



Top Time Management Tips for Accountants #2

Each month, I will provide some practical time management tips that practices we work with use from day to day. The idea is to challenge your current approach. Just try it, even if you are not sure it will work for you. By doing things differently, you will quickly discover what is effective and what is eating into your day. Last month, I covered

#1 Tackle small tasks on the spot if they can be done quickly.

#2 Use the 4-D approach - drop it, Do it, delegate it or defer it.

This month, we'll look at :

#3 Using Emails more effectively

Emails are one of the most effective tools we can use to receive and send information. They cannot be ignored, but most employees can handle them more effectively. It's important to recognise emails represent a constantly changing task list for us all. The more that we can organise emails, the more effectively we can manage the tasks resulting from them. I've seen many ways people manage their email. They usually work just fine – as long as nothing is lost, the list does not continue to increase and it is easy to see the emails where action is required. You may already have a document management system in place for your emails, but if you don't there are some basic procedures you can use.

- Set up folders and use rules to direct emails.
- Use the delete key for everything you don't really need.
- Move emails from general inbox to pre-assigned folders.
- Complete the ones that will take < 2 minutes to do
- Organise emails that require action and follow-up. Use flags to show those that are most important or urgent.
- Keep your in-box clean.
- Use the software effectively. Do you know all shortcut keys and functions?

A recent report suggested that it takes about 1 minute to recover your train of thought after interruption by email. The important thing is that you are sensible and realistic. If you have a job that needs your specific attention, then you should switch off other distractions whilst you focus on the job. It's all about prioritization ... and common sense.



#4 Take a break, regularly

There's no doubt that anxiety and stress contributes significantly to decreased work performance. Task overload usually leads to excessive hours at work. Stressed workers are likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, less productive and less safe at work.

It's important to take time out – both physically and mentally - on a regular basis to allow you to recover. By taking 5 minutes each hour to focus on non-urgent or non-important tasks, you may find that you are actually more productive over the whole day. Also if you always feel overloaded, consider taking an hour each week to review your job or task list. Go back to basics. Identify at a simple level the things you need to do next to move forward with the tasks at hand. Adopt the 4-D approach – Drop, delegate, do it now or defer! (refer to #2 in last month's hints)

#5 Use a weekly planner

Many of our firms use a weekly task manager with their accounting team. In planning your week, you should consider

Objectives--What results do you want to see by the end of the week? Write them down and rank them.

Activities--What do you have to do to achieve your goals? List the necessary activities, and put them in sequence.

Time--How much time will each activity require? To plan realistically, allow yourself more time than you think you'll need.

Schedule--Look at your calendar and decide when you can do each activity. Most people underestimate the power of a schedule.

Don't be afraid of planning and organisation. In my experience with highly performing firms, principals and partners of these firms know what they are doing when, every part of their day and week is productive. Even the non-chargeable time that is devoted to planning, professional development or just taking time out. They are usually VERY organised.

These hints come from *Take Control of Your Time – A 10-part Time Management Program* specifically developed for Accounting Firms.

Visit www.bizaptitude.com.au or contact Dorothy Crosby on 02-9904 8400 for more information on how you can help your team develop their time management skills.