for your workday</u>. What this does is immediately allow you to determine how many hours you can reasonably devote to getting things done today. When you have a job, this step is pretty much defined for you, since there is usually a specific time to start work and a specific time to end. However, even if the process takes place in a household, setting a start and end time will make it much easier to schedule your time realistically.

B. <u>Take a look at each task and attempt to prioritize them to your best advantage</u>. Any tasks that you must finish by a specific time of day should take priority during the scheduling. For example, if you have three tasks that you must complete before lunch every day of the

week, schedule them as early in the morning as possible. This will automatically provide you with some extra time later in the morning if there is an unanticipated snag with any of the three tasks. The chances of still making your lunchtime deadline will be much better.

C. <u>Assign a time allotment for each task, based on all data you have at your disposal</u>. For tasks that you've done before, you will have a personal knowledge of how long it takes to manage them effectively. However, for new tasks, you may have to depend on input from others to set up a realistic goal for completion. If the task is new, then you may have to set aside the amount of time you used in the past for a different but somewhat similar task. Demonstrate some flexibility with your time allotments, since different factors can influence how long it takes to manage different tasks, even ones you've done for years.

D. <u>Ask for input, but don't rely solely on what others have to say</u>. Since we've already established that proper time management involves being open to new methods and strategies, there is always the chance that a suggestion or idea from a client will help you manage a task in a more efficient and timely manner. However, not every suggestion will be constructive, so don't automatically assume it will work. By all means, take it, look it over, and maybe even give it a try. But if it doesn't seem to have the potential to streamline the process and allow you to manage your time more efficiently, don't be backward about rejecting the suggestion and explaining why it is not practical. For all you know, doing so will prevent someone else from getting bogged down because they implemented a process that is really not all that efficient.

E. <u>Never stop evaluating the schedule you create. Situations and conditions change over time</u>. What worked very well five years ago

may not be the best option today. But unless you are willing to look into new options, this may slip right past you. In fact, others may fail to notice as well, especially if your usual schedule is still somewhat effective and does not disrupt your workflow. But without this constant process of re-evaluation, you stand to miss out on some great tools that would help you manage your time.

While many of your time management goals are focused on the successful and timely completion of action items, a realistic approach to setting goals involves a little more than just getting things done. Don't forget to include these elements in your goal setting as well:

- Time to play as well as time to work. Without some rest and recreation, it is all too easy to begin viewing your daily activities as a repetitive grind that leaves you feeling dehumanized. While you want to get things done efficiently and on time, make sure you don't do so at the expense of taking your lunch hour or getting away from work on time. Life is a lot more than simply having a finished agenda at the end of the day.

- Face the fact that some days will be filled with unexpected factors that you couldn't possibly have foreseen. No matter how well you refine your time management, you will experience times when you have to revise it at the last moment. Accept this as the way things go sometimes and do not see it as a failure on your part to effectively manage your time. Instead, see it as an opportunity to accept a challenge and come out on top at the end of the day.

Conclusion

Effective time management is a lot more than simply walking through

some prescribed steps to achieve some arbitrary end. More often, it is a chance to demonstrate creativity, wisdom, insight, and the ability to think on one's feet. In short, it is about making the most of what you have every day, and enjoying every minute of it.

There is no one right way to master time management, or even a single correct approach to implementing the concept of managing time into your life. Each situation is different. Fortunately, you can apply the basic ideas behind time management to any situation, whether you are a freelancer pursuing your first client, an experienced freelancer with tons of work on your desk, or a freelancer who works at a business to do contract work. Time management is for everyone, not just for a chosen few.

Freelancers who are truly great time managers know that you never stop learning how to do things a little better, a little more efficiently, and with a little more speed. But at the same time, they know that getting the job done right is the main priority of proper time management. No amount of time saved is worth the cost of giving anything less than your best effort to any task. Freelancers also know that few things in life are as sweet as the realization that at the end of the day, everything has been addressed and tomorrow will start off without having to worry about action items left undone.

Even if you don't consider yourself as the best time manager in the world, take heart in the fact that just like the best of the lot, you can learn to improve and refine your time management skills. The process is never complete, but it is constantly moving forward every day. Take advantage of the opportunities to learn a little more and find creative ways to apply different time management ideas to your day. You may find that doing so will make you a much happier individual as you look back on a day well spent.