



Connected Digest

Business challenges faced by IT executives

Get the biggest bang for your 24 hours

by Meryl K. Evans, Editor, Connected Digest

Help! I Need More Time!

Since it's impossible to add another hour to the 24-hour day, I need an alternative. How can I find time to do all the things I need to complete at work? No doubt, many managers/supervisors deal with this challenge. How have you overcome the "I can't get everything done" syndrome?

— Ed, Manager

Twenty-four hours provides plenty of time to get work done and get in a good night's sleep. Not a believer? Wait 'til you hear the great advice from our experts. In fact, we'll let the experts do all the talking in this column. They provide many choices, and at least a couple may make a big difference in your life.

Kevin W. McCarthy, CEO of On-Purpose Partners, LLC, explains how many of us get into this situation. "Time management issues are a smoke screen or symptom of a larger underlying problem. The professional in your scenario has not yet figured out what he or she values the most. Therefore, every task, to do, project or assignment screams for attention. They will never 'find the time' to complete it all. They've lost the battle before the first shot was ever fired for lack of a clarification of purpose and values."

Ready to regain a few hours? Take your pick from the list:

- Stay on track for the day.
- Focus on tasks connected to customer choices.
- Resist distractions.
- Take control of time-consuming administrative tasks.
- Use social networks to generate leads.

Before digging in, "Stop making the first thought of your day negative," says Tom Marquardt, The Profit Repairman.

Stay on track for the day

Monica Ricci, CPO of Catalyst Organizing, says, "Unclear priorities make it easy to confuse urgent with important and valuable. If you're not sure what is most important to your work, or what projects you need to focus on, you're more likely to let yourself get distracted with email, phone calls and other things, while neglecting your highest-priority items."

McCarthy adds, "So what's most important — or my term for it — is, 'What's on-purpose?' Set criteria in advance for sorting the work. For example, Federal Express's early

brand promise and slogan (1978 - 1983) was 'Absolutely positively overnight.' Employees were legendary for fulfilling the promise because they could make a decision

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based on a core value, promise and directive. Get clear about what is strategically important, and many 'off-purpose' items fall by the wayside."

McCarthy uses a fun tennis tournament tool to determine his top priority. The team lists competing projects on a sheet. The more-important projects that win their pairing advance to the next level until a project becomes a grand-slam winner.

Do you drown in lists? Shannon Evans (no relation to Meryl), publisher and author with PASS Publishing, used to be disappointed at the end of the day if she didn't check off her entire list.

"So I stopped making these tremendously long lists. Now I write three achievable things on a Post-it* note. When all three are done, I mark them off and throw them away. I then make a new list with only three items. If one of the three items does not get finished that day, I move heaven and earth to complete it first the next day. Do I ever accomplish more than what is on the list in a day? Of course I do. We all accomplish many tasks not listed on a piece of paper somewhere. But in order to feel that I have sanity and control of my day, I only think in threes."

Marquardt also reminds us to focus. "Stop focusing on tomorrow; today is everything. If you focus on today, today will be tomorrow, and tomorrow will be your everything. You are your own change element."

Focus on tasks connected to customer choices

David A. Fields, director of Ascendant Consortium, gives this advice: "Many people say the way you get more time is by prioritizing, but that begs a question: How do I differentiate among the zillion tasks on my list which are all highest priority? The answer is in a single metric called net preference. Net preference connects every one of your tasks to the drivers of your customers' choices — because at the end of the day, what you are trying to do is persuade more customers to choose you (or your company). The amazing part: Many high-priority tasks actually have very little effect on net preference, in which case you can eliminate them. Voila! Extra time."

Resist distractions

These include email and alarms. Ricci recommends this: "Resist the email siren song. Too often, business people come to work and check email first thing. It's tempting and — dare I say — addictive to want to see what new and exciting thing lurks in the email inbox. But if you can resist opening your email for 30 to 60 minutes, you'll give yourself the gift of quiet, focused, uninterrupted time to work on your *most important*

tasks of the day.

"Also, silence the alarm. Since email is the most distracting thing most workers face every day, it's helpful to be purposeful about checking and responding to it. If you can, check email once in the morning, once after lunch and once at 3 p.m. If your business doesn't reasonably lend itself to that schedule, don't give up. Try only checking email at the top and bottom of each hour and give yourself a 10-minute limit to respond each time. If you do this all day long, you'll have 40 minutes of uninterrupted time each hour to work on your goals for the day."

Take control of time-consuming administrative management tasks

Fields recommends this: "Process improvement has been in vogue ever since W. Edwards Deming proved processes are the driver of success. Yet one area inside your company that has escaped process improvement could give you five to 10 extra hours every week: administration. My studies show that administrative requirements can eat up 40 to 60 percent of most workers' time. Since administrative work is low-grade, pedestrian or just plain unimportant, very few companies have brought in an administrative process expert."

Hazel Grace Dircksen, founder of Socialbees, adds this: "I use a virtual assistant to help with my reading and research needs. In my industry, it's essential to read a huge number of blogs and articles every day to ensure we are always on the cutting edge, and there's no way I could do it while running my company. Virtual assistant equals time saved!"

Use social networks to generate leads

Dircksen provides another valuable tip: "I use Facebook* to save time on targeted lead generation. This means I can target a specific role at any company that has a network on Facebook. For example, if I wanted to market a product to engineers who work at Facebook, I would be able to run an ad that only they will see so I am not wasting ad dollars on the wrong audience. This highly targeted system saves me both time and money. I have been bringing in about six leads per day on Facebook in a fraction of the time it would take me if I were spending my time going to networking events, trade shows and cocktail hours." If nothing else, follow the advice of Rich DiGirolamo, author of [*The Only Self Help Book You'll Ever Need*](#): "Done is better than perfect."