Time Management: "7 Quick Wins" Checklist

MindTools®

Introduction

Do ever you feel that there isn't enough time in the day to get everything done? We all get the same 24 hours, but do you wonder why some people achieve so much more than others?

The answer lies in good time management, and it takes more than just keeping an up-to-date To-Do List!

Remember, being busy isn't the same as being effective. The trick is to get more done in less time, without sacrificing quality.

This checklist can help you to learn how to do that. It provides a quick and useful process for using your time more efficiently. Key activities include:

- Eliminating unimportant work.
- Managing your email.
- Minimizing distraction.

However, we do also recommend that you invest a little time exploring our comprehensive range of **free** time management articles, which you can find here.

Enjoy using this checklist!

1. Setting up Your Workspace

Having a healthy and comfortable workstation will help you focus, and boost your productivity.

A good starting point is to make sure that your desk and chair are comfortable. Your workstation should also be well lit, and heated or cooled appropriately, and things you use often should be within easy reach. Remember, if you're going to spend many hours a day at a desk, it should be somewhere you enjoy being!

Action:

Using the worksheet on page 6, check that your workspace is well laid out and comfortable to use.

2. Eliminating Unimportant Work

Not all tasks are created equal. Some are worthwhile, but others are unimportant and, in the long run, add little value to you or your organization.

You can make the very most of your time and opportunities if you choose your activities wisely, and an Action Priority Matrix can help you sort through them and decide which ones are worth your effort.

If you have tasks that aren't a priority but still need doing, consider whether it may be appropriate to delegate them to a team member.

Action:

Using the template on page 6, list your tasks, and give each one a rating out of 10 for its impact and for the effort needed to complete it.

Then, using the template on page 7, plot your results on the Action Priority Matrix. You should focus on tasks that are "quick wins," and avoid those that are "time wasters" or "thankless tasks."

3. Prioritization

Prioritization will help you make the best use of your own efforts and those of your team, especially when your time is limited but demands on it are anything but!

At a simple level, you can prioritize based on time constraints, on the potential profitability or benefit of the task you're facing, or on the pressure you're under to complete a job. For a more in-depth approach, you can use a tool like Paired Comparison Analysis to work out the importance of your activities, relative to one another.

Action:

Write a list of the tasks or activities that you need to prioritize. Then, use this step-by-step guide to carry out a Paired Comparison Analysis, or see our article on Prioritization to find out how to set priorities in a more sophisticated way.

4. Managing Your Inbox

For many of us, dealing with emails takes enormous bites out of our available time, so let's look at how to deal with a bulging inbox.

First, you should schedule a few blocks of time a day for checking your emails, and stick to them! You risk wasting time and being less productive if you check your emails too often.

Once you've decided **when** to deal with email, you need to look at **how**. The "4D" system is extremely effective for doing this. You have four options for each email you receive:

1. **Do it:** for simple requests and responses, just do it!
2. **Delete it:** if it's not actionable, and you don't need to keep it, delete it.
3. **Delegate it:** if it's something you don't need to deal with personally, try to delegate it.
4. **Decide on its priority:** the emails that are left are the ones you need to act on - after you've prioritized them.

Action:

On the worksheet on page 7, list the last five emails that you received, and note your action for each (Do, Delete, Delegate, Decide). Assign a priority order for the items that are either "delegate" or "decide."

5. Overcoming Procrastination

We're probably all guilty of putting off difficult or unpleasant tasks at some time or another. Procrastination is a bad habit that feeds on itself – if you do it once and get away with it, it becomes easier to put something else off.

But when you focus your attention on **doing** rather than **avoiding**, you'll be amazed at what you can accomplish. To beat procrastination, you need to recognize that you do it, then work out why you do it, and, finally, adopt strategies to overcome it.

Action:

Think of five things on your To-Do List that have been there for more than a week. For each item, record the task, the deadline, and how long it's been on the list. Then ask yourself, "What are the real and potential consequences of not getting the job done?" For example, your boss might reprimand you, you might get a bad reputation, or your stress level might rise. (You can use the Overcoming Procrastination worksheet on page 8 to do this.)

6. Minimizing Distractions

Wherever you work, chances are you are distracted every day, or maybe even hourly! Emails, phone calls, instant messages, chatty colleagues, social media, and background noise can all interrupt your "flow" and cost you valuable time.

Learning how to minimize these distractions can dramatically increase your productivity. For example, while you need to remain approachable and available to your team members, set boundaries so they know when you do not want to be disturbed. You can close your office door, or wear headphones in a shared office.

Tip:

See our article, Minimizing Distractions, for advice on how to manage many common distractions and interruptions.

7. Bringing It All Together

We'd all love to have an extra couple of hours in every day to complete our tasks. Instead, we need to work smarter by zeroing in on things that have the highest priority, and then create a schedule that reflects our work and personal priorities.

With this in place, we can work in a focused and effective way, and really start achieving those goals, dreams and ambitions that we care so much about.

Action:

1. Get organized! Watch our video to find out how to take control of your day and start working to your true potential.
2. Identify and avoid common time management mistakes. We've looked at some strategies you can consider, but there are also traps you should avoid.
3. Then, continue improving your time management skills with our time-management quiz.

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"Time Management: 7 Quick Wins" Worksheet

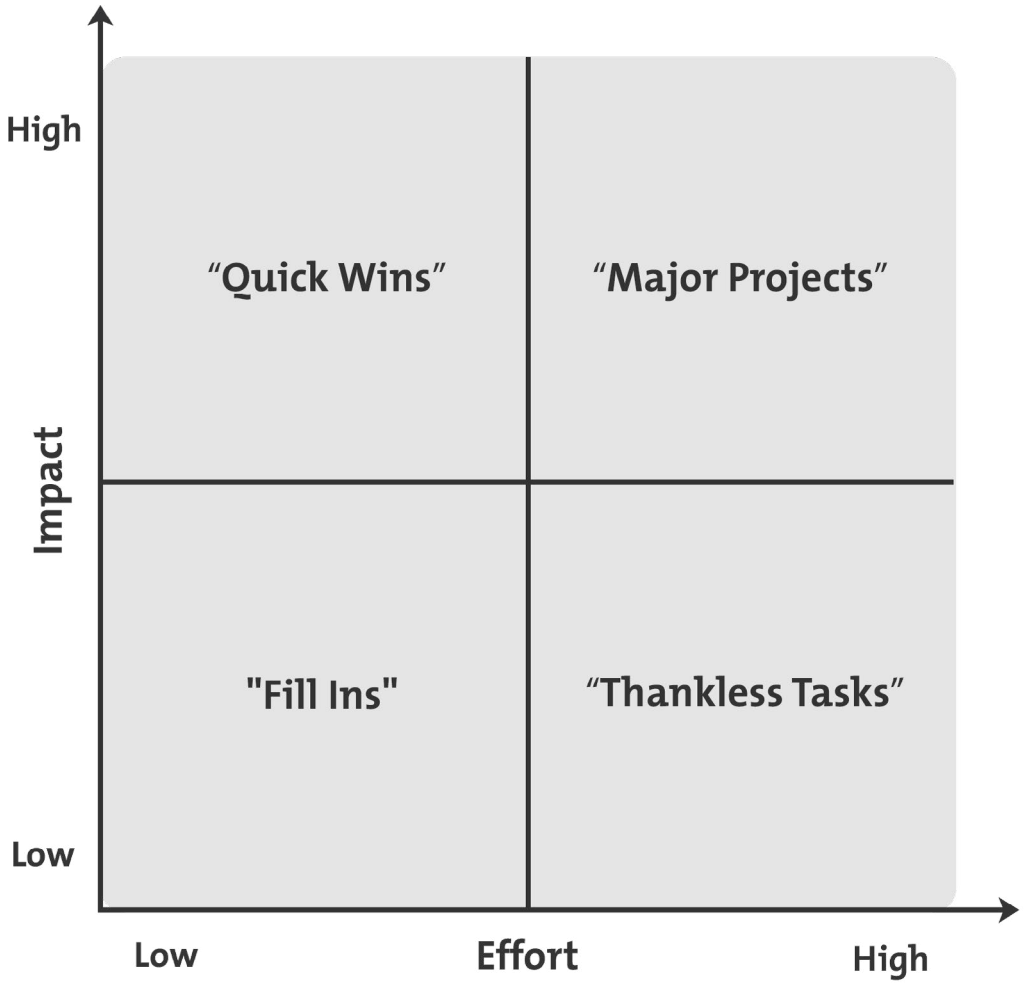
Setting up Your Workspace (source: U.K. National Health Service, and MindTools.com)

Workspace	Correct Position	Yes/No
Monitor and Screens	• Screens should be at eye level. • Screens should be positioned away from glare and reflections.	
Chairs	• Chairs should support your lower back. • Your feet should be on the floor. • Your knees should be slightly lower than your hips.	
Keyboards and Mouse	• Your wrists should be comfortable and straight when you use a keyboard or mouse. • Position your keyboard and mouse so that you don't over reach.	
Desk	• Clear unnecessary, distracting clutter. • File away things that you use rarely, so they don't get in the way. • Move things that you use often – like printers or pen pots – so that they're within easy reach.	

Eliminating Unimportant Work With the Action Priority Matrix

Activity	Impact (0-10) 0 = no impact 10 = maximum impact	Effort (0-10) 0 = no effort 10 = maximum effort

Action Priority Matrix



Managing Your Inbox

Email	Action (Do, Delete, Delegate, Decide)	Priority

Overcoming Procrastination

Task	Deadline	How Long on List?	Consequence of Not Finishing
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			