# How Do You Manage Time in a World of 24/7?

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## Key Points:

- Plan, Organize, Execute — clearly defined, simple steps but often difficult to do

- Attempts at planning & organizing are often undermined by distractions

- Delivering results requires good planning, organization and time-management

- Planning/Organizational tools are abundant but vary among people

- Technology designed to simplify has increased distractions at work & intrusions into personal time

- Stress & distractions can derail execution

- Being "very busy" does not necessarily equate to being "very productive"

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Plan. Organize. Execute.  Three simple words, but so difficult to do.  Working in today's business environment, success is largely determined by these three things.  Planning and organizing one's time in a world fraught with distractions is a daunting task.  Even if one is able to master time management over the course of a busy day, the ability to execute or deliver results is probably even harder.  But clearly, execution is predicated on good planning and organization.

People's preferences for planning tools vary.  For example, there are those who still hold true to the traditional "To Do" list, typically written on a yellow pad or kept inside of their Franklin Planners or their Day Timers.  These lists are written either on a daily or a weekly basis, with the latter documents being revised as needed.  These revised weekly documents are referred to as rolling "To Do" lists.  For those who maintain a paper-based planning list, we think that the psychological satisfaction of crossing items off the list is what prevents them from using the automated task list function on such software planning tools as Outlook.  In short, it's probably more satisfying to put a line through an item than making a click to produce an electronic check mark.  Incidentally, we find as many IT people relying on hand-written "To Do" lists as those in less technically oriented fields.

Speaking of specific disciplines, it has been our hunch that certain occupational fields impose a certain amount of structure on their participants, while others require job holders to plan and organize their time lest they become subject to each and every interruption and distraction.  For example, in finance and accounting, much of the work is dictated by external forces requiring monthly closings and quarterly filings.  Being organized to meet those deadlines is, of course, critical.  On the other hand, for the field sales representatives given only a monthly quota, it becomes imperative that these individuals must organize their activities themselves in order to manage their accounts throughout their assigned territory.

A lot has changed over the past 20 years, but perhaps, no development has been more ubiquitous than the advent of the Internet along with all of the other electronic gadgetry designed to "simplify" our lives and make them "easier."  When coupled with a global economy, such innovations bring a level of intrusiveness into people's lives that has never been possible before.  There is no place this is more evident than on public transportation.  Commuting on a train used to provide quiet time for resting or reading.  Now, it is a barrage of noises comparable to the busiest call centers, all the courtesy of electronic gadgetry.   Pagers buzz to warn the commuter about the next emergency.  Cell phones ring a variety of tunes from the 60's, 70's, and 80's.  Arguments ensue with significant others, conversations continue with coworkers, and laptops hum because an 8 hour work day is apparently not long

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enough.  The development of electronics has created a society that is always accessible, 24/7.

The high level of competing demands we experience both before and after work for our time and attention does not stop when we enter the office.  For example, we interview job candidates who claim that they are on the receiving end of as many as 100 to 200 e-mails a day – some even get more.  Of the 100 to 200 e-mails people are transmitted each day, we typically like to ask how many of them require follow-up action or some type of a response as opposed to being simply F.Y.I. from the sender or the infamous SPAM touting the next "quick get rich" scheme, or promoting the next unbelievable body enhancing product. Interestingly, responses vary from 10 to 15 percent to as many as 60 to 70 percent with the majority of answers zeroing in on about half or 50 percent that demand immediate action.  Once again, we would like to ask our readers for some help here by telling us (via e-mail, of course) how many electronic messages they receive on average, as well as what percentage of those e-mails require some kind of a follow-up response.  Do you find yourself answering e-mails at home in the evening or even before arriving at the office in the morning?  As a result, be honest, how many hours each day – both on and off the job – do you spend handling e-mails?  Finally, what about the amount of time you spend after hours participating in conference calls across far-reaching time zones?

In terms of other "helpful" technology for planning and staying organized, what are your thoughts?  While most people could not live without their laptop or cell phone, do you think the BlackBerry device is, overall, a help or a hindrance?  When does using one of these devices cross the line and become an intrusion?  We suspect that in the hands of an addictive personality type with the compulsive need to check for e-mails as frequently as possible, the BlackBerry or any PDA tool is no longer a valuable help, but instead an interference.  Receiving emails in real-time, anywhere, has made the BlackBerry devices infamously addictive.  (They don't call them "Crackberry's for nothing).  The use of this term became so widespread, that the Webster's New World College Dictionary named "Crackberry" the "New Word of the Year" in 2006. A lingo all of its own has been perpetuated with the popularity of these devices.  "Berry thumb" or "berry blister" is the soreness that occurs from prolonged handling of the cramped keyboard.  There is even a 13 step program for recovering addicts on www.crackberry.com to help break the "crack" habit.  Many BlackBerry users truly believe that the device makes them more efficient; however, some researches (and probably spouses too), believe the device offers new creative ways for the owner to distract himself while annoying others in the process.  Do you agree?

Very much related to managing one's time and resources is the notion of dealing with the normal stress and frustration that is associated with every job, regardless of the occupational field.  Some stresses are inherently created by the nature of the work itself (air traffic controllers, surgeons, police officers, firefighters), while others can be created just as easily by the coworkers we work with.  Certain individuals are drawn towards jobs that keep them active and busy.  Exhibiting a high degree of social energy, these extroverts, as psychologists call them, abhor boredom and routine.  On the other hand, more introverted or withdrawn types need their alone time. Personality differences among coworkers can create a multitude of unproductive work, disable the decision-making process, and decrease the overall enjoyment of work. Extroverted versus Introverted, there are differences in the way each approach their job functions and

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**Upcoming Topics:**

- Do People Deny Who They Are and Tell You Who They Are Not?
- Staying Connected: Maximizing Efficiency or Distraction?
- What Are the Code Words of Interviewing?
- Who Is Your Least Preferred Coworker?
- Body Language: A Valuable Tool or Pop Psychology?
- Why Do People Really Get Hired?
- Do Job Coaches Make a Difference?
- Can Behavior Really Change?

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interactions with others. These polar opposites can add to the levels of stress and distractions. Extroverts will prefer to communicate face to face or by phone, while Introverts will probably prefer to communicate in writing or via e-mail. Employees that are able to recognize the differences among these styles and make some accommodations for them, will make it easier for everyone to "play more nicely in the sandbox."

Finally, there are the omnipresent organizational meetings. We suspect that the larger the organization, the more time is devoted to group meetings. How much time do you spend in such meetings? What about the one-on-one, face-to-face meetings or the conference calls? Are they a benefit or a bane? We would ask our readers for their thoughts about whether or not they are in control of their time and the rationale for the assessment of the situation. Are you in a job where planning is really an academic exercise as opposed to a beneficial way of managing your time?

All of these sources of stress and distraction get in the way of execution, because as we implied above, in the end it is executing for results that ultimately matters in any organizational setting. The more difficult it is to maintain focus and concentration, the harder it is to exercise the self-discipline required to accomplish goals and objectives. How many people report that their days are filled with endless, hectic meetings and activities, but when they turn out the lights to leave in the evening, they feel as though nothing got accomplished? We have to believe with the onslaught of e-mails, texting, instant messaging, voice mails, and constant meetings, it is very difficult to feel, much less be, productive. On the other hand, keeping constantly busy can also serve as an excuse for not executing or delivering results. For some people the idea of having to concentrate for long, sustained periods of time is too difficult to fathom. Moreover, if one is constantly on the go – regardless of the results achieved – are they not being "productive" in some way or another?

As stated throughout this newsletter in discussing the topic of managing your time effectively in a 24/7 global economy, we would like to hear from you. As our readers, how are you managing under the circumstances that surround your job? For example, are you one of the people who actually finds the pressure and stress from your work to be stimulating and even a source of satisfaction and motivation? Or, do you feel overwhelmed? Moreover, are you one of the many employees or managers now forced to do more with less in terms of staff and resources? If so, what has this done to your productivity along with your ability to execute? In closing, let us hear from you via our Web site at www.laserassociates.net. We will publish our findings based upon your responses in future newsletter offerings.