Make Time for Success

MindTools™

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1. Introduction

No matter how much you do, you never seem to do enough.

This quip landed in Emma's mailbox last year, and it's still sitting there. "It's a silly little one liner," she laughs, "but somehow it captures the essence of my life."

As an advertising professional, a night school MBA student, and a fitness enthusiast, Emma is constantly juggling responsibilities. She doesn't mind the hectic lifestyle; in fact, she enjoys the challenge. Her problem is that even though she's putting in 100 percent to keep all these balls in the air, no one, including herself, seems particularly satisfied with the effort she's making.

Her boss keeps hinting that she should be taking on more assignments. Her professor feels that she is capable of getting better grades. Friends grouch that she is never around. Her gym instructor grumbles that she doesn't concentrate enough on her workout. And her husband would like to spend more time with her.

Emma acknowledges that the complaints are valid. Yet she's unable to address the issues. "I feel so frustrated. I'm working longer and harder every day, but I never manage to achieve the results I want. Fitness, friends, family, work, and school; everything is important to me. How can I give up one to focus on the other? Does it have to be an either-or situation? I'm working more than ever, so why am I still not managing to fit everything into my week?"

Does this story strike a chord with you? If it does, then welcome to the "World of Time Pressure." Here, you're just one of the millions of people who are working longer and longer hours, yet not getting results that are in keeping with the effort that they're making. And gradually, as responsibilities mount, you start getting sucked into a classic "time-stress trap."

So, is there a way to boost your productivity? How can manage to make time for all the things that you want – and need – to do? And what can you do to beat the time-stress trap?

Read on…

1.1. Where Does the Time Fly?

People experience time pressure when they feel an imbalance between the demands placed on them, and the time that they have available to deal with these demands.

While each day still stands at 24 hours, we're expected to accomplish more than ever before. Organizations demand more productivity. Our children demand more attention. Partners demand more support. (They too, like you, are time pressured.)

Even leisure-time demands more decisions. (You have to choose between lots of options.)

These spiraling demands are a reflection of the increasingly complex roles that society is thrusting upon us today. Until about 30 or 40 years ago, we lived in a comparatively insulated environment. Our roles were defined within the geographical, social, and national boundaries that our societies existed in.

But today, the twin forces of liberalization and connectivity are sweeping away all of the old barriers. Boundary lines are blurred. Consequently, the work week is evolving into a more fluid, more complex portfolio of activity. And, this places higher demands on our skills and on our time.

We're also rapidly continuing our transition from a goods-and-materials-based economy to an economy built on information and ideas. However, so much can be copied or reproduced that goods and materials, as well as information and ideas, have become less valuable. Everything has to be executed faster, better, and cheaper. Naturally, human time, attention, and relationships become the rare and valued possessions in such a scenario.

In the workplace, the complexity, uncertainty, and rapid changes that come with working across countries, cultures, and businesses present exciting new opportunities for people. Along with these new opportunities come new demands.

Take, for instance, the case of Neil Beckett, a graphic designer. Neil works remotely, and has several contracts with clients in different time zones around the world. He explains: "Because my business has expanded, I now work with global companies, and I've had to extend my working hours to make sure that I'm available for virtual meetings and calls. Since a client is working in some part of the world or the other at any point in time, I cannot relax."

Then there's Monica Fernandez, who works as an executive with a company that provides ground assistance to international airlines. Her workload has tripled because her company was forced to downsize. Although Monica wasn't fired, she had to take on the function of two other colleagues who were asked to leave.

On the personal front, the role of the hybrid parent that many of us are expected to acquire, is both time consuming and draining. Dad has to bathe Beth, read her a story, and tuck her into bed in 15 minutes flat, because he has a conference call with his suppliers, who are in a different time zone. Mom has to get back from work and then cook dinner because Dad is attending night school. We all confront these scenarios in our daily life.

So, how can we fulfill all the demands that are placed upon us, effectively?

1.2. The Toll of Time Pressure

Obviously, none of us can operate flat out 24/7 at peak performance for 30 to 40 years. Yet, that is precisely what we're pushing ourselves to do. Unfortunately, more often than not, it's the things that are most important to us that are the casualties in this struggle for time.

We can divide the toll that time pressure takes upon us into two broad categories – **personal** and **professional**.

1.2.1. Personal Time Pressure

Work never killed anyone, but why take a chance?

These days, this old joke isn't so funny. In fact, recent research has proven that work can kill; if not directly, then at least indirectly. The Japanese even have a word for it, "Karoshi." Translated literally, Karoshi means death from overwork – heart attack and stroke. The first case of Karoshi was reported in 1969. Today 10,000 deaths every year in Japan are attributed to it.

Studies show that five key factors lead to Karoshi:

1. Working extremely long hours, which interferes with normal recovery and rest patterns.
2. Night work that interferes with normal recovery and rest patterns.
3. Working without holidays or breaks.
4. High pressure work without breaks.
5. Extremely demanding physical labor, and continuously stressful work.

Do any of these factors ring true for you?

Death may sound a bit extreme, but stress does trigger complex changes in the body's processes, causing unwanted psychological and physiological changes that can affect our relationships, our disposition, and our availability.

Take a look around you. Lots of people seem to be suffering from stress-related physical and mental health problems. Surveys confirm this trend, and even courts recognize the problems – there have been judgments asking employers to compensate workers for stress. Insomnia, ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, and depression are some of the conditions that can be caused by stress.

The problem is not hard work. We all know what it's like to go full speed for long hours, totally involved in an important task. The resulting tiredness is matched by a sense of achievement and joy. The problem is that we're not getting any time to recover.

You know you need relief, but how do you achieve it? Is there any way that you can regain your ideal life balance?

1.2.2. Professional Time Pressure

According to the Harvard Business Review, "Very few managers use their time as effectively as they could. They think that they're attending to pressing matters, but they're really just spinning their wheels." It also says that 90 percent of managers waste time on unimportant tasks because of inadequate focus and energy. This affects non-managers as well.

Depressing news, isn't it? Here you are slaving away all day long, and then someone comes along and declares that what you are doing isn't important. Actually, the problem is that "busy" doesn't always translate into "effective."

"Effectiveness" can be defined as the art of achieving the optimum return on effort. We can maximize this only by selecting the best task to do from all the possibilities available, and then doing it the best way; something far more important than doing whatever job happens to be around efficiently.

However, in the "World of Time Pressure," effectiveness has fallen victim to the "Tyranny of the Urgent." Each demand on our time screams "**Urgent**," putting us under pressure to do it as soon as possible. In the process, we rush from one task to another, without really pausing to consider its importance in the bigger scheme of things. At the end of it, we're simply too exhausted to do the important jobs effectively. So, while we're all putting in a great deal of effort, we're not able to achieve the optimum return on this effort.

Is there any way to leapfrog from being active to effective? How can you maximize your return on effort?

Managing your time optimally is the key to mastering your workload and leading an exceptional life. If you use your time to concentrate on the important things, not only will you be able to boost your productivity, you'll also manage to make more time for yourself.

People may not manage their time well because:

- They don't know how.
- They don't want to plan (and planning is an intrinsic part of time management).
- They enjoy the adrenaline buzz of meeting tight deadlines.
- They enjoy crisis management.

Do you manage your time optimally? Ask yourself these simple questions:

- Do you feel unable to achieve the optimum return on your efforts?
- Do you feel overwhelmed with tasks?
- Do you find it hard to enjoy life?
- Are you forgetful?
- Do you lose sleep worrying about how you are going to get everything done?

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," then you can safely conclude that you, too, need to improve your time management skills. **This Mind Tools course can help you acquire these skills, and make them a part of your life and attitude.**

This program provides the blueprint for a simple, comprehensive system that will help you win back control of your time and your life. It introduces you to practical, tested strategies that will catapult you to new heights of effectiveness.

Don't worry. We don't plan to turn you into a compulsive clock-watcher. Neither do we expect you to morph into one of those irritatingly over-organized, over-scheduled people, who have no concept of flexibility. Rather, you'll find that the little bit of planning and scheduling that we expect you to practice will allow you to pursue opportunities, as and when they come by.

Most of the techniques described here are easy to follow. In fact, you might already be practicing some of them. We just show you how a small shift in attitude can help you incorporate these basic skills more comprehensively and systematically into your daily life. We also introduce you to some new, advanced skills, but these are simple applications, that are sure to bring you the results you desire.

Once you adopt this new behavior set, you'll find your efforts yielding immensely higher returns.

The objectives of this program are to help you:

- Take back control of your time.
- Work faster, smarter, and better.
- Maximize your return on effort.
- Find time for the things that really matter to you.
- Delegate.
- Tackle procrastination.
- Strike an ideal work-life balance.
- Feel good about yourself.

If you follow this course, and properly use the tools within it, you'll win back control of your life. You'll be focused on what is truly important to you, and you'll move step-by-step towards the achievement of your life goals. You'll be efficient, reliable, effective, and well-organized. And, you'll know how to use all of the resources available to you to their full extent, powering you to the greatest success that you can achieve.

Of course, there is no one-fit-for-all solution, but herein lies the inherent strength of this program. The techniques that we teach here can be molded to fit specific, individual situations.

1.3. The Structure of the Course

The course begins by helping you understand the need for better time management skills, and by showing what these skills can do for you. Next, it challenges you to identify your own lifetime goals. Once you've identified these goals, the program teaches you how to make the time to achieve them.

Step-by-step, you will work through techniques that not only help you tackle your workload more effectively, but also create time for you to pursue your personal goals. We then show you how to maintain your energy at optimum levels, and how you can use leverage to increase your productivity substantially.

The course is divided into eight modules, as follows:

Module 1: Introduction

The module you're reading now is the introduction to the course. This sets the context of the course, and explains how it works.

Module 2: The Big Picture

Prioritize, prioritize, and prioritize! This is the mantra underpinning the second module. From a time management perspective, your life is a sequence of big and small choices and decisions. It's these choices that you really manage, not the flow of time. Setting the right priorities is what puts you in control of your life.

Unfortunately, most of us have fallen into the habit of relinquishing choices. We're so caught up with the urgency of the present, that most of us have lost track of what our priorities are. The second module helps you address this specific problem.

It pushes you to take stock of your life, it trains you to recognize your priorities, and it challenges you to identify your wants. Then, it teaches you to set goals that reflect these wants. It is ultimately this focus on your goals that will provide you with the vision and motivation to take back control of your life.

Module 3: Planning and Scheduling

This module shows you how to make the leap from being efficient to being effective. As we mentioned earlier, effectiveness is the art of doing the best task, at the best time, in the best possible way.

Unfortunately, many of us spend time on less important tasks, and let many important ones go undone. This tends to be cumulative: the more overtime you put in, the more exhausted and less effective you can become.

This module helps you escape this trap. It gives you tools to evaluate your daily work, and it pushes you to consider whether or not your daily activities are in alignment with your life goals. And, if the answer is "no," it provides you with tools that you can use to change the situation.

It helps you formulate an action plan that you can use to achieve your goals, and it helps you create a schedule that will give you the time to implement your action plan. It also introduces you to a useful organizational system that will help you get back in control.

Module 4: Clearing the Clutter

By the time you reach module 4, you'll have set your goals, and you'll have figured out just what you need to do to work towards them. You'll also have scheduled these goal-achievement activities. But what about the current clutter that's holding you back?

How do you make a fresh start with that pile of paperwork sitting on your desk? You can't wish away the overflowing inbox. Neither can you ignore the phone calls, those little emails from your boss, the "crisis calls" from your kids, and all the other demands on your time that keep pushing you off track.

This module helps you to get organized and eliminate the clutter. It equips you with tools that you can use to streamline the way you handle email, paper, people, information, and all of those other tasks that spell "overload" in your life.

Module 5: Beating the Blues

Now that you've defined your priorities, made plans, fixed schedules, and become organized, the next step is to swing into action.

There are several barriers to action that you may need to overcome in order to get started, and this module helps you deal with these. We group them together under three headings:

1. Interruption.
2. Perfectionism.
3. Procrastination.

Good or bad, they are realities, and this course equips you with strategies to tackle these obstacles head on.

It empowers you with techniques to minimize interruptions, it gives you ways to overcome perfectionism, and it teaches you to tackle the tasks you hate with a positive attitude. It helps you break up those "too complex," "too time-consuming" projects into manageable proportions. And it outlines ways to free yourself from "the externals" long enough to accomplish your own plans.

This module helps you learn how to handle the stumbling blocks that keep you from translating your plans into real action.

Module 6: Effective Delegation

Delegation is a primary skill required for effective time management. In this module, we help you develop this skill.

Many people think that they can do everything themselves. They become so used to handling problems that they often don't realize that the problem parked on their desk doesn't belong there in the first place. Sometimes the problem is theirs, but they're reluctant to admit that someone else could handle it better: they don't want to be caught seeking help.

Module 6 tutors you to recognize these situations, and how to get out of them. It coaches you on how to hand other people's jobs back to them. It teaches you the value of assigning the right task to the right person. And, in the process, it helps you free your time, energy, and talent for tasks that you really want, and need, to do.

Module 7: To Each Their Own

As we've already mentioned, in the world of time management, there is no one-fit-for-all solution. All of us are individuals with specific needs and patterns. This module puts you in touch with yourself, and it helps you figure out work styles that suit your individual personality best.

It helps you tune in to your energy patterns, and then put this knowledge to work for you. We look at how to create schedules that work best for you. We show you the way to determine when your energy and focus peak, and then put that time to good use.

We also teach you how to analyze your work preferences, and how you can use that information to achieve optimum results.

Module 8: Using Leverage

The last module is a tactics module.

Where we get to in life largely depends on the "power" (however we choose to define it) that we are able to exert. Because we can only exert a small amount of power on our own, people move beyond this level by leveraging resources – such as other people's time, technology, and money – to gain a much greater advantage.

This module shows you how to achieve this leverage. At the basic level, it coaches you to incorporate intuitive skills – such as managing multiple tasks and using transition time effectively – more comprehensively and effectively, in your life.

More than this, the module's power comes from the specialized management skills that it introduces you to, such as harnessing technology and outsourcing. These are key leverage tools that can catapult you to new levels of effectiveness.

1.4. Module Structure

Modules typically open by explaining the background theory that underpins them. Once you are clear on the theory, you'll understand just how and why the time management techniques described in the module work.

Next, we look at the tools and techniques required to handle the particular aspect of time management covered by the module. We explain each tool and, where appropriate, follow this with an example of how the tool is used.

We then help you apply these tools to your life. We guide you through using the tools practically to give you a feel for the way they work, so that you can draw upon them when you need them. We strongly recommend that you work through all of the exercises. (It's tempting just to read through the exercises without actually practicing them, but if you do you won't receive the enormous benefits of this course!)

Work though each module in turn. Take your time to assimilate the information given in each module. Finally, reap the dividends of this by applying this knowledge to your daily life.

Enjoy using Make Time for Success!

2. The Big Picture: Knowing What You Want

Interest:	Time management is not about managing time; it's about managing priorities. No one can control time, but we can control how we use it. This module looks at how we can use our time better. We're confronted with a barrage of tasks every day, and, often, we spread ourselves too thinly, trying to accomplish all of these. In the process, we don't manage to accomplish any of them very effectively. This module coaches us to identify and focus on our priorities, so that we can figure out which tasks are really important to us, and then concentrate our efforts on these.
Need:	Prioritization is the key to time management. It propels us from "reaction mode" to "action mode." Setting priorities ensures that we focus our time and energy on the important tasks, and not just the task at hand.
Timing:	2.5 hours.
Range:	We discuss: • The need for prioritization. • Developing the "big picture." • Setting life goals.
Objective:	The aim of this module is to help you identify what you want from life. Once you know your wants, you can clearly define your "big picture" of life. From this, we help you set goals that reflect your wants. These "big picture" goals provide the motivation that you need in order to manage your time effectively.

He that is everywhere is nowhere.

– Thomas Fuller, 17th-century scholar.

2.1. Introduction

These days, time can be perceived as an extremely valuable commodity that we're perpetually short of. We can't increase the supply of time, but we can balance the demands on our time. This management of the demands on our time is the basic principle underlying effective time management.

The starting point is to set priorities. Prioritization is the key to winning back the control of your time. Every day you face an array of choices that are competing for your time and attention. If you don't decide what's important to you, you risk wasting valuable time on the less important choices.

"The Tyranny of the Urgent"

On the face of it, prioritization seems like a simple enough exercise. But, often, we don't recognize what's important to us, and we don't automatically focus on it.

The problem is that, for most of us, life has become reduced to our vast To-Do Lists, and it's almost impossible to get everything done. Because of this, it's easy to lose perspective. You have no easy way of deciding between one thing and the next, because it all seems equally important and urgent, and you often feel like you didn't do enough.

Time management expert R. Alec Mackenzie once observed, "Urgency engulfs the manager; yet the most urgent task is not always the most important. The tyranny of the urgent lies in its distortion of priorities. One of the measures of a manager is the ability to distinguish the important from the urgent, to refuse to be tyrannized by the urgent, and to refuse to manage by crisis."

Unfortunately, most people, burdened by an overwhelming number of tasks, find it increasingly difficult to make the distinction between urgent and important. They confuse activity with results, and become caught up with short-term urgencies, missing what's really important to long-term growth and development.

The Big Picture – A Way to Rise Above the Chaos

So how do you rise above the chaos of your daily activities to figure out what's really important to you, and what your priorities are? How do you make sure that you don't lose perspective?

A good start is to write out your "Big Picture" – a statement of what you really want from your life. The tools in this module will help you do this.

We strongly recommend that you take some time to figure out what your purpose is, and what your real wants are. Figure out what kind of work and lifestyle suits you. What kinds of jobs and relationships would support the general direction that you want to take? The exercises towards the end of this module help you answer all these questions.

Once you know what your real wants from life are, other things will automatically start falling into place. You'll have a context within which to set priorities. Your Big Picture will help you discover what you really want to do. It will also help motivate you, and give meaning to the way you spend your time.

Your Big Picture gives direction to your life. And it provides a measuring stick that you can gauge alternative activities against, when they come along. You'll be able to balance the many aspects of your life better. You'll also reduce unnecessary conflict and stressful uncertainty over how to use your time.

2.2. Introducing the Tools – Setting Life Goals

Setting long-term life goals is the most important thing that you'll need to do to define your personal Big Picture.

By going through the process of identifying your life goals, you outline your most important wants, and you cut away the vague distractions that slow you down and break your focus. And these wants, when acknowledged as goals, take on a very definite, structured form. They are no longer just dreams; rather, they become specific aspirations that give a clear meaning, motivation, and direction to your life.

By setting goals on a routine basis, you decide what you want to achieve, and then move step-by-step towards the achievement of those goals. The process of setting goals and targets allows you to choose where you want to go in life. By knowing precisely what you want to achieve, you know which tasks you have to concentrate on, and which are just distractions.

This process of goal setting is a standard technique used by top-level athletes, successful businesspeople, and achievers in all fields. It gives you long-term vision and short-term motivation. It focuses your acquisition of knowledge, and it helps you to organize your resources.

By setting sharp, clearly defined goals, you can measure and take pride in the achievement of those goals. You can see forward progress in what might previously have seemed a long, pointless grind. The process of setting goals, achieving them, and seeing this achievement gives you confidence that you'll be able to achieve higher and more difficult goals in the future.

A written life goals statement is the cornerstone of any successful time management program, and it requires surprisingly little effort. So, why do people shy away from putting down their goals in writing?

One way or the other, whether we're explicitly aware of it or not, most of us have been thinking about our life goals for much of our lives. But somehow, putting them down on paper seems difficult. We might say, "I already carry my life goals in my head, why write them down?"

The big deal about putting your life goals down on paper is that it forces you to get real about your wants. Thinking about your goals is usually quite a vague exercise – "travel," "become a millionaire," and so on. Writing goals down makes them more concrete and specific.

Because your life goals statement will be limited to a few hundred words, putting it down on paper encourages you to narrow down your aims. It also helps you probe below the surface, and it helps you avoid procrastination.

It's easy to get caught in the trap of delaying the activities and events that you promised yourself you'd undertake. A written life goals statement brings you up against the fact that your time is a limited commodity, and this usually jolts you into becoming more productive.

Rita Rollins, a 32-year-old marketing executive, had a long-standing dream. She wanted to pursue a post-graduation degree in economics. Financial commitments had forced Rita to quit business school when she was 20. So, when she picked up work, she promised herself that she would return to her course later.

A decade passed. Rita found a good job. She got married. Financially, the couple became comfortable. Yet, there was no action on the "Go Back to School" plan. Rita kept thinking about it, but she figured that she had plenty of time to pursue this important goal.

Then, Rita attended a time management seminar. She was asked to write down her life goals statement. Starting a family and attending college both figured high on the list.

Rita realized that if she wanted both the goals to materialize, she would have to take action on at least one in the near future. She would have to plan kids within the next four to five years. And, since she didn't want to have to juggle crying babies and college classes, she had better take up that post-graduation class now!

Some people feel that writing down a goals statement stifles spontaneity, and that setting goals limits your options. However, defining goals doesn't mean that you become closed to opportunities; rather, you recognize the right opportunities for what they are. You don't waste time on low value, low priority tasks. And, of course, the option to revise your goals is always open to you. After all, goal setting is not a static exercise that you do once – an important part of the goal-setting exercise is reviewing your goals on a periodic basis.

The other complaint about setting goals that some people have is, "How can I list my goals? I want so much from life." This is all the more reason you should list your goals. Many things look attractive, and, at one point or another, you'll have to choose the ones that are most important. If you don't,you may spend your time trying to achieve everything, without getting very far.

This is particularly the case if achieving your goals means that you have to compete against other people (as it does in many areas). If you spread your efforts across many activities, your more-focused competitors are likely to leave you behind.

People are also afraid that setting goals increases their risk of failure. However, if you know what you want, you have sense of direction, and you might achieve your goals. But, if you don't know what you want, you may not even attempt to get it.

Setting life goals helps people by giving them a clearer view of what their ideal future looks like. Established life goals help you:

- Retain perspective.
- Focus your effort.
- Establish priorities.
- Stay motivated.
- Recognize achievement.

For some people, the process of defining goals can be eye-opening, forcing them to focus for the first time on what they really want in life. But, for most people, it's less of a surprise, and more of a process of clarification.

2.3. Applying This to Your Life

By now, you should be convinced about the importance of a life goals statement. You may even find yourself wanting to draft your own, but you're just not sure just where to start. Follow our simple four-step procedure, and in no time you'll be sitting with your life goals statement in your hand.

The process is as follows:

1. Create your "Plan 60."
2. Create your five-year plan.
3. Do a reality check.
4. Write your top four life goals.

Let's look at each of these steps:

Step 1: Plan 60

First, let's do your Plan 60. This is a statement of where you would like to be when you turn 60. (Of course, as years go by, you might eventually start calling it "Plan 70." Or, you could call yours "Plan 40," "Plan 50," and so on.)

For the sake of convenience, let us assume that 60 is a few decades ahead for you. So, creating your Plan 60 would make perfect sense.

First, print off or save several PDF copies of the worksheet on page 88, and set aside an hour or so to work through it.

Think About What You Really Want

Now, visualize your life at age 60 (or whatever age you've decided on). If you could be, do, or have anything you want (and, if money wasn't an issue and failure wasn't a possibility), what would your life look like?

Don't worry about the logistics at this point. The question here is not how you're going to get there; it's about what you want and what you desire. Even if your wants seem unrealistic, don't hesitate to write them down. Climbing Mount Everest, having four children, becoming a billionaire, and so on; just go ahead and make a note of it. After all, this may be a long way off!

Next, run through it and see whether you have listed your "wants" in all the critical areas in your life. Many times people just think in terms of what they want in their career and financially. However, we're looking for a list of wants for all the significant categories of your life.

Possible categories to consider are:

- Self.
- Family.
- Romance.
- Friendships.
- Career.
- Finances.
- Health.
- Community.
- Spirituality.

You can use this list as a starting point, and then draw up your own categories. The idea is that the categories you list should give a holistic picture of all of the areas that are important to you in your life.

Spend a little time thinking through the categories that you want to apply, and then jot down the wants that you wish to achieve within them.

Turn Your "Wants" Into Goals

Now, print off or save fresh copies of the Plan 60 worksheet. Work your way through your wants, and redraft each of your wants as a goal. Don't worry at this stage about practicality – we'll look at this later.

Initially, goals are active, concrete statements of your wants, expressed in a "To…" format. For example, you might want to become a CEO. Express this as "To be CEO of Company X."

However, you can make goals more powerful by using the **SMART** mnemonic. While there are plenty of variants, SMART usually stands for:

- Specific.
- Measurable.
- Attainable.
- Relevant.
- Time-bound.

For example, instead of having "to get rich" as a goal, it is more powerful to say "To have a net worth of $2 million by December 31, 2025."

Also, goal statements often seem more real if they're expressed in the present tense. Building on the example above, instead of saying "To have a net worth of $2 million by December 31, 2025," you might prefer "It's December 31, 2025 and I have a net worth of $2 million."

Done? Great! Can you feel how much more powerful your wants are when you express them as properly-formatted goals?

Now, let's run through your list of goals again. This time, use the Goals by Category Worksheet on page 89. You should only need one copy of this.

On the left-hand side of the worksheet, list the categories that you think are important; on the right side, write the one goal that is most important in that category. Your list may now look like this:

Goal Category	**Goal**
1. Self	To have walked the Inca Trail, climbed Kilimanjaro, and so on.
2. Family	To have a big house in the country, two kids, and a dog.
3. Romance	To have a happy marriage.
4. Friendships	To have a small group of close friends.
5. Career	To be CEO of an international consulting firm.
6. Finances	To have enough money for a comfortable retirement.
7. Health	To be in good shape, with a body weight less than X pounds.
8. Community	To be an active member of an environmental movement.
9. Spirituality	To meditate daily.

Of course, your goals will probably be very different from the ones listed here. This is just to give you a general idea of what you need to do.

One problem that people generally run into during this exercise is that they have so many interests and desires that they find it hard to define their goals. But it's important to zero down on one specific goal in every category. If you don't, you run the risk of losing focus.

If you're finding it hard to make choices, try the "one-for-now" approach. Make a list of all the things that you want to do in one category, and then pick one goal to achieve for now. Just remember that choosing one goal doesn't mean that you're eliminating the others. It just means that this one goal is the one most important to you at this point in time. You can always revise the goal later.

Also, don't worry if the goals on your list conflict with each other. For instance, your goal to become a CEO might conflict with your goal to spend more time with your family. This competition for your attention can stimulate you to increase the quality of the time you spend on each. If, on the other hand, these conflicts cause you to feel frustrated, then a good use of your time would be try to understand and resolve such conflicts.

One way to resolve these conflicts is to set priorities. Here, you decide which goals are most important to you at this time.

Out of your list, pick the four goals that are the most important to you right now. Don't feel guilty if you pick "becoming CEO" over family time here. Just because becoming CEO is your goal now doesn't mean that your family isn't important to you. It just means that at this point of time, your focus is becoming CEO. The focus might well change in the future.

Once you've picked the four goals most important to you, write them below:

My Top Four "Plan 60" Goals
1.
2.
3.
4.

Tip:

It's often a good idea to involve your partner or friends while thinking about your goals. They know you well, and they might be able to help you avoid missing anything out. And, if you're in a relationship, it makes sense for both you and your partner to do this exercise simultaneously. You'll be able to figure out whether your goals are in alignment with each other or not. (If not, you can always change your list.)

Step 2: The Five-Year Plan

Now for the second step: let's get a little more real. Instead of looking at decades ahead, we'll focus on the next five years. Where are you now, and where would you like to be in the next five years?

Referring to your Plan 60 goals, repeat the goal-setting exercise that you just carried out, for the next five years. Of course, you'll have to be a bit more realistic about what you can achieve in five years. But, you'll likely find your choices more or less in sync with the priorities sketched out in Plan 60.

If they're not, you may need to consider some big changes in your lifestyle. If the next five years aren't taking you towards your Plan 60, then you need to take action!

Again, at the end of the goal-setting exercise, pick the four goals that are most important to you, and write them down in the table below:

My Top Four "Five-Year Plan" Goals
1.
2.
3.
4.

Step 3: Reality Check

This is step 3 of the life goals exercise, and it's quite simple. Imagine that you have only one year to live. How would you like to spend this year?

This is a bit of a reality check, and it forces you to take inventory of your life. Are there things that are important to you that you're not doing now? Would you choose to live your life completely differently?

If you come up with a completely different set of things to do, some real changes may well be in order. With proper time management, there's no real reason why you shouldn't start doing at least some of your preferred activities today.

Again, use the approach we described above to draw up a list of your goals in the major life categories. This time the list may not be as holistic as before. But, in any case, write it down and pick out the four goals that are most important to you.

My Top Four "Reality Check" Goals
1.
2.
3.
4.

Step 4: The Top Four Life Goals

The paradox about priorities is that if you have too many of them they can't all be priorities. We deal with this during the first three steps by using the "one for now" approach, and by selecting the four most important goals at the end of every exercise.

But we're still left with 12 goals, which is too many to focus on, so we need to cut more. Look at these 12 goals and whittle them down to your four top life goals.

Then write them down on the next page.

My Top Life Goals
1.
2.
3.
4.

Feel free to choose any four goals to fill the blank space. Again, the goals that you leave out aren't unimportant, they're just not top priority right now.

Remember that you're free to add and delete items from your life goals list anytime – the life goals statement is not a static declaration, and you should review and revise it on a regular basis: on your birthday, on New Year's day, or over the holiday season, for example. Just pick a time on a regular basis to re-evaluate your life goals statement, and schedule this in your diary or calendar.

You should now have your four top goals written down in front of you.

Congratulations! This is your life goals statement, and it's the first and most important step towards getting back control of your time. Now, move on to the next module to see how you can use this life goals statement to build your time management program.

3. Planning and Scheduling: Knowing What to Do

Interest:	This module helps you make the transition from being active to being extremely effective. Our focus here is to help you evaluate the work that you're engaged in, so that you can judge whether it's in sync with your life goals.
Need:	Pareto's Rule suggests that around 80 percent of the results we achieve are generated by 20 percent of our effort. The remaining 80 percent of our effort generates as little as 20 percent of our results. Pareto's Rule holds true for most people. If you want to rise above this rule, use the tools outlined in this module. They show you how to focus your effort on high-return tasks, and they help you ensure that you don't waste your time and energy on low-priority, low pay-off tasks.
Timing:	2.5 hours.
Range:	We discuss: • The need to evaluate your work. • Strategies to help you keep track of both short-term activities and long-term projects simultaneously. • The how-to of identifying activities that support your goals. • The requirement for effective scheduling. • The necessity of review.
Objective:	The main objective of this module is to help you build an action plan that will take you to your priorities, and formulate a schedule that will give you the time to implement your action plan.

Being busy does not always mean real work. The object of all work is production or accomplishment and to either of these ends there must be forethought, system, planning, intelligence, and honest purpose, as well as perspiration. 'Seeming to do' is doing nothing.

– Thomas Edison, American inventor.

3.1. Introduction

In the last module you identified your wants – your life goals. Now that you know them, how do you achieve them? Working through this module is a great way to get started on this journey.

It provides you with the know-how to identify and focus on the activities that will take you towards your goals. Don't worry, this module doesn't require you to increase your workload. Rather, it provides tools that you can use to restructure your daily work profile so that you can become more effective, and achieve better results.

The majority of people are so caught up in the urgency of the current moment that they forget to differentiate between being busy and being effective. Being busy does not automatically translate into being effective. Being busy means doing some work, but being effective means doing the right work, at the right time.

What is the "right work?" Only you know the answer. But we can give you a hint: it's the kind of work that gets you the results you want. It's the kind of work that propels you towards your life goals.

In the real world, you have to handle essential, often unwanted, activities. But are you exerting whatever control you do have over your activities? How many times do you actually stop and think about a job – whether you want to do it, and whether it fits in with your scheme of things – before taking it on?

Consider this: are you as effective as you would like to be? It's quite possible that you're burning the candle at both ends without achieving as much as you think you should, or could. If you want to optimize the return of your efforts, use the tips and tools provided in this module.

Bottom-Up or Top-Down?

The majority of the tasks we do on a daily level don't really contribute to our life goals. Yet, for us to become fully effective, forging this connection is crucial. So, how do we achieve this alignment?

Do we start "at the top" with life goals, and work our way down to daily activities? Or, do we start "at the bottom" (with the reality of our daily workload), and work our way up to the top priorities? Theoretically, both approaches work. While traditional time management models have relied on the top-down approach, programs that focus on extremely time-stressed people tend to use the bottom-up method.

Our strategy is a mixture of both approaches. We start at the top, move down to the bottom, and then slowly climb our way back. This helps us incorporate the results of big-picture thinking, as well as the smallest of daily activity details in our time management system, simultaneously.

We start by setting life goals – we did this in module 2. This is the first step, because all priorities are driven from the level above, so any formulation of priorities begins most efficiently from the top. Once you've set life goals, you have a context within which to set the rest of your priorities.

When this exercise is done, we next ask you to go back to the bottom and get a grip on your daily life. Instead of asking you to take on another big list of things-to-do – the things that will help you achieve your life goals – we direct your effort to your current To-Do List. Is the list complete? Does it reflect all your work?

Next, you have to analyze the activities on your list. How many of them really fit in with your priorities? Ask yourself – is it essential to do the ones that are not in sync with your goals? Are you doing enough to move towards your goals?

We then ask you to identify what extra work you need to do to move towards your goals. You'll list these activities, and add them to your schedule. You might feel that you don't have the time to take on these new activities, so we'll help you plan a schedule that gives you time to build these in.

The benefit of this strategy is that it takes care of both the intellectual and the practical perspective. Intellectually, the top-down start provides you with a conceptually sound framework for working out your priorities. And then, the focus at the bottom level helps you take control.

3.2. Introducing the Tools

Let's look at the tools that will help you convert your daily work into effective, productive activity. We covered the first tool, goal setting, in the last module. This is the key to identifying and establishing your priorities. Now we discuss the next six tools that help you complete the process.

These are:

- Action Programs.
- Trigger Lists.
- A-Activity Lists.
- Work evaluation.
- Scheduling.
- Work Reviews.

First, in this section, we look at your Action Program. This is your "organizational control center." It helps you organize all of your projects, and shows the next steps that you need to take on each. This is very effective in helping you manage multiple tasks and projects, and for pushing projects forward on all important fronts.

We then look at Trigger Lists and A-Activity Lists. These are brainstorming aids that feed into your Action Program, and they help you flush out all outstanding tasks.

Next, we briefly look at a work evaluation tool that helps you check that you're exerting the right level of control over your work.

Finally, we look at two essential techniques – effective scheduling and the Work Review tool. These help you when you discover that there's too much routine work in your schedule, and you can't do the high value things that move you towards your life goals.

3.2.1. The Action Program – Your Organizational Control Center

You're probably aware of the idea of "To-Do Lists." (You can read our article on To-Do Lists here.) These are great for managing small numbers of tasks. But the problem is that a things-to-do list is not really a planned, focused action list. Rather, it's a catch-all for partial reminders about things that are unresolved and not yet translated into outcomes.

Specific entries, such as "Call Tina," exist along with vague aspirations, such as "Get started on new website project." Often, the real outlines and details of what the list-maker has to "do" are actually missing. (Take, for instance, the new website project; more precise entries would be to write a spec, choose a designer, and so on.)

What this means is that To-Do Lists begin to "buckle under the load" when you run many simultaneous projects. In particular, they can lead you to focus your attention on single, big, time consuming, high importance tasks in the top "A" position of your list, to the exclusion of other tasks on your list. This makes managing multiple projects difficult, and it can mean that you miss small but essential maintenance activities when you're under pressure.

Action Programs help you rectify this situation. They help you keep individual actions small, while still bringing together all of the major projects that you are working on. They help you stay on top of daily jobs and long-term projects simultaneously, and they help you take control of your daily to-dos without losing focus on long-term goals.

Action Programs are one of the most important tools in this course.

They help you to:

- Take stock of the inputs that flow into your life.
- Translate these inputs into actionable activities, or "Next Actions."
- Keep track of the "Next Actions" through a two-tier structure that reflects both long-term plans and short-term activities.

Follow this four-step procedure to use your Action Program:

1. Collect actions.
2. Prune.
3. Organize your "Next Action List," "Delegated Action List," and "Project Catalog."
4. Work your Action Program.

Note:

Our Action Program draws on David Allen's Workflow Plan in his book "Getting Things Done." We look at this in more detail later.

Let's look at each stage in more detail:

1. Collection

First, you take inventory of all the things in your life that require resolution. Try to collect and write down everything – urgent or not, big or small, personal or professional – that you feel is incomplete and needs action from you to get done.

To an extent, this collection is taking place automatically. Email requests are getting stored in your email account, and messages asking for action are accumulating on your voicemail, for example.

There are probably other things – ideas that are idling in your head, projects you want to run, things you intend to deal with lying at the bottom of the drawer, thoughts written down on stray bits of paper – that you need to gather and put in place too. Bring all of these actions and projects together, and list them in one place.

Tip 1:

The next two tools – Trigger Lists and A-Activity Lists – help you do this. We'll explain these later.

Tip 2:

You're likely to feel stressed if you have too many mental "to dos" floating around in your mind. You never know whether you've forgotten things, and you always have that feeling of not having achieved everything you want to.

By writing down everything on your Action Program, you can empty your mind of these stressful, distracting reminders, you ensure that you prioritize these actions coherently and consistently, and you improve your concentration.

Tip 3:

The first time you create your Action Program, you're going to spend a while putting it together. However, once you've done it, you'll be amazed by how much more in control you feel. Also, it will take relatively little effort to keep your Action Program up-to-date.

Tip 4:

You'll probably find it easiest if you keep your Action Program in an electronic document. This will make it easy to put together, update, and maintain on a routine basis, without lots of time-consuming redrafting.

2. Pruning

Next you process your inventory of all those items on your list, and look at each in more detail.

Consider each item in turn, and decide whether you should actually take action on it. A lot of what comes our way has no real relevance to us. If this is the case, then remove these things from your list.

If you need to take action, ask yourself what the logical next step is. Write this down.

If you feel that you might need to take action on the item at some future date, or that you might need to reference the material later, store the messages and related files in an assigned "home" (more on this in module 4).

3. Organization

Now you need to work through your inventory, and put items into the right place in your Action Program.

The Action Program is split up into three parts:

- A "Next Action List," which shows the small next actions that you will take to move your projects forward.
- A "Delegated Actions List," which shows projects and actions delegated to other people. This includes who they're delegated to, and the next date on which you will review progress.
- A "Project Catalog." This shows all of the projects that you're engaged in, and the small individual tasks that you have identified so far that contribute to them.

To create your own Action Program, work through your inventory and categorize items as follows:

- If this is a logical next action on a project, put it on your Next Action List. This shows the small next steps that you're going to take to advance your projects. Remember, if you can delegate the action (see module 6), then your next action is to do this. Once you've delegated the action, put it on your Delegated Actions List (see below).
- If this is an action that you've delegated to someone else, put it on your Delegated Actions List. Also, note down who you've delegated the action to, and the date of the next checkpoint for the action.
- If the item is a project that you must run, or want to run, write it down in your Project Catalog. If the item is part of a project, write it down as a bullet point under the relevant project.

You should find that as you go, points seem to "organize themselves" into projects. This will become clear as you work through them. Put them within the Project Catalog as a project, and promote the most obvious next action to your Next Action List.

Now review the Next Action List. If it's too cluttered, move some of the less urgent/important jobs back into the project catalog. If it's thin and under-challenging, pull up more next actions from the Project Catalog.

Also, it makes sense to prioritize the items in the Next Action List so that you know what to focus on. The "ABC" system works well here: "A" being top priority tasks, "B" being medium priority, and "C" being low priority.

Tip 1:

Don't worry if this sounds confusing at the moment. Our example on page 26 will help you make sense of it.

Tip 2:

Keep your next actions small and achievable, ideally taking no more than a couple of hours to complete. This helps you keep momentum up on projects, and it strongly enhances your sense of being productive and successful.

If next actions are larger than this, break them down. For example, if your next action is to write an article, break this down into research, planning, writing, fact-checking, and editing phases. Then make the research phase your next action, and put the rest of the stages in your Project Catalog.

Tip 3:

Where you have several next actions, prioritize them from A to F, depending on their importance, value, urgency, and relevance to your life goals.

Then monitor your success in dealing with these actions. If you find that actions are "stagnating" on your list, consider whether you should cancel these projects, put them on hold, or raise their priority so that you deal with them.

Whatever you do, make sure that you don't have too many actions on your Next Action List.

4. "Working" Your Action Program

An Action Program is typically fairly long, often running onto several pages. But just because you have a long list doesn't mean that you have to run through the entire program every day. Typically, you'll be dealing with just the top page. This is the page where your short-term, next actions are listed. Some activities may be day-specific or time-specific – they can be either maintained as the top page of your Action Program, or marked in your calendar.

Actually, these pages are just a new form of your old To-Do List. However, only short, specific actions are outlined here, while the major projects to which they belong are stored in your Project Catalog.

The purpose of the other pages is that they give you a place to keep track of your medium- and long-term projects. Most days, you won't even have to look beyond, say, page 3.

However, in case something from, say, page 7, does surface during the course of the day, you have the information available to refer to.

What you must do is review the list periodically. (Schedule regular time to do this.) Delete or archive items that you've completed, moving items from the Project Catalog to the front pages as you make progress on your project, and adding any new tasks that have come your way.

For instance, let's say that you're working on a long-term project. The final outcome of the project is listed in the Project Catalog section. You can then regularly draw short-term tasks from this, and move them up to your Next Action List.

Example Action Program

Let's look at a simple example of using an Action Program. Take the case of a journalist. She arrives in the office, opens her email account, and sees a message from her editor. He wants her to do an article on health care packages being offered by local hospitals.

She runs the editor's communication through our four-step procedure. The first step, the collection step, has already taken place. The communication was collected in her email account automatically.

She is now ready for the second step. Does she need to take action on it? Yes. What is the next action that she can, and needs to, take? A good starting point is to compile a list of the hospitals in the area, and to find out their telephone numbers.

Moving onto the third step, can she delegate this job to someone else? No. Then she should put down the list-making activity under the Next Action heading of her Action Program. Next she has to consider the final outcome that she hopes to achieve: the article. She lists this under the Project Catalog heading.

Once this initial activity is done, she can list another Next Action, such as "call X, Y, Z hospitals," to move the project towards completion. The process goes on until she finishes the article and strikes it off her list.

This is shown in the simplified example Action Program below:

Action Program: August 20

Next Actions:

- List local hospitals.

Delegated Actions:

(No delegated actions in this example.)

Project Catalog:

Article on Health Care Packages:

- List local hospitals.
- Get telephone numbers.
- Arrange interviews.
- Research additional data.

Summary

An Action Program is an "industrial strength" version of a To-Do List. It helps you to process inputs into actionable activities, and then list them in a three-tier structure.

In the short-term, under the "Next Action List" heading, you list the small, next actions that you've decided to undertake to complete your main projects.

In the "Delegated Actions List," you record the projects and actions that you've delegated, who you've delegated them to, and the date of the next review.

In the long-term context, under the "Project Catalog" heading, you list the final outcome that you want to achieve, as well as the other actions you've gathered that will contribute to it.

This approach helps you maintain focus on daily jobs and long-term goals simultaneously. It means that you always have a plan for "next actions" that you can implement or renegotiate at any moment. This puts you in control, and gives you a real sense of achievement.

More than this, this approach allows you to work on multiple projects effectively, helping you to manage many simultaneous, complex jobs with a variety of inputs – the sort of work carried out by a typical senior executive or CEO.

3.2.2. Trigger Lists – Capturing Hidden Actions

Trigger Lists are useful to use alongside Action Programs. They help you flush out hidden actions that you may not have captured within your Action Program.

Chances are that you found taking an inventory of all your actions a painstaking and time-consuming exercise. As you jot down all the incompletes that are running through your mind, you start processing them, and realize that you've missed something – you never seem to get everything down!

Trigger Lists are a good way to jog your memory and clear your head. You brainstorm the sorts of activities that you have to do regularly, and then list these categories.

You then use these to "trigger" in your mind the activities that fall within each category.

Some categories are fairly common, such as:

- Phone calls you must make.
- Coworkers you must talk to.
- Reports to write.
- Meetings to run or attend.
- Presentations you must make.

Others are job-specific. For instance, for an event manager, these could be:

- Venues to book.
- Upcoming events to prepare for.
- Performers to book.
- Invitations to issue.

As a further example, let's say that you're an interior designer with an active social life. You could split your triggers into two category lists: personal and professional.

Personal:

- Friends.
- Birthdays to remember.
- Anniversaries.
- Plans.
- Clothes.
- House.
- Errands.
- Finances.

Professional:

- Clients.
- Drafts.
- Paints.
- Design schemes.
- Finances.
- Computer.
- Software.
- Calls.
- Ongoing projects.
- Pending projects.

The idea is to provide a trigger to unearth actions that are buried in your mind.

Now, use the Trigger List as a starting point for brainstorming actions that you need to take, and go back and update your Action Program with the hidden actions that you've flushed out.

3.2.3. The A-Activity List – The Link Between Your Goals and Your Action Program

You may have spotted that we haven't made much reference to the life goals you identified in module 2.

This is where the A-Activity List comes in – this helps you build a list of activities that will take you towards your life goals, so that you can link these into your Action Program. We call these activities "A Activities," and the A-Activity List takes over where the life goals statement leaves off.

Take out the list of your four life goals from page 18. Then print off or save four copies of the Life Goal Detail Worksheet on page 90, and write one of your life goals at the top of each sheet. Under each goal, list all the possible activities you will undertake to achieve them. (If you don't know what activities you need to undertake to achieve your goal, your first activity is to gather more information about your goal, and to think about what you need to do to accomplish it.)

Chances are, you'll soon have a list of too many activities, and not enough time for all of them. Now is the time to set your priorities. Use these questions to prioritize your activity list:

- Which of these activities will yield the highest returns?
- Which of these will move me closest to my life goals?
- Which of these activities are the most do-able in the near future?

After you've pruned all four life goal activity lists, add these activities and projects to the Project Catalog section of your Action Program. Make it obvious that these are life goal projects, so you keep their significance clear.

Finally, move an action from each life goal project onto your Next Action List.

Now you're starting to do what you want to do! Working towards your life goals is now an everyday part of your life!

Tip:

For each life goal, make "conducting an annual review" one of the Project Catalog actions. Schedule this for a particular date each year, and update your calendar to reflect this.

This helps make goal setting an ongoing part of your life.

3.2.4. Work Evaluation – Making Sure That Your Work is Sensibly Balanced

This next tool helps you to understand the pattern of your daily work, and enables you to make changes and become more effective. It gives you two evaluation approaches for appraising your work.

With the first approach, we consider that, at any given point of time, you can be engaged in three categories of work:

- Managing and defining your work.
- Doing work as it shows up.
- Doing predefined work.

If you're engaged in processing incoming inputs to determine what needs to be done (for example, preparing your Action Program), it means that you're managing and defining work. Doing work as it shows up is a fairly self-explanatory category. Doing pre-defined work (the kind of work that enhances productivity), means that you're doing a task outlined on your Action Program.

This tool asks you to evaluate your work in terms of these three categories, and then judge whether the balance between them is right or wrong. If you're spending too much time on the second category, and too little on the third, you need to take corrective action.

For example, a coworker has asked you to explain the new campaign to him, but do you have to do it right now? If this is the time you have scheduled to go through your emails, would it really be a problem to meet him 15 minutes later?

The second approach asks you to reflect on whether some of your daily actions genuinely carry you towards your life goals.

Suppose you decide to jog every day. This activity is essential, because you need to do it to achieve your target weight loss over the next six months, as part of your life goal of "being healthy and fit."

Review your daily activities. How many of them are in alignment with your life goals. Not too many? This is an important wake-up call. Maybe it's time you built more life goal-related activities into your schedule.

3.2.5. Scheduling – Making Time for Your Priorities

So far our main focus has been on priorities and goals. These define what you aspire to do with your time. Scheduling is where these aspirations meet the hard reality of the time that you have available.

Scheduling is the process of looking at the time available to you, and planning how you will use it to achieve the goals you've identified. By using a schedule properly, you can:

- Understand what you can realistically achieve with your time.
- Plan to make the best use of the time available.
- Leave enough time for things you absolutely must do.
- Preserve contingency time to handle "the unexpected."
- Minimize stress by avoiding over-commitment to yourself and others.

Scheduling is best done on a regular basis; for example, at the start of every week.

Start by choosing a format that suits your preferences. You can use devices such as online calendars, paper-based organizers and diaries, your smartphone calendar, or cloud-based or integrated software like Google Apps or MS Outlook to help you structure your schedule. The scheduling tool that is best for you depends on your situation, the current structure of your job, your tastes, and your budget. However, you need to be able to enter data easily, and view an appropriate span of time in the correct level of detail.

Then, follow these steps to prepare your schedule:

1. Identify the time you want to make available for your work. This will depend on the design of your job, and on your personal life goals.
2. Write in the actions that you absolutely must take to do a good job. These will often be the things that you're assessed against. For example, if you manage people, then you must make time available for dealing with issues that arise, such as coaching and supervision.
3. Allow time to communicate with your boss and key people around you. While people may let you get away with neglecting them in the short-term, your best time management efforts will surely be derailed if you don't set aside time for those who are important in your life.
4. Leave 15 minutes in your schedule every day for "Organizing Time." This is the time that you use to keep yourself organized, maintain your time management systems, and keep yourself focused on the real priorities in your life.
5. Review your Next Action List, and schedule in the high-priority urgent activities, as well as the essential maintenance tasks that you cannot delegate or avoid.
6. Block in appropriate contingency time. You will probably know how much of this you need by experience. Normally, the more unpredictable your job, the more contingency time you need. In reality, many people experience almost constant interruptions. (Studies suggest that some managers get an average of only six minutes uninterrupted work done at a time – more on this later!)

Obviously, you cannot tell when interruptions will occur. However, by leaving space in your schedule, you give yourself the flexibility to rearrange your tasks to react effectively to issues as they arise.

But, what if your job requires you to manage unpredictable situations? For instance, let's say that you're a doctor. You can still schedule yourself, it's just that a lot of blocks on your schedule will be left empty.

What you now have left, after all this scheduling, is your "discretionary time." This is the time available to deliver your priorities and achieve your goals. Review your Next Action List and A-Activity List, evaluate the time needed to achieve these actions, and schedule these in.

But what if there is no discretionary time left over? This is where you need to conduct a thorough review. We'll look at how to do this next.

3.2.6. The Review – Paring Things Down to the Bare Minimum

By the time you reach step 6 of the scheduling process, you might realize that you have no discretionary time left. You have too much to do, and too little time to accomplish it. What do you do now?

Run through your life goals statement, Action Program, and A-Activity List again. Purge actions wherever you can (without sacrificing life goals), to make the schedule work. If things are standing in the way of you achieving your life goals, you should deal with them.

Your Action Program becomes the chief focus here. Does that job really need to be done? Can you create processes that other people can follow to do routine, repeat jobs? What can you delegate or outsource? Examine all your options, and consider lowering your standards for certain tasks.

If you are going to be happy, effective, unstressed, and in control of your time, you have to make the schedule work.

Remember, one of the most important ways that people become successful is by maximizing the "leverage" that they can achieve with their time. They increase the amount of work that they can manage by delegating tasks to other people, by spending money outsourcing time-consuming tasks, or by using technology to automate as much of their work as possible. This frees them up to achieve their goals. (There's more on this in module 8.)

Also, use this as an opportunity to review your A-Activity List and life goals statement (module 2). Have you set goals that simply aren't achievable with the time you have available? Are you taking on too many additional duties? Or, are you treating things as being more important than they really are?

If you still can't find time for your A-Activities, you may need to renegotiate your workload (remembering that you should use your personal time for goals that are not work-related). With a well thought-out schedule as evidence, you may find this surprisingly easy.

3.3. Applying This to Your Life

Planning is hard work, but the effort is well worth it. If you haven't already done so, now is the time to put to work all the know-how you have acquired in this module!

First, create your Action Program. Be warned – preparing a comprehensive list is not going to be an easy exercise! There are so many unresolved inputs cluttering most of our lives. However, once the exercise is completed, you'll feel liberated.

As part of the process of drawing up your Action Program, use Trigger Lists and A-Activity Lists to ensure that the Action Program is comprehensive, and that it integrates your life goals.

Next, analyze your work using the work evaluation tool in 3.2.4. Ensure that your work is well-balanced, and that your Action Program has elements that contribute to your life goals.

The next step is to put together a schedule for all your activities. Choose a schedule format that suits you, and use the steps outlined in the scheduling tool to draw up your timetable.

Often, writing out a schedule turns out to be a demoralizing exercise. Many people find that, before they know it, their entire schedule is filled with essential but low-priority tasks, and they have no place for the activities on their A list.

This is where the review tool comes in handy. It helps you question whether things are absolutely necessary, whether you can delegate them, or whether you can do them in a different way.

4. Clearing the Clutter: Achieving Maximum Productivity

Interest:	Clutter is anything that takes up your time, energy, and space, without yielding any tangible results in return. The only way to eliminate clutter is to set up an organization system that helps you deal effectively with all the inputs that enter your life. This module shows you how to set up such a system.
Need:	Even if you have all your goals and action plans mapped out, you may have trouble realizing them if you can't move past the clutter. Use the tools described here to cut through productivity-killing clutter. They show you how to focus your effort on high-return tasks, and help you ensure that you don't waste your time and energy on low-priority, low pay-off tasks.
Timing:	2.5 hours.
Range:	We discuss: • The Next Action Organization System. • The Input Processor. • Email management. • Organizing your workspace.
Objective:	Most of us are so bogged down by clutter on a day-to-day basis that we're not able to think about the bigger picture. This module helps you clear the clutter, so that you can focus on this.

If we do not eliminate the clutter, the clutter will eliminate us.

– Priscilla Elfrey, American author.

Clutter is anything that takes up your time, energy, and space, without yielding any tangible results in return. It's things that you should have taken action on yesterday, but never got around to. And now, with every passing day, it's accumulating into a mess that's becoming increasingly difficult to tackle.

Generally, when we think of clutter, we think of physical mess – a pile of papers on the desk, a stack of magazines, over-stuffed filing cabinets, and so on. But all those disjointed thoughts that keep running through your head are mental clutter. These thoughts randomly pop up in your mind, but they have no relevance to the job at hand.

Clutter is a distraction, and anything that distracts also interferes with effective use of time and energy. If you don't deal with it, clutter can get in the way of you achieving your life goals.

4.1. Introduction

This module shows you how to clear clutter, and organize your life for maximum productivity.

So, how do you clear the clutter in your life? Most of us have tried purges and clean-alls at some point, but somehow we have not been able to maintain the clean position permanently.

You start the day with great intentions: you're going to deal with it all. But, gradually, the sheer volume of inputs you encounter in the course of a single day – email, reports, blog articles, magazines, bills, plans, proposals, promotional items – push you into a position where you're just "shuffling paper."

First, you receive these things, look at them, move them, attempt to arrange them, file some items, discard others, try to find the items you need, and then finally give up.

What you need is a comprehensive, effective organization system that helps you collect, process, and track all the inputs that enter your life on a frequent, periodic basis. As with the Action Program in module 3, setting up this system will take time. But we guarantee you that this time investment will yield phenomenal returns. For once, you'll defeat clutter, and you'll find a lot more energy, time, and mental space to devote to your priority tasks.

What we introduce now is a high-powered, industrial-strength system for self-organization that will scale with you as you scale your life. Effort put into implementing the system now will pay for itself many times over, as you become more and more successful, and as the demands on you get greater and more complex.

The Next Action Organization System

You've already taken the first step on the organization journey. The Action Program tool that we introduced in the last module is an important organization tool.

Now we go a step further and introduce you to the rest of the "Next Action Organization System."

The objective of the system is to:

- Capture all the things that need to get done – now, later, someday – into a logical system.
- Process these things, and take specific, front-end decisions about what you need to do about them.
- Assign a place where you can keep track of all processed inputs.

Within the system there are seven categories, under which you can organize all of the inputs that enter your life. When we looked at the Action Program in module 3, we discussed three of these – the Project Catalog, the Next Action List, and the Delegated Actions List. These categories covered inputs that required direct action from you, or from the people who you've delegated work to. Now, we look at the remaining four categories, which cover inputs that are not actionable. These categories are:

- **Project Support Material:** This contains all of the material – proposals, plans and general information – that supports your projects. (Don't confuse this with the listing of projects and project tasks within your Project Catalog.)

- **Trash:** This is self-explanatory. All the inputs that have come your way, but have no relevance to you, fall under this heading. For example, promotional mailers, unread newsletters, emails relating to other departments, and so on.
- **Reference:** This contains information that you want to keep for a variety of reasons. This information is not actionable, but you might need to refer to it someday. The trick here is to judge how much reference material you want to keep. It shouldn't be too much or too little. Don't just push information that you're undecided upon into the reference section – this just becomes clutter. Whenever you're undecided, just remember the maxim from efficiency expert Edwin Bliss: "When in doubt, throw it out!"
- **Someday/Maybe:** This contains material that you feel you might want to take action on someday. These are not essential items, yet they are things that you would like to add to your Action Program at some point in the future.

We'll look at how to organize this information later in this section.

Once you master the skills and habits of the Next Action Organization System, you'll find yourself regaining control of your time. You'll find more time for yourself, because you'll know just where everything is, and when you need to take action.

And, you'll clear valuable mind space, because you'll be able remove distractions, and allot alternate, physical homes to the clutter that you carry in your head. This is important, because there is only so much information that any of us can keep in our minds at any one time (our "attentional capacity"). Attention devoted to remembering diverse mental notes is attention that you cannot focus on the task at hand. By writing these mental notes down, you'll improve your concentration, your focus, and your effectiveness.

Usually, when you haven't decided where an item belongs, or what you want to do with it, you tend to carry it in your head. Worse still, it keeps popping up at odd, unrelated times to distract you. For example, you're brainstorming about the new product launch, but your mind keeps sending out distracting little reminders about that client you need to call, the birthday card that you need to send, and the report that you need to file.

However, once you have the Next Action Organization System in place to collect, process, and track things, your mind relaxes. It lets go of the low-level job of hanging on to information, and you can use the space freed to concentrate on other, higher-value tasks.

4.2. Introducing the Tools

Now, let's run though the techniques and support systems that will help you implement all four stages of this organization system effectively.

In the last module, we asked you to collect, process, and organize the things that were accumulating in your life, in order to prepare your Action Program. We now introduce you to the Input Processor tool. This complements the Action Program, and helps you assign a home to all the inputs – actionable or not – that enter your life.

We also provide you with tools to manage email overload, and we look at effective physical organization of your workspace. These are important for productivity, but are often overlooked.

4.2.1. The Input Processor – Handling all Inputs Effectively

The Input Processor is a quick, effective tool that you can use to decide how to process all inputs. Inputs are anything new that comes to your attention – letters, emails, useful information, requests from your boss or from your clients, ideas for new products, and so on.

You can use the Input Processor tool to decide quickly what you're going to do with the input, and to manage it in a consistent and efficient way. Where you need to take action, it helps you take the action, delegate it, or schedule it with certainty of follow-up. And, it helps you store it in the right place, for quick future recall.

By using the Input Processor, you adopt a consistent and efficient organizational approach that helps you stay completely on top of the inputs that you receive.

This means that you stay totally in control, however complex your job. It helps you to be totally reliable in meeting your commitments.

Managing Files Effectively

Before you work through the Input Processor tool, you'll first need to set up a physical system to deal with paperwork and your files.

For this you will need:

- **A wastebasket** and/or recycling bin.
- **A shredder** (or access to secure document disposal) for destruction of confidential documents.
- **Reference Files:** The way that you organize your reference files often depends on your job. For example, if you work in HR, you may need physical reference files for individual members of staff. If you work in account management, it may be more appropriate to scan all paper documents and then save these with your electronic files. Or, you might need to use both of these approaches.

  If you use a physical filing system, you may also benefit from another, alphabetically-organized filing system. This can handle reference material that doesn't fit in with your main filing scheme.

  And remember to keep files secure where necessary, and to back-up regularly.
- **Project Files:** When you're managing several projects, or when you need to store related files, then it is worth setting up project files.

  A useful way of arranging these is to number your projects sequentially, and to store information in a filing system with files arranged in numerical order. (This works for both physical and electronic files.)

  Then, by noting the project number next to the project details in your Action Program's Project Catalog, you know where to look instantly when you need information on that project.

  Note: if your job mainly involves project management, you may find that you want to use the same system for both your reference files and your project files.
- **A Calendar:** This is for directly recording day-specific and time-specific actions. This calendar could be the one sitting on your desk, the one on your smartphone, or the ones included in your productivity apps or software, for example.

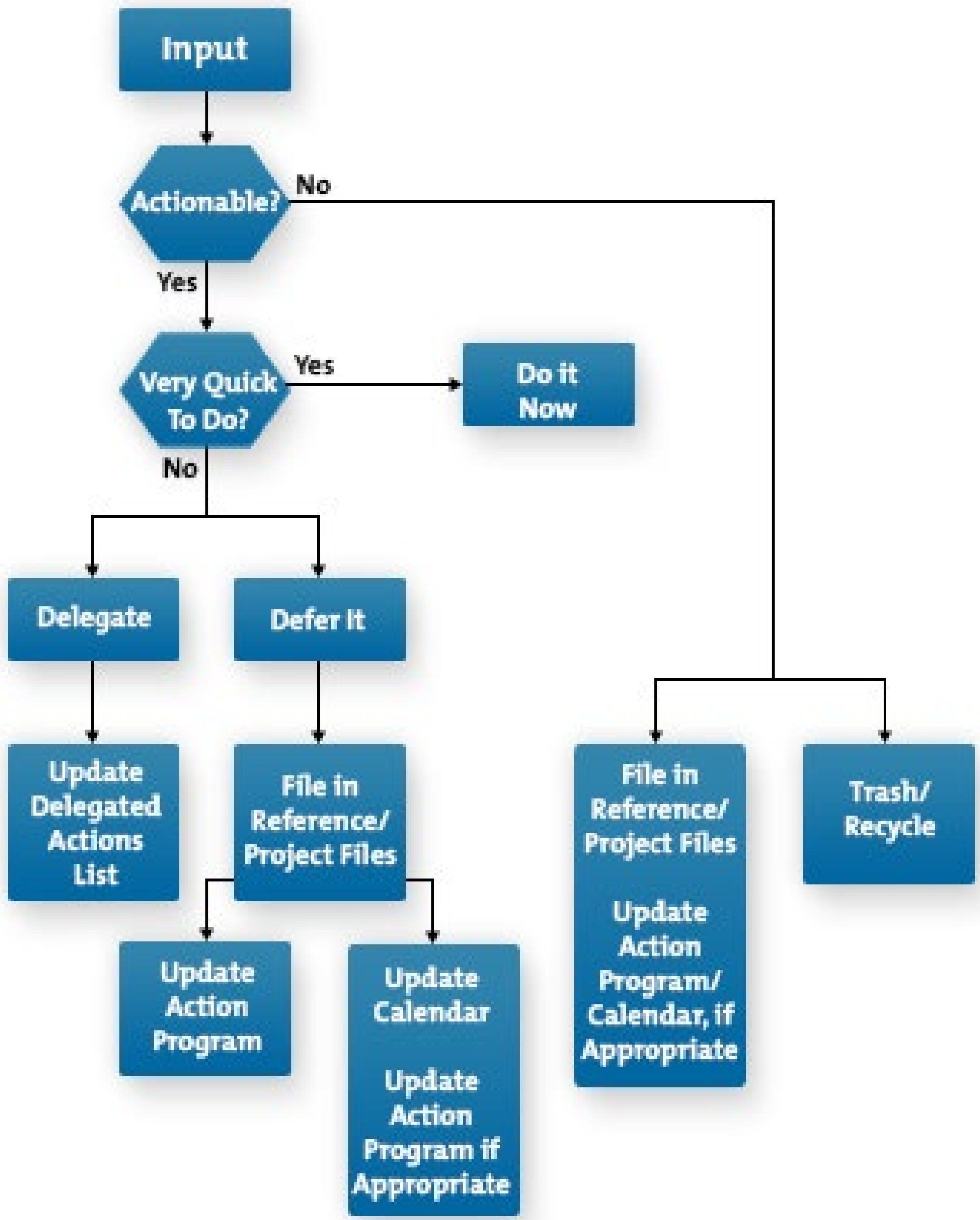
If you want, you could sub-group the calendar actions in two categories – personal and professional.

You may find it useful to note the location of documents that you'll need for specific tasks in your calendar. (Some apps and software allow you to attach electronic documents and URLs to your calendar entries.)

Using the Input Processor Tool

Once you've set things up, you're ready to use the Input Processor tool. This is shown in the flowchart below.

When you receive an input, refer to the flowchart, and process the input appropriately.



The steps shown in the flowchart are listed below:

Will I Act on This?

Inputs that are not actionable fall into three categories: "Trash," "Someday/Maybe," and "Reference." Treat them in the following ways:

- **Trash:** This is material that has no ongoing importance. Delete it, throw it away, or shred it if it's confidential.
- **Someday/Maybe:** These are inputs that aren't immediately important, but that you may want to act on at some point in the future. If these are possible projects that you could run, put them at the bottom of the list of projects in your Action Program's Project Catalog.

  File the other inputs, and schedule a reminder for when you want to review each input.
- **Reference Files:** Store information that is genuinely useful as reference material, as appropriate.

For actionable inputs, we move onto the next stage of the process.

Can the Input be Actioned Quickly?

If you can process the input very quickly, then don't waste any time organizing it: do it right away.

Delegate or Defer

If you cannot action it straight away, then either **delegate it**, or **defer it**.

Here, you need to decide whether the input is part of an existing project, or whether it initiates a new project.

First, check to see whether the project exists in your Project Catalog. If it does, update your Action Program's Project Catalog and project files appropriately.

If the input relates to a new project, create a new, consecutively numbered file or folder for the project, and make a new entry for it (with the project number) on your Project Catalog.

When you delegate an input, make an appropriate entry on your Action Program's Delegated Actions List, and monitor it on the basis you have agreed. (We look at delegation in detail in module 6).

When you defer an action, you need to decide whether you're going to carry out the action on a particular date, or whether you'll do it when you're able to. For date-specific actions, update your calendar as required.

By following this approach, you should always know exactly where information is. Using the Action Program, the Next Action Organization System, and the Input Processor tool together, you should always be well-organized and efficient.

Tip 1:

Sometimes it's difficult to manage both physical and electronic filing systems at the same time. In an ideal world, we would use one or the other exclusively. It takes time to scan in physical information, just as it does to print out and file digital information.

The best way forward depends partly on how you receive the majority of your inputs, and partly on your preference.

If you receive almost all of your information on paper, it probably makes sense to maintain paper files, and print off and file digital information when it arrives.

If you receive the vast majority of your information digitally, then scan in paper documents, and store them digitally. (If you have a smartphone or tablet, consider getting a scanning app – these are surprisingly effective!)

Tip 2:

A huge hidden benefit of these approaches is that, because the system is logical, consistent and clearly documented, you should find it easy to work with a Personal Assistant (PA) when this becomes appropriate.

Your PA should be able to manage large parts of this process for you, and will be able to deal with many of the tasks on your Action Program for you. This will hugely increase your productivity.

4.2.2. Email Management

In today's workplace, the vast majority of inputs often arrive by email. Because of this, we're faced with a situation where we find it difficult to manage and monitor the large volume of email that we receive.

Here are some tips for combating email overload:

- Don't become chained to your email. Set up a regular time to check and respond to mail. If you keep checking email, you won't get much done because of the distraction of looking at it. You could either turn off notifications, or even close down your email program completely. (Remember, however, that this approach won't be suitable in all roles.)
- If you receive large amounts of email you could use different folders. These allow you to filter incoming emails into appropriate folders, depending on content and importance. This allows you to deal with high priority email (for example, customer service queries) as quickly as possible, while dealing with lower priority email when you have time. It also allows you to batch up particular types of emails, so that you can deal with them in one quick, efficient process.
- If you're receiving a lot of unwanted emails from non-spam sources, ask to be removed from the relevant mailing lists. You could send out a message to all your acquaintances asking them not to send you alerts, or unimportant meeting minutes, for example. Also, review the newsletters you receive, and unsubscribe to the ones you no longer want. If this

doesn't work, set up filters in your email program so that any unimportant email is deleted or archived in specific folders as soon as it arrives.

- Many email programs are very effective at stopping email spam from reaching your inbox. If spam is a major problem, you can use junk mail filters to cut down on it. However, the problem with many of these is with "false positives" (for instance, with legitimate emails that are misclassified as spam), so be cautious here.
- If you receive a large volume of email, you might want to set up a separate email address that you use only for important communications. Or, alternately, get a separate email address (perhaps a free email account such as those available from Google or Microsoft), for all services that require registration.

Also, invest in good anti-virus software, and keep it updated, either manually, or by setting it to auto-update.

Remember, email is just another input - the Input Processor tool works here too!

4.2.3. Organizing Your Workspace

Organizing your workspace is a key part of clearing the clutter. It's also important for your effectiveness and productivity.

Try these tips for getting your workspace into shape:

- Move your workspace near to the people and resources you need to work with, so that you have easy access to them. Not only is this more efficient, but you'll often find that you work more productively next to these people.
- Make sure that you have easy access to your files, so that you can ideally file or retrieve information without leaving your chair. This helps you to work faster, and it makes it easy to keep your systems up-to-date. It also means that you keep unnecessary paperwork off your desk, which gives you space to work.
- Arrange your workspace so that the things you use frequently (such as your smartphone and computer) are close to hand, and rarely used items are stored away. Put things in drawers whenever you can.
- Make sure that you use files, partitions, in-trays, and so on, to stay organized.
- If you need more workspace, extend your desk or buy a credenza and hutch. This will give you plenty of working space, and additional storage.
- One thing you need to decide for yourself is whether to keep a "clear desk" or not.

  This often depends on what you do. For example, if you deal with many different things during the day, then it often makes sense to file things away as you complete them, so that you have space to work on the next task. However, if you work on the same project for several days, then it clearly wastes time if you put things away at the end of one day and pull them out again at the start of the next. Adopt the approach that's most relevant to your work.

  Obviously, if you deal with a lot of confidential information in a public area, then you must secure this whenever you're not around.

4.3. Applying This to Your Life

Now it's time to get down to sorting out the clutter.

First, take inventory of your existing state. If you haven't already prepared the Action Program from the last chapter, do it now. Set aside an hour every day, for at least a week, or dedicate an entire weekend, to collecting, processing, and listing the accumulated inputs in your life.

Next, set up the filing system needed to support your Next Action Organization System; and run all of your inputs through the Input Processor tool to decide how to process them. Then, process them appropriately.

Once your accumulated mess is clear, you'll have to ensure that you set aside at least some time every day to keep your organization system clean, clear, and complete. Usually about 10 minutes every day is sufficient for organizing yourself. Block this time out on your schedule – put this time in your calendar like you would any other work commitment, and respect it just the same!

Then, review your use of email, and set up your email system properly, so that you can process it efficiently.

Finally, organize your workspace for maximum effectiveness.

5. Beating the Blues: Conquering the Barriers to Success

Interest:	It isn't always easy to translate a plan into action. There are several barriers to scheduling that can hold you back. These barriers can be external – such as interruptions – or internal – such as perfectionism and procrastination. This module gives you techniques for dealing with these time traps.
Need:	The whole point of making a plan is that you use it. If you let these barriers to success sidetrack you, you'll struggle to accomplish your plans. Use the techniques outlined here to beat the time wasters – interruptions, procrastination, and perfectionism.
Timing:	1.5 hours.
Range:	We look at several tools that help you overcome the barriers to success.
Objective:	The objective of this module is to empower you to: • Minimize interruptions. • Conquer procrastination. • Overcome perfectionism.

Never let yesterday use up today.

– Richard H. Nelson, American actor.

By now, you can confidently say that you've taken some giant steps towards winning back control of your time. You've identified your life priorities, marked out plans and schedules to achieve them, and have even organized your daily life to support your mission.

Now comes the crunch time; putting these plans into action. Usually, the transition from planning to action happens smoothly, because good plans have a way of motivating you to accomplish them. Yet, there are times when you have a great plan, but you're just not able to move ahead on it. Your schedule tells you what to do, yet you can't do it. Why? What holds you back? How can you swing back into action?

5.1. Introduction

This module provides the answers to these important questions. It looks at the barriers that block your efforts to implement your schedule and your plans, and it gives you concrete strategies for overcoming them.

First, what holds you back from implementing your plans? Sometimes, it's external factors that keep intruding on the space that you've reserved for your plan or your schedule.

Maybe you've just sat down at your desk and are creating a Trigger List for the inventory exercise (which we described in a previous module). Then, your colleague walks in. She wants your opinion on her project, so you set aside your Trigger List and start helping her. Half an hour flies by, and it's time for your meeting with your client. You rush off and the Trigger List lies on your desk unfinished.

Other times it's your own self – your fears and your worries – that don't let you proceed according to your plans or your schedule.

These barriers to scheduling can be classified into three areas:

- Interruption.
- Perfectionism.
- Procrastination.

Let's consider interruptions. If you're good at what you do, everyone wants a bit of your time. People may compete for your time and attention with urgent requests, so, often, your own agenda gets buried under their interruptions.

If you want to reclaim control, you need to **minimize interruptions**. Otherwise, before you know it, you won't have any time left to meet your own goals. This module coaches you in skills required to deal with interruptions.

Perfectionism, by contrast, is a subtler barrier. You're doing your job well, it's just that you don't realize when it's finished, and you always want to make more changes. The brightest people suffer the most because of perfectionism, because they often think that they can do better.

For instance, you're writing a report. You think of a better way to structure it, and a better way, and a better way. Before you know it, the deadline is upon you, and the report still isn't finished.

The only way to overcome perfectionism is to realize when good is good enough. The techniques outlined in this module propel you towards this realization.

Next, the easiest trap to fall into: **procrastination**.

You reach the office at 8 a.m. You have your daily schedule right in front of you, and the first task is to prepare a progress report on the new product launch. The product hasn't done as well as you thought it would, and you don't feel very inspired. What will the boss say when she reads the low sales figures?

You push papers around and look for information that you might need. An hour flies by. If you had stayed on track, according to your schedule, by now you would have not only prepared the report, but also finished replying to your emails. The late start has a cascading effect. To get back some sense of control, you focus on the low-priority (but easy-to-do) activities that you're more comfortable with.

However, by the end of the day, you feel frustrated. You've been working all day, but haven't achieved much. You waste further time and energy agonizing: "Why couldn't I have stayed on schedule?"

Next day when you reach the office, preparation of the same progress report stares you in your face. You remember yesterday's scenario, and this reinforces your negative feelings. You try to push the report further back in your mind. But, it keeps irritating you, and then soon it's time for a reality check. Your boss wants the report the very next day. You stay up all night preparing the report, and, as a result, it isn't your best work.

Why do we procrastinate like this? There are many reasons why we put off doing a task. For example:

- We find it overwhelming – it seems too complex or too vast.
- We feel that we're not equipped to deal with it.
- It just seems boring.
- We think it's unpleasant.
- We just don't want to do it.

Often, these factors overlap, and the result is the same. You lose time and energy, you don't achieve anything, and you end up feeling like a failure. This steals even more time and energy from your ability to move on to your next task.

The best way to handle the situation is to accept that procrastination is a fact of life. It happens – don't waste more time punishing yourself. Instead, get down to the task, and try to tackle the root cause that led to the initial procrastination.

5.2. Introducing the Tools

So far, we have established that the best way to move forward on your plans and accomplish your goals is to:

- Minimize interruptions.
- Overcome perfectionism.
- Conquer procrastination.

Now, we provide you with tools to achieve these targets.

The first six tools will help you to minimize interruptions. They help you to tackle interruptions that hold you back. Next is the Completion Deadline tool; a practical way to beat perfectionism. The last part of this module contains another set of six tools – all geared to help you conquer procrastination.

5.2.1. The Interrupters Log – Know the "Time Bandits"

Interruptions and low-level crises are a part of everyone's normal day-to-day life. The problem comes when these interruptions and crises start stealing your time and push you off schedule.

If interruptions have reached the stage that they have started hijacking your agenda, it is time to start keeping tabs on the "time bandits." Keep a log of all telephone calls, visitors, and interruptions for at least a week.

You may find the log worksheet on page 91 useful for this. Print off, say, 10 copies, staple them together, and use this as your Interrupters Log.

Once you have the log results in front of you, analyze who the time-snatchers are, and what they wanted. Consider whether the interruptions were valid or not. If you feel that a large chunk of the interruptions are valid, you might want to build time for them into your schedule; if not, you need to find a way to block them out.

Tip 1:

Dealing with interruptions is part of the job for many managers, and some studies have shown that they may only get as little as six minutes, on average, between interruptions. If you're a manager, be careful how you cut down on interruptions. Make sure that you're available for your team, and that you can act early enough to "nip problems in the bud."

Your main job as a manager is to manage people. If you're also trying to deliver a lot of work at the same time, then this compromises your effectiveness. This is where you need to delegate work, or turn it away, where you can, so that you have time to do your real job.

Tip 2:

While some people exaggerate the importance of their projects, some "interruptions" may actually be genuine emergencies that need immediate, focused activity. Similarly, interruptions can also be opportunities that will advance you more quickly towards your goals, if you address them.

While you should aim to stick to your schedule when possible, don't be excessively rigid with it. Make sure that you deal with emergencies when they need to be dealt with, and take intelligent advantage of opportunities that come up.

5.2.2. Availability Time – Turn Interruptions Into Scheduled Activities

Your Interrupter's Log helps you decide whether an interruption is valid or not. If you feel that a type of interruption is justified, you should build time for it into your schedule. That way, you will be dealing with it on your own terms, in time that you've set aside.

Once you decide that regular interruptions are valid, go ahead and schedule them. Earmark a special slot, "Availability Time," in your daily plan to deal with these interruptions. This way, the interruptions no longer remain interruptions. They are defined tasks, specifically catered for in your schedule.

Yes, you might have to remove a few things from your schedule to create Availability Time. But, since you've taken a conscious decision that the interruptions are important and need to be addressed, you shouldn't feel guilty about any rescheduling. Being flexible and open to change is an essential quality of a good time manager.

If an interruption is inevitable, schedule it. You get to tackle it in your own time, at your own pace.

5.2.3. Telephone Techniques – Don't Get Hung up on the Phone

The telephone exists to help you, not interrupt you. You don't have to leave whatever you're doing to answer the phone every time it rings. A little technology, and some basic discipline, can go a long way to helping you escape telephone tyranny.

If you've blocked out time for a task that requires intense concentration, use voicemail or an answering service to screen your calls. If it's an emergency, take the call. Otherwise, get back to the caller (who would have left their name and number) later, at your convenience.

Also, get in the habit of scheduling a specific time for calls. Take the initiative in contacting the other party. This way you make the call at your convenience, according to your schedule. Interruptions get minimized automatically.

Then practice the art of short phone calls. Get to the point, quickly, and be clear and concise. Before dialing, know what you plan to say. Listen attentively, and keep a pen and paper handy.

The moral: you don't always have to answer the phone immediately. The call can wait if you're busy. And, keep it short!

5.2.4. Positive Delay

It's tempting to react to interruptions instantly. The people who interrupt you have a way of making you feel that their requests are very urgent. But it's important to realize that most crises really aren't crises. A little delay in reacting to a request often goes a long way in helping to assess it accurately.

When interrupters come to you with "urgent" demands, take a little time before taking any action, if you can. In most cases, you can safely postpone your response to a request for at least a few minutes, if not longer. Use this time to run the request through the Input Processor detailed in module 4. You'll be able to take on the problem in action mode, rather than reaction mode.

So, when you're interrupted, don't get rushed into decisions. Delay can be positive, if you use it to assess the situation clearly.

5.2.5. The "No" Word – Avoid and Win

There just isn't time to do everything that everyone wants. You should learn to say "No," at least to some of the requests that come your way. Saying "No" isn't easy, but using this word promptly, properly, and politely, can save you a lot of time and frustration.

So, when do you say "No" to a request? You can often politely say "No" when you feel that the task:

- Is not important.
- Can be done later.
- Can be done by someone else.
- Is something you simply don't want to do.

It makes sense to prioritize interruptions. Consider who the person interrupting you is, and what's being asked of you. If you can, delegate or ignore the task. If it's important, check your schedule, and see if you can manage to make some time. If both are very important, then try to fit in the request.

Most interrupters tend to feel that you, and only you, must take care of their request right away. You need to decide whether the request can wait for your attention, or if someone else could handle it better. Sometimes, saying "No" is a useful option.

Admittedly, this isn't easy. But the more you practice saying it, the easier it will become. Initially, rehearse a few "No" lines on your own. Go through the interrupters log, and identify regular culprits. Decide how you're going to refuse to take on their next request. Rehearse the rejection in front of a mirror, or role play with a friend. And, when confronted with the situation, take a deep breath and say "No."

Remember, you don't have to be rude when saying "No." You can refuse a request gracefully and courteously. Ultimately, it's your time – you decide how to spend it. (See our article on "Yes" to the Person, "No" to the Task for more on this.)

5.2.6. Negotiation – Give a Little, Gain a Little

What do you do if the interrupter is someone important to you – your partner, your boss, your child, your parent, or your best friend – and you don't feel that you can out-and-out say "No?" Try negotiating.

Look at the other person's request: how important is it to her? How unimportant is it to you? How much time will it take? Does it push you off schedule? Is this a pattern? Are you being reasonable?

Now, what happens if you feel that the other person's request is a priority, but yet you don't want to take it on? Often, you can satisfy people without completely sacrificing your own priorities if you look for compromises. Another solution to conflicting priorities is discussion – not argument. This helps you get a better understanding of each other's situation.

If you're having trouble with this, try to do a little preparation so that you can explain your position better. And, remember, stay calm and composed.

What if you cannot arrive at a compromise? Then one person gives way, and the other person tries to compensate in some other way to the person who has sacrificed their priority.

Remember, a major reason that people get promoted is that they have learned to deal with difficult situations in a calm, rational, and clear-headed way. You may want to impress your boss by being flexible and hardworking, but your boss should know that there is only so much that you can take on before other work suffers. Also, if you're good at what you do, then he or she won't want to lose you to overwork and burnout.

If you're overloaded, say so. If you can't do something, agree what you can do or what else you can drop.

Example:

Rose had a workaholic boss who was constantly pushing her beyond her limits. Before she completed any task, he would assign her a new one. Tired of being pulled in different directions, she decided to take a stand.

She worked through a few lines at home. Now, when she feels that her boss is being unreasonable, she has a set of stock responses to help her negotiate her way through the situation:

- "Thanks for giving me this opportunity. I want to do this job. Can it wait a little because I currently have X, Y, and Z on my plate?"

- "I am so over-committed right now that I will not be able to do this job full justice."
- "I want to handle this assignment, but I will have to drop X project to devote proper attention to it. What would you like me to focus on, X or this new assignment? Which of them can wait?"
- "That sounds interesting – I'd like to do it. Can we look at my work schedule and decide which jobs are most important to you? I will work on them in that priority and we'll get a realistic idea of what can be accomplished and by when."

Use negotiation skills to find acceptable compromises, so that both parties end up in a sensible situation.

5.2.7. Completion Deadlines – Know When Good is Good Enough

Overcoming perfectionism means learning when to let go of a task. To put a task in perspective, step back for a moment, and ask yourself how much difference a little more effort is going to make with it. Will continuing with the job force you to take time away from another important activity?

Usually, the second question is the most effective for preventing tasks from expanding unnecessarily. Identify the tasks that you tend to linger on, and then set clear deadlines. Schedule other tasks right after these tasks.

To illustrate the point, let's look at the example of Lara. Lara and her husband love socializing and having people over. Lara's problem was that she was finding it increasingly difficult to enjoy her own parties. She spent so much time planning and arranging them, that she was too tired to have a good time by the end of it.

Lara's husband solved her problem. On the day of the party, he would insist that she stop whatever she was doing by 5 p.m., take a shower, then come out for a walk with him. Initially, she found it difficult. She hadn't taken care of so many details yet, she would argue. But gradually, she began to relax. The details were less important than having a good time.

If you find it difficult to let go of a task, like Lara, schedule another task right after it, so that you have a deadline to work to.

Also, be aware of the value of your time (see the next tool). If the value of the task that you're working on is huge, relative to the time you've put in, or if there will be serious negative consequences if things go wrong, then you may be justified in putting in a lot of work to bring it to a successful conclusion.

However, if the value is small, then minimize your effort, or avoid the job altogether.

5.2.8. Time Valuation – Measure Time in Tangible, Monetary Terms

This tool teaches you how to attach a finite, tangible, monetary value to your time. Once you know the value of your time, you will tend to use it more effectively. Whether interruptions, procrastination, or perfectionism hold you back, chances are that knowing just how much every wasted minute costs you will push you to blast through the barrier.

If you're employed by someone else, you need to understand how much your employer is paying for your time, and how much profit he or she expects to make from you. If you're working for yourself, you should have an idea of how much income you want to bring in after tax. By working these figures back to an hourly rate, this gives you an idea of the value of your time.

From this, you should be able to tell what tasks are worthwhile, and which give a poor return, once you know the cost of your time.

Calculating the Value of Your Time

If you are an employee and you don't have a charge-out rate, estimate the annual value of your time using the table below. (We show you on how to estimate these figures, if you can't get hold of them, below.)

	Your salary:	**$**
Add	**Your benefits:**	**$**
Add	**Employer's payroll tax:**	**$**
Add	**A contribution of rent, light, heat, equipment, and so on:**	**$**
Add	**A contribution for overheads and supporting services:**	**$**
Add	**Profit expected:**	**$**
Total:		**$**

These figures can be difficult to get a hold of. Use the following as a guide:

- **Your salary and benefits**: if you don't already know this, the information will often be shown on, for example, end-of-year tax statements.
- **Employer's payroll tax**: this is dependent on the country you live in. Your human resources or accounting department may be able to tell you this.
- **Contribution for rent, equipment, heat, light, and so on**: it is difficult to get to this figure unless you can read the accounts of your organization. With this in mind, you can use a value of 10 percent of your salary and benefits as an estimate.
- **Overheads**: again, this information is difficult to get unless you can read your organization's accounts. Use a value of 40 percent of your salary and benefits as an estimate for this.
- **Profit Expected**: in reality, this will depend on the sector you're in. Again, in the absence of reliable figures, use a value of 50 percent of your salary and benefits as the profit you should bring in. This is a good value for a company that sells people's time. Other businesses may expect greater profit from your activity.

Example:

An HR Manager earns a salary of $85,000 per year, with an additional $25,000 of benefits. The country she works in has a payroll tax of 12 percent.

The **annual value of time** can be estimated as follows:

	Your salary:	**$85,000**
Add	**Your benefits:**	**$25,000**
Add	**Employer's payroll tax ($85,000 x 12 percent):**	**$10,200**
Add	**A contribution of rent, light, heat, equipment, etc ($85,000 x 10 percent):**	**$8,500**
Add	**A contribution for overheads and supporting services ($85,000 x 40 percent):**	**$34,000**
Add	**Profit expected ($85,000 x 50 percent):**	**$42,500**
Total:		**$205,200**

Next, calculate the number of working days in a year as follows:

	Total Possible Working Days	
Deduct	**Holidays:**	
Deduct	**Public Holidays:**	
Deduct	**Sickness, Training, Etc.**	
Total:		

Example:

Again, as an example, if the HR Manager has 10 days holiday each year, and lives in a country that has 5 public holidays, then the number of working days is:

	Total Possible Working Days	**260**
Deduct	**Holidays:**	**10**
Deduct	**Public Holidays:**	**5**
Deduct	**Sickness, Training, Etc.**	**4**
Total:		**241**

From these figures, she first calculates a daily rate, based on the annual value of time, divided by the number of working days:

$205,200 / 241 = $851 a day

She then calculates an hourly rate, based on the daily rate, divided by the number of working hours in a day:

$851 / 7.5 = $113 per hour

When you work through this calculation yourself, you may be quite surprised how high the value of your time is!

Tip:

If you're self-employed, you can use a similar approach to work out the hourly value of your time. However, make an appropriate allowance for the time that you will spend marketing and selling your services, and running your business.

Using This Figure

This figure shows you the average value you should aim to deliver with your time, if you want to be a satisfactory performer. If you want to be a high achiever in your organization, you should aim to offer substantially better value than this!

In looking at your workload, think about a rough value of each of the things that you do. Where possible, your aim should be to concentrate on tasks with a value greater than the calculated value of your time.

Then, eliminate or delegate tasks that have a lower value than your time, where you sensibly can.

5.2.9. The Swiss Cheese Technique – Creating "Instant Tasks"

We've already highlighted that one of the main reasons we procrastinate is because we find a task overwhelming – we feel that it's too complex or too time-consuming for us to handle. When this happens, time management expert, Alan Lakein, suggests that we use the "Swiss Cheese Technique."

He says not to push yourself into tackling the task head-on, as this can be a doomed effort. (If you could do it, you would have done it!) Instead, he suggests that you pick up a small task related to the main task, and do it. This small task, which Lakein calls an "instant task," doesn't need to be significant; it just has to be a task that can be done fast, and that is easy to do.

Follow this with another task, and another task, and another task. This is like "poking holes in some cheese." The idea is that as the cheese gets filled with holes, you will get more and more involved with the project. Soon, you'll be so involved that you won't require the instant task to motivate yourself to get going. Also, there is a probability that the progress you've made on the instant tasks will motivate you to finish the entire project.

However, Lakein warns, "Don't try to bite the same hole out of the cheese twice. If you've tried an instant task and it didn't lead to involvement, the next step is to try another instant task right away. And remember: one hole doesn't make a piece of Swiss Cheese. It may take a number of instant tasks before you finally get involved with the big "A-1," and gather the momentum you need to stay with it."

You can use the same technique to tackle unpleasant tasks as well. For instance, imagine that you're delaying a project because you don't enjoy it. Try to find some activity related to the project that you can undertake in five minutes, easily. The idea is that, even though you dislike the task, you can spend five minutes on it. And most of us can stand five minutes of almost anything!

Then, give yourself permission to quit after five minutes. A series of five-minutes teasers might make you realize that the task isn't that bad.

Yes, the five-minute chunks are not enough to get the job done. But they'll lead you to explore various aspects of it. And, hopefully, some aspect will engage you enough to push the procrastination out, so that you can actually finish the job.

Example:

Jason and Nina's investment portfolio was in a big mess, and they'd lost track of their investments. Which bond was maturing when? Were all the stocks that they had bought transferred in their name, and had they sent their shares for conversion after the merger?

The idea of sorting through the mess was scary, and they weren't even quite sure where to start. And, as things accumulated, the mess became even worse. Finally, Nina decided to take the lead.

The first and easiest task seemed to be making a list of all the stocks they owned. This wouldn't take long, and wouldn't need much effort. Once Nina had the list, the next logical step was to see what their value was.

The valuation made Nina realize that they could make good money out of their investment. Of course, on the face of it, Jason and Nina knew all along that stocks could fetch them money, but it was just a general premise. The evaluation process put a whole new spin on the game, and Nina became much more motivated. She encouraged Jason to help, and, gradually, they got things back in order.

If a project seems overwhelming or unpleasant, identify some instant tasks associated with it that you can use to get involved with it. These will help you make a start on the project, and, with a little luck, they'll give you enough momentum to carry you forward to its completion.

5.2.10. Baby Steps – Break a Project Into Bite-Sized Action Pieces

The Baby Steps tool is closely related to the Swiss Cheese technique. This tool helps make an overwhelming task manageable, by breaking it down into a series of bite-sized tasks.

The tool requires very detailed planning. With it, you structure your project as a chain of small, specific steps. You then focus on one step at a time, and you always have the next step ready.

You'll also need to plot your project on a calendar. Start from the ending date (the deadline for completing your goal), and work back to the present, plotting the smaller tasks and activities that you'll need to do.

You could set up a series of small rewards for accomplishing each step. If you do, you'll find that the project automatically becomes more manageable. You feel in control because, instead of focusing on the entire "overwhelming" tasks, you're dealing with simpler, more achievable "sub-tasks."

5.2.11. Outcome Focusing – Assess Benefits Versus Unpleasantness

Often, you procrastinate because, frankly, you just don't like the task. When this happens, delegate it or hire someone to do it, if possible. If you can't do this, and you're stuck with the job, then roll up your sleeves, and get ready to tame the procrastination beast.

Earlier, we advocated using the Swiss Cheese Technique to get involved with a project. But what if you've tried this, and you're still not able to get procrastination under control?

Then we suggest that you take a long, hard look at the consequences of not doing the job. Evaluate what you stand to lose if you delay it, or if you just don't do it, and then assess whether you're willing to take the consequences.

Seeing the dentist for the annual checkup, asking the boss for a pay raise, meeting your daughter's teacher to discuss her bad grades, filing your tax returns – these are all typical examples of important, but unpleasant, jobs that most of us put off. You include them when you plan, and you even attach a high priority to them. Yet, when the time comes to follow through, you hastily turn to some other activity instead.

So how do you escape this trap?

The next time that you decide to turn away from doing an unpleasant task, pause, and take some time out for reflection. Then, instead of beating a hasty retreat, force yourself to take a conscious, deliberate decision.

Admit that you're procrastinating. Ask yourself, "Why am I doing so?" Is it because the task is unpleasant? If yes, accept that the alternate job you're doing is just an escape route to avoid doing the task that you actually need to do. Acknowledge that the alternate task might give you some value, but that it's still not the best use of your time. In fact, it's a comparative waste of time.

Focus on the reason that you attached a high priority to this job. If the outcome is not incentive enough, attach more rewards to the project to counterbalance the unpleasantness. Stressing the benefits will coax you along.

Instead of taking an easy decision to avoid an unpleasant job, recognize the greater unpleasantness that results from delay.

All in all, whenever you're tempted to procrastinate because a job is unpleasant, slow down and force yourself to remember the positive outcome of the job. Also, recognize the negative consequences of not doing the job. These consequences will often create even more unpleasantness in your life!

5.2.12. Reinforcement Techniques – Motivate Yourself

So, you've set your goal, and even formulated a plan to achieve it. Now, you have to ensure that you stay on course. Positive reinforcement techniques come in very handy in such a situation. Again, whatever the barrier holding you back, these techniques will motivate you to stay on course and achieve your goal.

One technique is to link up with others who have similar priorities and goals. It's inspiring to know that others, too, share a similar vision. You get a forum to discuss ideas and achievement, and seeing others making progress jolts you into action. Your project becomes more fun.

Shaina had wanted to address her drinking habit for a while. But the idea of joining Alcoholics Anonymous felt a little cheesy. She didn't have a big problem, but she decided to give it a shot anyway, and she hadn't made much progress on her own.

Signing up with AA helped Shaina a lot. Talking to others made her realize that, even though her drinking wasn't out of control, she was heading down the wrong path. Hearing others' horror stories spurred Shaina to kick the bottle faster.

You could also make a commitment to someone. Get a significant other to be your watchdog. Report to him or her. When you know that you're accountable to someone you tend to move faster. You could even write out a formal contract with that significant person for closure on a crucial project.

Adam had an important history exam coming up. His problem was that he hated the subject and somehow always found excuses not to study. He decided to rope in Evan, his classmate, as his watchdog.

He gave Evan permission to question him on his preparations. Initially, when Evan used to ask Adam about studies, Adam would get irritated. But gradually, the pressure of being answerable started working. Adam was forced to study, and he did well in his exam.

Another good technique is to surround yourself with reinforcing statements. The power of positive suggestion is great.

Lee had been planning a holiday in Goa for a long time. But, somehow she just didn't get around to it. Last year, she decided to make it a priority mission. On her bulletin board, both at home and at office, she wrote "GO GOA" in capital letters.

She placed travel brochures in prominent positions on the coffee table. She bought a new bikini. She blocked out holiday dates in her calendar. And the trip to Goa finally did materialize.

Also, reward yourself! Break up your plan into bite-sized goals, and set up a series of small rewards for achieving these goals.

James liked the idea of playing golf. But he couldn't drag himself out of bed at 6 a.m. for coaching lessons. So, he made a pact with himself. If he managed to make it to the driving range four times a week, he would buy himself a golf accessory that week. Soon he had a cap, gloves, shoes, and so on.

These reinforcement techniques, such as joining groups, posting reminders, making commitments, and rewarding yourself, will help motivate you into achieving your goals!

5.2.13. Information Gathering – Get Prepared to Tackle a Project

Many times we find ourselves reluctant to start on a project because we don't know enough about it. The obvious starting point in such a case is to gather information on the subject you propose to take on. But, simultaneously, you have to be wary about not getting sucked into "the knowing-doing gap." This gap arises when we just keep collecting knowledge about a project, and never actually get around to doing it.

In this era of information overload, you probably won't require much advice on how to gather information. There are many sources of information available: websites, social media, blogs, magazines, dedicated groups, expert forums, and so on. Let's instead concentrate on the other end of the spectrum – the knowing-doing gap.

If we were to measure our level of actual performance against our level of knowledge, we may find that we tend to under-perform. We often over-know and under-do. This is normal, and as it should be. Yet, sometimes the lag in the transfer of knowledge to action becomes too much of a gap.

In "The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action," Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton say that this gap may be getting too big when you start thinking that:

- Knowing about something is sufficient for success.
- Talking about things (meetings, committees, reports, and so on) is action.
- Measuring things is action.
- Making a decision is the same as taking action.
- Planning is the same as action.

Although many jobs need these things, they shouldn't become ends in themselves.

If you're caught in such a situation, set a deadline for finishing information gathering and planning. Tell yourself that, ready or not, you'll start the project on a specific date. Mark the date and proceed as per your plan. You'll usually find that even though you thought you weren't prepared enough, actually you were.

5.3. Applying This to Your Life

We've given you knowledge about ways to blast through barriers to success in this module. Now's the time to get down to business and apply this knowledge!

- Check on the "Next Action" and "Project Catalog" lists in your Action Program. Identify the projects and activities that you're not making much progress with.

  Consider this: Are you behind on specific projects or categories? Or are you running behind schedule on almost everything?

- If you're generally running behind schedule, it could be because of interruptions. Remember, some interruptions will be part of your life. Your schedule needs to be flexible enough to accommodate some interruptions at least.

  If the interruptions are taking over your life, however, it's time to take action.

  Start maintaining an interrupters log. If the interruptions are valid, factor them into your schedule. Otherwise, minimize them using the tools provided in this module.

- If you're dragging behind on specific projects, spend some time analyzing the things that hold you back.

  Are you struggling with perfectionism? Do you find the project unpleasant? Is it overwhelming? And, does the project need to be done at all?

  If you decide that the project needs to be done, and done by you alone, get started. We've provided you with a whole set of tools to overcome perfectionism and beat procrastination.

- If you find yourself procrastinating, remind yourself that "time is money." Our "Costing Your Time" tool shows you just how much money. This reminder should spur you on!

6. Effective Delegation

Interest:	Delegation is a skill that you need to master to progress your career and life. There's a limit to the amount of work that you can do on your own. Delegation is a skill that empowers you to draw on the help of others to transcend this limit. If you're ambitious, your career will stall at a junior level unless you master the art of delegation. You need to be able to free yourself of the routine work that consumes your time and energy, so that you can focus on higher priority jobs.
Need:	Effective delegation means getting things done the right way, at the right time, by the right people. This module shows you how to master this art, and then employ it to save time and boost your productivity.
Timing:	2 hours.
Range:	We discuss: • The reluctance to delegate. • The benefits of effective delegation. • The reverse delegation trap. • Delegation criteria. • Selection of the right person to delegate to. • Defining the delegated task. • The importance of support and feedback.
Objective:	Delegation is one of the most important time management tools that you can learn. This module shows you how to delegate effectively. It teaches you to recognize the jobs you can delegate, and the people you can delegate them to. It also ensures that you learn the art of monitoring, so that the delegated jobs are successfully completed.

The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.

– Theodore Roosevelt, American President.

Delegation is the art of getting things done the right way, at the right time, by the right people. This is a vitally important time management skill.

Unfortunately, many people, including many managers, are not very good at delegating. Why are we so reluctant to redistribute our workload to others, even when our job requires us to do so? Run through this list of excuses, and think about the toll they may take on your time:

1. "No problem; I can manage this too."

This is the feeling that you can do it all yourself. This feeling generally stems from a need to feel indispensable, and a reluctance to seek help from others.

Since most people tend to exaggerate their own importance, they frequently fail to let go of what they're doing. But would their own importance not be considerably greater if their personal time was focused on the activities that they, alone, can do?

2. "It's quicker and easier if I do it myself."

Sometimes, people are so overwhelmed by their work that they prefer to do a job themselves, rather than taking the time to delegate to someone else (for example, explaining the task to the individual and then monitoring the progress).

What they often fail to understand is that, more often than not, it makes sense to invest time to save time. Investing a little time figuring out what you can delegate, finding someone to help, and coaching him or her can save you enormous amounts of time later.

A key question here is whether the task is a one-off job, or whether it must be repeated time and again. (Remember, though, that even one-off tasks can help team members develop.)

3. "They can't manage it."

This one comes from a lack of confidence in others. While sometimes the concern is justified, often it's not. A little time invested in training another person can pay off big dividends. You save time, you build your team members' skills and confidence, and you simultaneously gain your team's respect.

The other side of this is to question whether you have the right people on your team. If you do, then delegate to them. If you really don't, then you need to address this issue.

4. "I enjoy doing it."

Often you're so comfortable doing one particular type of task that you don't want to lose it, even when it's time to move on to different, higher-value tasks.

The danger with staying inside your "comfort zone" is that you don't stretch yourself to develop the new skills and capabilities you need to progress your career.

The toll is obvious. You're stuck doing low-priority work that someone else could do, when your focus should be on high pay-off jobs.

5. "I don't want to dump on others."

This one arises out of misguided benevolence. You think of delegation as giving someone else the "grunt work" and you feel guilty about it; therefore, you don't pass the work on.

First, you have to recognize that your time is important. Just because you don't want to be thought of as the big, bad boss, this doesn't mean that you should waste your time on routine work that others could do.

Second, work that's dull for you may be quite challenging for people with less experience.

Third, while it's great to enjoy work, people aren't paid to have fun – they're paid to get their jobs done. As a boss, you have the right to ask for this!

6.1. Introduction

This module shows you the way to rise above this swamp of excuses, which is essential if you want to achieve good time management.

If you have difficulty delegating, you may need to recognize that this is because you haven't overcome your own fears. For instance:

- Fear of not appearing busy.
- Fear of loss of authority, status, and control.
- Fear of inability to answer questions.

Unless you overcome these fears, you'll never be able to reap the full benefits of delegation.

Often, we're not able to let go because, consciously or subconsciously, we enjoy the adrenaline rush that comes with being stretched. It makes us feel important or indispensable. But consider – is this what you really want? What matters more – that you achieve better, faster results, or that you're an indispensable person?

Yes, if you don't delegate, you'll have the satisfaction of being the crisis manager for 1001 situations. You'll feel important when people turn to you for advice all of the time. Yet, the results you achieve won't be spectacular. You can only truly become effective if you start practicing delegation. This is because delegation:

- Helps you transcend your personal limits. You achieve leverage by harnessing the efforts of others, and, in the process, accomplish more than you could alone.
- Frees you to concentrate your time, energy, and talent on jobs where you can make a big impact.
- Allows you to seek additional expertise and skills whenever a job requires it.

If you're a manager, delegation is even more essential for you. Your job is to supervise your team members, not actually perform their tasks. If you find yourself performing rather than supervising their work, remember the following:

- Your team has more collective time, energy, and, in some cases, more knowledge for handling tasks than you do.
- Your team members should be closer to their work than you are, and should therefore be in a better position to handle their tasks.
- Taking on your subordinates' jobs will eat into your time. You won't be able to handle your work, or supervise work, if you get bogged down with doing their jobs.

If you still find yourself hesitating before delegating, remind yourself that indispensable people don't get promoted. Chances are, when you have groomed your successor, the company will find it easier to move you up.

Also, watch out for "reverse delegation." This is a problem peculiar to managers. Often, they find themselves caught in a situation where instead of delegating work to their employees, they're taking on employees' work.

It happens subtly. Your team member walks into the room. He says, "Boss, we have a problem." He describes the problem. You respond with: "I'll look into it." With this one statement you have taken on the burden of the problem.

You could have asked him what the solution to the problem might be, but you didn't. Maybe you were short on time, maybe you thought he was incompetent, or maybe you're in the habit of doing things yourself. Whatever the reason, your subordinate has passed the responsibility for the problem on to you.

As a manager, your work can be divided into four categories:

- **Boss-imposed** – these include the tasks that your boss sets for you.
- **System-imposed** – these are tasks imposed by the system. For instance, completing necessary forms, seeking approval, and so on. Much as we all dislike it, a certain amount of bureaucracy is essential.
- **Discretionary** – these are the tasks that you've decided to take on yourself. You find these tasks important because they fit with your work and life goals.
- **Subordinate-imposed** – these are the tasks delegated by your coworkers and subordinates.

Of the four categories, the discretionary tasks are the most important, because these are what you have **chosen** to do. Unfortunately, it's also the category that suffers the most in times of overload. You find it difficult to say no to others, so you cut down on your own discretionary time to finish their jobs.

Until you learn to guard your discretionary time, you will struggle to practice effective time management. In module 5, we showed you some ways to tackle interrupters. Now, we provide you with specific ways to hand other people's jobs back to them, so that you can get on with your own.

6.2. Introducing the Tools

While delegation is one of the most important time management skills, it's also one of the easiest to get wrong. Effective delegation saves you time, helps you develop your people, and gets the job done faster. Ineffective delegation, on the other hand, causes frustration, creates friction, confuses other people, and endangers the successful completion of the task itself.

Run through our tools to ensure that you delegate the right job, to the right person, at the right time.

6.2.1. Delegation Logs – Identifying Jobs That You Can Delegate

The purpose of this first delegation tool is to step back and look at all the tasks that you perform, or plan to perform. It then helps you evaluate where you can delegate these jobs. It works at two levels:

1. It helps you analyze if you're delegating effectively.
2. It helps you prepare delegation strategies for major projects.

If you're following the processes we introduced in modules 3 and 4, you should be delegating at least some of the jobs that come your way. But are you managing to delegate fully? Use this tool to find out.

Activity Delegation Log

Using the Activity Delegation Log template on page 92 as a guideline, list 12 activities that take from one hour to 12 hours of your time each week. (These really should be shown in the Action Program you created at the end of module 3.) Estimate the total time you spend each week for each activity. Then, decide whether you can delegate the activity:

- Fully.
- Partially.
- Not at all.

If you are not sure whether an activity can be delegated, use the following delegation criteria to decide.

Tasks that should be delegated include:

- Routine matters.
- Tasks that can be done better by others.
- Tasks that would benefit from others' specialist skills.
- Tasks that will develop team members.
- Tasks that will test team members.

Tasks that shouldn't be delegated include:

- Emergency tasks requiring your skill and judgment.
- Tasks requiring unofficial action.
- Matters that are exceptions to policies or procedures.
- Selection and development of your team.
- Tasks that involve monitoring, evaluating, and rewarding team members.
- Disciplinary matters.

Have you completed the template? Could you be delegating more? If so, then start using the criteria mentioned above to ensure that you filter out the tasks that can be delegated when they first come in.

Project Delegation Log

The second level application of this tool includes planning delegation strategies for major projects.

Review the Project Catalog section of your Action Program. Look at individual projects, and break them into specific tasks.

Using the delegation criteria mentioned above, decide which tasks only you can do. Then, determine the tasks that can be given to others on the team. Are certain items routine, such as monthly sales reports, budgeting, or activity reports? Someone else can handle those duties, so delegate them accordingly.

Tip:

The skills needed to schedule and manage complex projects are outside the scope of this course.

However, the Mind Tools Project Management section introduces you to useful skills for running mid-sized projects.

For large and very large projects, project management is a discipline and a profession in its own right. If you are responsible for large projects, you may benefit from bringing project or even program managers onto your team.

6.2.2. The Talent Scout – Identify the Right People for the Right Job

How do you decide which job to assign to which person in your team? While sometimes the answer is obvious, often it isn't.

These four guidelines will help you pick the right person for the right job:

1. Where possible, delegate the task to the lowest organizational level required for good performance.

   Tracy has a product launch coming up. Several people have to be called and invited. She can assign the responsibility to any of the four people on her team – Ryan, the research assistant; Sheila, the secretary; or Tina and Vicky, the marketing executives. It makes sense to assign the job to Sheila. She stands at the lowest organizational level, but she's fully qualified to handle the job. Tina, Ryan, and Vicky would be better employed doing other work.

2. Take the person's talents into account when assigning a job.

   A special presentation on the product's evolution is planned for the launch party. Ryan, the confident research assistant, is the obvious choice to take on the task.

3. Consider whether delegation can help an employee grow.

   Until now, Tracy only entrusted Ryan with data collection. While Ryan would do the research, she would prepare the presentation herself. But now she feels that Ryan is ready to prepare the presentation too. She wants him to develop his skills further.

4. Consider the workload of the person that you're assigning the task to. (Where necessary, you may need to renegotiate this.)

   The details of the launch party are yet to be coordinated. The job is beyond Sheila's scope. Tracy wants to assign it either to Tina or Vicky, but Vicky is busy with another project. Tina, on the other hand, is relatively free. Tracy decides to delegate the coordination job to Tina.

Having said all of this, you need to keep a sharp eye on the successful completion of the task. Particularly with urgent, important, and high-visibility jobs, you need to be able to delegate with confidence, and know that the task will be completed successfully.

Select team members with a track record of success and a proven capability for these jobs. Use lower-visibility and less urgent tasks to develop people's capabilities, and make sure that you give as many opportunities as possible for people to do this.

6.2.3. Task Definition – Delegating Fully and Effectively

People take better care of things that they own, than things that they don't. So, when you delegate a task, give the responsibility for the task specifically to the person that you're delegating it to. Highlight what you want the person to achieve; and give him or her a good chance to perform.

Make certain that the person to whom you're delegating understands:

- What the task is.
- Why it needs to be done.
- When you expect it to be complete.
- The specific goals you expect him or her to achieve.
- Whom he or she is responsible to.
- The extent of his or her authority to make decisions.
- What problems need to be referred back to you.
- What the progress reporting mechanisms are.
- The project checkpoints at which you'll review progress.
- The information and coaching support that you're willing to provide.
- What resources will be available.

If appropriate, ask the person to whom you're delegating to repeat your instructions, especially about key issues such as methods, checkpoints, and deadlines. Often there's a difference between what you say and what the other person understands!

You may find that for reasonably large tasks, the Delegation Worksheet on page 93 will help with this. The person to whom you're delegating should fill this in, not you.

Tip:

For the largest tasks, particularly those involving delegation to a team, you might want to use, or adapt, some of the ideas around team charters. Find out more about these in this article.

Ensure that both you, and the people you're delegating to, understand each other clearly. Provide a clear picture of the job to be done. Ask them to repeat back to you what they've understood, and ensure that this is what you meant. Spend extra time, if you need to, at this stage. You don't want things going wrong later, because you didn't take time to explain things clearly at the start.

6.2.4. Monitoring – Ensure That the Work Gets Done

Even after you have assigned the right job to the right person, you need to ensure that it gets done. You can do this by setting up an effective monitoring system, so that you can keep track of progress.

Don't be embarrassed about monitoring people – most people expect it. Some won't perform well without regular monitoring, while others will welcome your interest, and feel more secure if they know that they're working well.

Don't wait for the deadline before you start monitoring the task – schedule regular appointments with the people that you've delegated to. By holding quick meetings at designated checkpoints, you can ensure that everything is on track, and you can nip potential problems in the bud. (Keep a list of delegated assignments on your Action Program, and write down the checkpoints that you've agreed.)

Remember that part of your role is to coach your team members on issues that they are facing, or issues that may arise at the next stage of the task. Another part is to clear unnecessary obstacles, so that your people can perform effectively.

Be aware that you may need to make contingency plans in case things go wrong. For instance, when you first delegate work to someone, you might expect that he or she may not complete it to your liking. So, leave time for rework if necessary.

Encourage your team members to approach you if they feel that they have, or might, run into a problem on the task. This doesn't mean that you take on the task for them, but you can help them solve the problem.

Also, think about keeping closer tabs on the project if you feel that it's likely to run into problems.

Your dentist always tells you to come in for regular check-ups, whether or not you have problems with your teeth – if a problem is developing, she will be able to tackle it before it becomes serious. The same principle applies to monitoring delegated tasks. There's no point waiting for a problem to occur, and then taking corrective action – regular reviews can ward off problems before they actually happen.

6.2.5. Insuring – Keep the Mistakes Down

One of the primary risks in delegating is that the person you've delegated the job to might make a mistake. It's your job to make certain that mistakes aren't disastrous.

This is where you'll need to establish a control mechanism to ensure that mistakes stay within acceptable limits. Yet, simultaneously, you need to ensure that you're not breathing down the other person's neck.

The idea is to give as much space as possible to team members, so that they can do things the way they want to. At the same time, you need to step in if people would benefit from coaching and support. As always, it's a balance.

Your level of involvement should depend on the experience of the person you're delegating to – the more experienced and reliable they are, the more freedom you can give them. Also, the more critical the task, the more cautious you need to be about giving him or her a lot of freedom.

For instance, suppose a task is very sensitive. You feel that your team member is capable of dealing with it, yet, because of the sensitive nature of the task, you ask him to check with you before taking action. In this case, you could tell him to formulate a strategy for doing the task, run it past you, and then, if you give your approval, do it.

On the other hand, suppose that the task is routine, and you know that he can do it. You could ask your team member to go ahead, and then report to you about having completed it.

In their book, "The One Minute Manager Meets the Monkey," Kenneth Blanchard, Hal Burrows, and William Oncken Jr. highlight two basic levels of "insurance" that you can use when delegating:

1. **Recommend Then Act**
   Use this approach if there is a reasonable risk that the person to whom you have delegated the job might make an unaffordable mistake. In such a situation, ask the person to formulate a recommendation that requires your approval before proceeding any further. This provides protection when necessary, but at the cost of your time, and of people's freedom.
2. **Act Then Advise**
   Use this approach for tasks that you're sure your people can handle successfully on their own. Leave them to get on with it, but they should inform you about the action that they've taken, afterwards.

These two levels cover most situations.

6.2.6. Reverse Delegation Guards – Don't Take on Other People's Jobs

The tools we've outlined already will give you some automatic protection against reverse delegation. But where you still find yourself facing problems, you'll have to set the ground rules more clearly.

Clarify in your team members' minds that **they** work for **you**, not you for them. You're there to supervise your staff, not to do their jobs for them.

So, how can you do this?

- If someone approaches you with a problem, discuss it, but don't let your team member transfer the problem to you. Coach him or her in handling it, but don't take on the burden of handling it yourself.

  Remember Tracy, who had asked her research assistant, Ryan, to prepare the presentation? Well, he has run into problems. All of the material is there, but he's not quite sure what style he should use. He approaches Tracy for advice. Her first instinct is to say, "Leave it with me. I will put it together." It seems easier to do the job herself than explain things to Ryan. But then she remembers the other things that she has to do. So, she suggests that Ryan digs out copies of her old presentations, and then uses that style. This way, Tracy has helped Ryan solve his problem, without taking the initiative away from him.
- Get team members into the habit of coming up with possible solutions to their problems. They may not have the perfect solution, but if they come to you with suggestions, you might be able to help them better. (Sometimes, people can be so much in the habit of getting help that they don't really try to find their own solutions.)

  So, the next time a team member comes to you with a problem or opportunity, don't take on the burden of resolving the situation for him or her. Make it clear that you also expect team members to bring recommendations for what to do.

  Gradually, they will get into the habit of doing preparation work before approaching you, saving both their time and yours.
- Shake off your own tendency to procrastinate. Often, when the best solution to a situation is not obvious, it's tempting for you to protect

yourself by saying, "Let me think about it and I'll get back to you." You are then stuck with a problem, the project is put on hold, and your team member is unlikely to use his or her initiative.

Instead, take the time to think about the situation and talk through the "next moves" with him or her. You'll usually find that there are many next moves that your team member can take on.

You can use this technique even if you're not delegating a task entirely to someone else. Sometimes, it's beneficial to leave your team members with the "next move" of formulating a recommendation to help you handle the project. This not only improves the quality of whatever next move you make, but it also develops your people's skills.

The next moves habit benefits both you and your team. By defining next moves, you make a clear statement to your team members about what you expect, and from whom. This clarity boosts motivation.
The next moves approach also breaks a project into bite-sized pieces, and that, as we discussed in the last module, is a great way to tackle big projects.

- Encourage people to speak to you about problems at the times that you agree when you delegate the task. Once team members know that you plan to meet with them on a specific date, they might be more willing to wait for the scheduled appointment, instead of rushing to you as soon as a problem arises. This also gives them time to come up with potential solutions.

  Jose is the operations manager of a large oil rig operation. He has three people reporting to him directly – the chief engineer, the financial head, and the HR manager. He has a system under which he spends an hour on Tuesdays with the engineer; on Wednesdays with the financial controller; and on Thursdays with the HR manager. It works well. Since all three know they have scheduled meetings, they don't bother him on a day-to-day basis, unless there is an urgent problem

6.2.7. Feedback and Support Systems – Reassure and Motivate Your Team Members

Delegation isn't just a matter of telling someone else what to do. You also have to provide appropriate support and guidance to the person.

For instance, if you've delegated a task to someone, make sure that you give him or her the resources needed to complete the job.

Also, it's extremely important to let people know how they're doing, and whether they have achieved their objectives. If they have, give plenty of praise, and reward them appropriately. Remember: praise motivates people.

If they didn't achieve their goals, review with them why things didn't go as planned, and deal with any problems. This will help them do a better job in the future.

Since the final responsibility for the job is yours, you must absorb the consequences of failure and pass on the credit for success. (But of course, make sure that you get fair credit for your good judgment and management!)

6.3. Applying This to Your Life

Delegation is an important, time-saving skill. In this module, we've highlighted tools and techniques that you can use to delegate effectively.

Now comes the part where you actually apply these tools to your life:

- Use a delegation log to think about which tasks you should delegate. Go through your projects and daily activities in detail. Apply the delegation criteria to all of the tasks that you're doing, or that you plan to do, and decide which of these you can delegate.
- Select the person best suited to take on the task. Consider your reasons for delegating to this person. Do they have the ability to do the job? What are they going to get out of it? What are you going to get out of it?
- Define the task clearly to the person that you're delegating to. Explain its importance and relevance, state required results, and set standards of performance. Clarify the resources and support mechanisms that you'll make available to them.
- Set deadlines. Tell the person when you expect the job to be done. Also, schedule checkpoints and review dates.
- Let the person know how and when you intend to monitor the progress on the project. Also, clearly establish the level of authority that the person has. How much can he or she do without checking back with you?
- Support and communicate. Provide the person with access to the resources that he or she needs. Give feedback, and provide your input when there are problems. Finally, appreciate a job well done.

7. To Each Their Own: Getting That Extra 10 Percent

Interest:	All of us are different. We work in different ways, and we have different strengths and energy cycles. Understanding our strengths and energy patterns can help us perform better.
Need:	If we do not tune-in to our natural energy cycle, we risk wasting time. Once we know what works for us, we can use this knowledge to create a time management system that suits our individual needs.
Timing:	1 hour.
Range:	We discuss: • Energy cycles. • Energy boosters. • The energy expenditure/energy renewal equation. • Preference analysis. • Using preference to maximize productivity.
Objective:	This module will help you to develop a thorough understanding of your energy cycle and preference patterns. It gives you tools so that you can use this knowledge to save time and boost effectiveness.

7.1. Introduction

In the past six modules, we've given you a vast arsenal of tools and techniques that you can use. If you're serious about becoming an effective time manager, you should already have started applying some of these.

And, instinctively, you've probably realized that some of the tools work better for you than others. This is natural. We all have skills and preferences that make us more adept at some things than others. The trick is to realize what your individual strengths and preferences are, and then use this knowledge to boost your productivity.

Even if you haven't started using any of our tools, and even if your life seems totally out of control, you know that there are some things that always seem to work for you. By consciously identifying these things, and then applying this knowledge, you can save an enormous amount of time and energy.

Sometimes you struggle with some tasks more than others, not because you're lacking a skill, but because you don't enjoy doing them. We all have preferences about when and how we do certain tasks or activities. When we honor those preferences, it's easier to get things done. However, many people don't think to consider their natural inclinations, and they end up with a schedule that works against them.

As well as your natural likes and dislikes, the ups and downs of your energy levels also have a profound impact on your effectiveness. Are you a morning person or a night owl? Do you wilt after lunch? Are you getting enough sleep? Our personal energy cycles influence our alertness and productivity at different times of the day. We can often get twice as much done in an hour when we're alert and productive, than when our energy is at a low point.

Naturally, you cannot expect the world to take your personal preferences and energy levels into consideration when it throws tasks at you. But you can definitely try to factor them into your schedule whenever possible. Even a little consideration can go a long way here.

And, even though you cannot always control your environment, it's helpful to know when you're at your best, so that you can identify what's working against you, and then compensate for it. Work through this module to explore your own energy cycle and preferences. Once you understand these, you can put them to work for you, instead of against you.

7.2. Introducing the Tools

The tools outlined here help you uncover your abilities and preferences. They also show you how to tune-in to your energy rhythms. Then, we help you create a time management system that's geared specifically to meet your own individual needs.

Our tools show you how to build your schedule to take advantage of your individual energy cycles and preferences. They also help you cope when external factors force you to do tasks that don't fit in with your inclinations and energy levels.

7.2.1. Understanding Energy Cycles – Figuring Out Your Ups and Downs

Everyone has a natural time during the day when they are "Up" (prime time) and a natural time when they are "Down" (down time). During prime time, your brain is on, your "batteries" are charged, and you're able to focus. During down time, your brain feels slow, and it's difficult to get through your work. You obviously perform better in the "Up" time.

This tool helps you understand your personal energy cycle. It teaches you to identify your energy peaks and valleys. And once you know your up and down times, you can plan your schedule around them.

So, how do you trace your energy cycle?

All you have to do is keep tabs on it. A good start is to maintain an energy graph.

To do this, print off the energy graph on page 94. The horizontal axis reflects time (the waking hours of the day), while the vertical axis represents your energy level as a percentage.

Place the graph in a prominent position. Once you wake up and are fully functional in the morning, draw a dot where energy intersects with time, to indicate how you feel in terms of your energy level. Then set the alarm on your watch or phone to go off every hour. Every time the chime beeps, place a corresponding dot on the chart.

Obviously, you'll have to carry the graph with you to your workplace. As the day progresses, you'll have a series of dots marching across the page to show how your energy ebbs and flows. At the end of the day, connect the dots and lay the graph aside. Go through the same exercise for at least three more days in the week. Then, sit down to analyze your graphs.

On the graph, there's a dotted line at about the 75 percent energy level mark. This represents your peak productivity zone. Write these exact time ranges out to the side of your graph. These are your "premium" hours, compared with other times of the day, because you'll be at your best during these hours. There's another line around the 25 percent mark. Everything below this is your down time.

Now that you have a grip on your cycle, try to work with both your brain's rhythms and your body's rhythms. Try to build your schedule (the part that you control, at least) around your personal highs and lows.

Schedule the most complex, the most critical, and the highest-paying jobs in the peak productivity time zones. You'll achieve faster, higher-quality results. Similarly, factor downtime into your schedule. Plan easier activities – not necessarily low-priority, but those that don't require the brainpower of the prime time tasks – in this period.

The challenge for most people is that when they're in prime time, they feel **good**! They don't feel like sitting down and preparing a report. This is where self-discipline comes in. Resist the urge to do just "fun" things during this period. Remember that working on the difficult jobs in downtime takes much longer, and is far more painful.

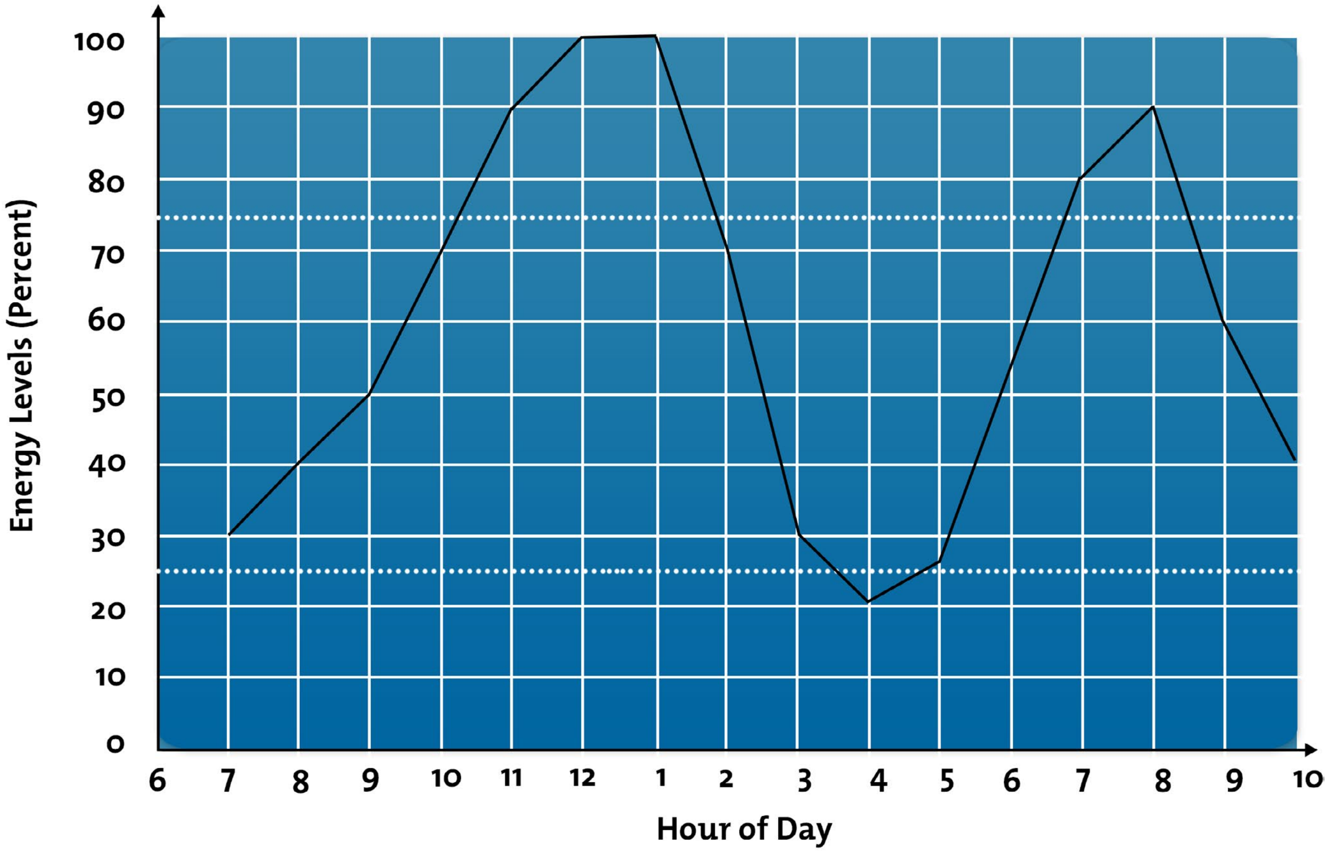
Roger, a creative director with a leading advertisement company, has figured out that he has two prime times – morning and late evening.

He uses the one in the morning to hold meetings. He needs to brainstorm, and it helps to be "Up" and on top of things.

The late evening one he reserves for dreaming up his campaigns. There are fewer interruptions. He can lock himself in a room and try to actually "create."

The 3:30-4:30 p.m. slot is the one where he hits a real low. He puts in his administrative and social calls during this period. He catches up on emails, networks with people, does follow-up work, and clears all pending claims, vouchers, and permits. Whenever possible, he tries to sneak in a little nap. Roger knows that doing anything more demanding will leave him so drained that he won't be able to function optimally in his peak late evening zone.

Roger's graph is shown on the next page:



Overall, the key to managing your energy cycle efficiently is to figure out your own ups and downs. Once you know what these zones are, try to plan your schedule accordingly. Also, remember to be self-disciplined when you're "up." Listen to yourself, and rest when you're "down."

7.2.2. Energy Boosters

While we recommend that you build your schedule around your energy cycle, we also know that you can't always control when you do certain tasks. For example, your boss might ask you to prepare an important proposal immediately after lunch, which is your downtime. This is where energy boosters are useful!

The best time managers are tuned-in to the activities that give them a boost when energy is flagging. They use this knowledge when faced with a demanding task at a time they feel low.

This is very, very simple: just reflect on what energizes you, and then use this booster to recharge when you need it. Sometimes, a change of pace is all you need to raise your energy levels. If you've been concentrating for hours and your brain needs a break, then it's a great time to do a task where you need to move around and use your muscles. Eating an energy snack, chatting with friends, drinking a cup of coffee, listening to music – these can help too.

One energy booster that many people tend to undervalue is a break – a plain, simple break, where you just relax and do nothing. The power of a break is immense, and it serves to revitalize you.

Take at least three five-minute breaks each day. Use these short breaks to sit back, put your feet up, or meditate. You'll soon realize that these periods of relaxation vastly recharge your energy levels.

Along with using energy boosters, also get in the habit of avoiding "energy drains." Long days, pressure, eating on the run – all these drain you of your energy. So do factors such as heat, humidity, monotony, boredom, and jet lag. Some of these drains are inescapable, but avoid known energy suckers when you can. Things like air conditioning units, dehumidifiers, and proper rest can work wonders here.

When you can't avoid energy suckers, counter them with a potent energy booster.

Yana feels very sleepy after lunch. So she has made it a practice to try not to schedule any important meetings immediately afterwards. She generally gives herself 15 minutes to get over the post-lunch sluggishness. In case a meeting does get scheduled then she either tries to sneak out a little earlier for lunch, or she makes sure that she eats a very light meal. She can always eat more food later during her coffee break.

Even though you cannot always control the timing of a task, it helps to be in touch with your energy rhythms. If you know when your energy ebbs, you can try to compensate for it when you really need to perform.

7.2.3. Revitalizers – Refresh and Rest Yourself to Maintain Energy

Energy boosters are a great way to get an instant recharge, but you'll need to renew yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally if you want to avoid burnout.

If you're not sleeping, catnaps cannot revive you forever. If you aren't eating, gallons of coffee cannot sustain you permanently. If you don't have good relationships, work cannot become a replacement over the long term.

The problem is that we often take it for granted that the energy available to us is limitless. We keep spending energy without making any conscious effort to renew it. The result is that we break down, lose our passion, and even get sick with burnout or stress. This happens in both our personal and professional lives.

Revitalizing ourselves with intermittent energy renewal helps us avoid these pitfalls. To revitalize yourself physically, make sure that you get enough sleep, and take in at least some form of exercise. Sleep deprivation is a genuine problem – it can cause disorientation, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and memory problems. People who haven't had enough sleep make more mistakes and are less productive. As for exercise, you don't need another lecture from us regarding the importance of incorporating physical fitness into your daily life!

For emotional renewal, many of us have to reach out externally. While there are a select few who seem entirely self-sufficient, for the majority of us, relationships are a powerful source of emotional renewal. Friends, family, spouses, colleagues – all of them can renew us if we've been investing the right kind of time and energy in the relationships.

Also, mental energy suffers because of under-use. We're so caught up with our daily activities that we don't take time out to stimulate ourselves mentally. A new hobby, a good book – there are many ways to revitalize yourself. Use them!

Managing your energy effectively is essential to managing your time productively. If you don't balance energy expenditure with energy renewal, you cannot perform optimally.

7.2.4. Understanding Your Preferences – Manage Preferences to Maximize Effectiveness

However out of control your life seems, you'll find that there are some things that you always manage to do. Generally, these things are tasks that suit your natural preferences.

Whether or not we acknowledge it, all of us have preferences about when or how to do certain tasks. These preferences are the results of our abilities, past experiences, and comfort levels. And, managing these preferences can enhance our effectiveness significantly, and save time.

So, how do you figure out your preferences? First, make a list of things that always seem to work for you. At the end of each day, jot down the jobs which you managed to do well, fast, efficiently, and easily. Do this exercise over a week.

Then try to analyze what the similarities are between these tasks and activities. Were you performing them under similar conditions? What made these jobs appealing to you? Are you getting to certain jobs because you enjoy them, or because you feel pressured to do them? Are you responding to external pressures ("Oh, no! I'm going be fired if I don't do this!"), or an internal push ("I won't be happy until I finish this!")?

Do a corresponding exercise for the things that don't work for you at all. Why do you avoid some jobs? Why can't you get certain activities done?

Then, review all of the answers. If you've been conscientious in preparing and analyzing your lists, your natural preferences and abilities will become obvious to you. Once you have this knowledge, use it to maximize your efficiency.

Run carefully through your lists. These will include some tasks that suit your natural preferences, and some that don't. You have to do both of these. While it's a breeze to do the tasks that fit with your inclinations, you can use your knowledge of your preferences to save time on "not-preferred" jobs.

When you're tackling these tough jobs, you can either:

- Seek help from someone else.
- Redesign the task.

We all feel a little inadequate when requesting help. However, it's important to recognize that you're good at some things, while others are good at other things. If you get stuck with a task that you're bad at, there's nothing wrong with seeking help. Recognize that someone else might be better equipped to do that job.

So how do you persuade this person to take on your job? Well, you could:

- Hire them (experts).
- Trade with them (coworkers).
- Delegate to them (team members).

When you have a degree of competency in the non-preferred task, or if it's not possible to seek help, try redesigning your task.

One way to do this is by "sandwiching" the task, which uses your non-preferred competency, between two tasks, each of which draw upon your true preference.

The power of this highly effective approach, advocated by Dr Katherine Benziger, a pioneer in the field of personality assessing, is based on energy management. Using your natural preference energizes you. Using your non-preferred competencies exhausts or fatigues you. This is something that most of us already know and practice intuitively – all we're asking you to do is apply this approach a little more consciously.

Assuming that your system begins the day in neutral, by first doing something you prefer, you energize your system. By using one of your non-preferred types of thinking immediately afterwards, when the system is "charged," you experience fatigue or drain which simply takes you back to neutral. If you follow this step with another task that you enjoy, you will again move "up" to a positively charged position.

By contrast, engaging in non-preferred tasks randomly, without charging your system before and after, can result in much of the day being spent in a "down," or negatively charged, position. Indeed, this conscious ordering of tasks allows you to conserve a valuable resource – you.

Another informal strategy involves conscious scheduling. Schedule the non-preferred tasks at times of the day when you're generally, naturally "up"; and never schedule important non-preferred tasks at times of the day when you are generally "down."

It also helps if you remind yourself that the non-preferred task might be something you don't enjoy, but are choosing to do as part of a total package for which you have accepted responsibility.

Sonia, a graphic designer, runs a home-based business. She knows that she suffers from a split personality when it comes to work. She is great at creating designs and meeting clients – she is always on time, always affable, and always delivers high-quality work. However, when it comes to managing the office, doing follow-ups, organizing finances, paying bills, sending invoices, and preparing project proposals, she just can't seem to get anything done.

Sonia sits down to analyze her problem. She lists what works for her:

- *I enjoy meeting people.*
- *I thrive on deadlines.*
- *I love creative work.*

And what doesn't work for her:

- *I dislike administration work.*
- *I am lazy at doing follow-ups.*
- *I am not good at number crunching.*

She then puts this knowledge to use.

She starts assigning start and end-times to her follow-up tasks. The impression of a deadline pushes her to do the job.

She starts alternating solitary, routine office jobs with social contact. After every hour of concentrated time spent on clearing accumulated paperwork, she makes a couple of calls to touch base with her clients. The calls re-energize her to tackle some more.

She hires a bookkeeper to help her with her finances. Although the payout hurt a little initially, now Sonia figures that the amount of time and energy the expert has freed for her is more than worth it.

Overall, to achieve maximum productivity, tune-in to your natural preferences. Make them work for you. And, in case you're stuck with non-preferred jobs, harness the power of your preferences to take the sting out of them.

7.3. Applying This to Your Life

Now comes crunch time – understanding what works for you, and then using your new insights to be more efficient.

Do the following:

- Trace your energy cycle. Become acquainted with your highs and lows.
- Try to build your schedule, at least the part you control, around them. The difficult, critical tasks should be scheduled for your prime time and the routine, easy tasks for down time.
- Identify your energy boosters – the things that recharge you. You cannot always control your schedule, but where you have to tackle a tough task at a time when your energy is flagging, use an energy booster to recharge yourself.
- Ensure that you balance energy expenditure with energy renewal. You cannot draw upon energy limitlessly: you have to make an effort to put something back in reserve. Adequate sleep, exercise, hobbies, and relationships – you need all of these to revitalize and energize yourself.
- Analyze your abilities and preferences. Work out what percentage of the tasks you do match your preferences. If the percentage is very low, you might want to switch careers. If the percentage is reasonable – say 50 percent – you should use our two-step approach to tackle the remaining 50 percent of tasks.
- Try to seek outside help for the tasks that are high on the "not-preferred" list. Hiring, delegation, trade – use whichever option suits you. When help isn't available, either sandwich the task between two preferred tasks, or schedule it at a peak energy time.

8. Using Leverage to Maximize Success

Interest:	Where we get to in life often depends on the "power" (however we choose to define it) that we're able to exert. However hard and however efficiently we work, we can only exert a certain amount of power on our own and with our own resources. People who move beyond this do so with specialist knowledge, with other people's help, or by using technology. Using these types of "leverage" is essential if you want to achieve really meaningful results.
Need:	Leveraging, if done right, can catapult your time management efforts to an altogether new level. Applying the right leverage helps you get a lot more done, with only a little more effort.
Timing:	1 hour.
Range:	We discuss: • The concept of leverage. • Leverage of time. • Knowledge leverage. • Technology leverage. • The leverage of other people's time. • Using money to create leverage.
Objective:	The objective of this module is to show you how to use the leverage available to you, so that you can live your best life.

8.1. Introduction

A lever is a tool that helps you use your strength more effectively. It doesn't make you stronger; it just helps you do more work with the strength you already have. An example is the car jack: it helps you to raise an entire car with just one hand; an impossible feat without a lever.

While the car jack is a mechanical lever, other types of lever can help you achieve a lot more. With a little thought and some hard work, you can use the leverage of time, education, technology, and capital to do much, much more than you could otherwise do.

This is because where we get to in life depends on the "power" that we're able to exert. However hard we work, we can only exert a certain amount of power without using leverage skills. People who move beyond this level do so by harnessing knowledge, money, technology, and other people's time, on their own behalf.

Again, let's use a mechanical example to clarify the point. Did you watch the last Olympics? The high jumpers were clearing the bar at well over seven feet, while the pole-vaulters were vaulting over a bar that was more than 19 feet high. It isn't as if the pole vaulters are better athletes. It is just that they are using the pole as leverage to propel themselves over the bar, while the high jumpers' performances are limited by the power of their legs.

Now, in sports, leverage isn't so important. Pole-vaulters are judged in one category, and high jumpers in another. But, in real life, there are no separate categories. If another person uses leverage to push ahead of you, she will be judged a better performer. Even if there are no comparisons, using leverage makes sense, because it helps you achieve dramatic improvement in results with just a little more effort.

This module shows you how to take full advantage of the resources available to you to optimize your performance.

8.2. Introducing the Tools

We have already discussed some key leverage skills (such as assertiveness, negotiation, delegation, and making your preferences work for you) in earlier modules. We briefly mention them again here, because they're important in the context of leverage.

Unlike earlier modules, however, the tools in this section aren't useful procedures that you can follow, instead, they're things you should think about. As such, we look at the leverage that you can achieve through time, knowledge, education, technology, other people's effort (honorably sought), and the fair use of finance.

You'll already know about the leverage of time and knowledge, but it's worth recapping. And, the others are really worth thinking about.

8.2.1. Leverage of Your Time

This whole course is about time leverage – using your time efficiently and effectively to get the greatest possible value from it.

If you've followed the course through and applied the exercises that we've described, you should fully understand this. You should be focused on the goals that are truly important to you, and you should know how to avoid distractions. You should be in full control of your workload, and you should have a comfortable and achievable schedule. And, you should be well on your way to delegating large parts of your workload.

Remember the importance of this leverage – the added effectiveness it gives you adds to your personal "power." You lose this if you slip back into old habits.

8.2.2. The Leverage of Knowledge and Education

The importance of knowledge is obvious: if you don't know how to do something, then finding out how to do it by trial-and-error can take you a very, very long time. What's worse is that, even when you've figured out a workable solution, you'll never be confident that your solution is the best one. For example, who wants to be operated on by surgeons, or fly with pilots, who are "figuring it out as they go along"?!

Unfortunately, it's easy to take on a task without thinking about the knowledge that you need. If you do this, you risk not making the best use of your time, and not performing to your full potential. You also risk seeing less-experienced but better-educated people sprint past you, simply because they've learned the right answers, rather than having had to learn them by experience.

Look at the life goals you identified earlier in this course (on page 18), and at the things you want to achieve. For each of the goals, take the perspective of an outsider, and ask yourself what skills should be needed for the efficient and successful attainment of those goals.

Then, make sure that you take the courses and acquire the knowledge needed to reach the goal. This could take a very long time, but if you're serious about your goals, then it's time well spent. And aim for the very best education or training that you can get – it's normally true that the best institutions deliver the highest leverage.

A powerful side-effect of "doing the knowledge" is that you plug in to the support mechanisms and professional networks used by people with similar goals. This provides a powerful leverage of experience and assistance all of its own. Everything becomes so much easier.

8.2.3. Technology Leverage

We're all well acquainted with the power of technology. If harnessed well, it can yield immense results for us.

Using Personal Productivity Tools

The thing about technology is that there is so much innovation happening every day that we do not know what to choose. We feel compelled to buy the latest technological release, and then often don't find the time to master its features.

You don't need to have the very latest in technology, and often, this isn't what you really need. Instead, you need something that works for you, and helps you be more creative, more productive, and more profitable.

In our rush to get the very latest innovations, we can miss the point – it's not about technology; it's about developing your career to the fullest, and enjoying life more. Each tool or technique can offer great benefits, or significant drawbacks. Only if you use the right technology, in the right way, can you attain the things that you want.

Remember to ask yourself these three questions before investing in new technology:

- Do I need it?
- Does it give me an edge?
- Will I use it?

And of course, we then have the problem that there are now just so many good tools, services, apps, and pieces of software available that we can become easily swamped in competing and incompatible systems.

So how do we make sense of this? One way is to use a smartphone or tablet device. You can synchronize these with your computer and other devices, so you can keep your key contact and schedule information integrated and properly backed up.

Another useful approach is to use online file storage solutions such as Google Drive™ or Dropbox™. That way, you can get access to your work whatever PC or device you're using.

Using Technology to Build a Business

So, how else can you harness technology to achieve better results? This question is best answered through an example. At the risk of us seeming excessively introspective, take Mind Tools: 20 years ago, Mind Tools would be an entirely regionally-based business, with a small, local, time-limited market. Now, because we have reliable web servers, good software tools, and access to the Internet, we've been able to build a global team that helps people around the world learn the key career skills that will help them achieve excellence.

On a much grander scale, look at the computer company, Dell. Michael Dell famously founded Dell with $1,000 in 1984. Since then, through superb use of technology, he has built a company with 100,000 employees and revenues of $57 billion (as of 2013). His is a superb example of how technology can be used for leverage. Without its impressively integrated systems, just think:

- How many salespeople Dell would have to employ to process customer orders, and how much this would add to the cost of each PC sold.
- How much longer it would take to order parts and manage the construction of each PC. This would add weeks or months to the build time, and again add a fortune to the price that customers pay.
- How much time would have to be spent in training and retraining staff to be able to handle each new product, or product variation. This would seriously slow down the rate of change, and reduce the variety of options that Dell could offer.

Dell uses the leverage of technology to drive down the cost of its PCs, and to deliver a quick, accurate, and effective service to its customers.

On a more ordinary level, things like social media, marketing databases, and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools can substantially increase the amount of contact that businesses can make with their markets. Use of email, text messaging, and helpdesk systems, in place of manual typing, again have radically improved productivity. Spreadsheets ease the pain of complex processes like forecasting and budgeting. Similarly, the automation provided by vertical market software applications can offer huge improvements in productivity, speed, and accuracy of service.

This is all technology leverage. All of these examples have up-front difficulties in identifying the opportunity, learning and implementing the technology, and refining its use. Once in successful use, however, they all give a massive boost in performance.

So, how do you know whether you need technology? Again, an example will best answer the question.

Reva, 50, runs a franchise business from home, and her husband Cecil, 55, is a management consultant.

They both have busy lives and need planners to keep track of their schedules. They both use different planning systems, ranging from basic to very sophisticated, to stay focused.

Take Reva: she is a visual/tactile person who feels more comfortable with paper. She had a choice between classic paper-based planners and wall calendars. She decided to use the wall calendars as her planning tool. Her logic is simple. "I work from one place, my home, and my schedule is fairly simple, so I don't need anything fancy to keep track of my plans. Also, the wall calendar is a great family communication device. Each family member can keep track of everyone else's schedule at a glance."

Cecil, however, uses a Web-based service to manage his planning needs. He travels a lot so he chose a service that can sync between his smartphone, laptop, and office computer. His assistant can also access and update his calendar. Since Cecil is also a visual/tactile person, making the switch was difficult initially, but he persisted, and made it work for him. He also adapted the service to suit his needs. He zeroed-in on the features that he liked best about his paper-planner – how he used it, how he liked to see his information – and then set up his new service to work that way.

Overall, there will always be faster, sleeker, less expensive, and more powerful gizmos to buy; and new services and applications that promise to make you more productive. Don't worry too much about this; get what works for you, and learn how to use it well.

8.2.4. The Leverage of Other People's Time

Another vital source of leverage comes from other people's time. With the benefit of this, you can expand the "power" you exert enormously. We have already looked at some of the skills you need to do this: delegation and negotiation. There are many others. By using the skills of experts, you achieve quicker and better outcomes. By teaching your team your skills, you radically increase the benefit that you and your team can deliver.

It's important to say that we're not talking about anything manipulative or wrong here – you must make sure that the people giving you their time receive fair compensation for it, whether this is financial, a trade of expertise, or some other benefit that has real significance to them. And, of course, remember how important well-deserved praise is to all of us.

If you don't compensate them, then any help that people give will be short-lived and unreliable. Favors you want will be at the bottom of people's lists of priorities, as they face the hard graft of earning a living.

More than this, if you manipulate people so that they act against their own best interests, or if you act dishonorably, then you risk ruining your reputation, and losing the people leverage that you could otherwise use.

Delegation – A Key Leverage Skill

We've already looked at one aspect of the leverage of other people's time in detail in our module on delegation (module 6). Delegation is worth a section on its own, partly because it's so difficult to learn, and partly because it's usually the first leverage skill that people come across as their careers progress.

However, you can see that our principle of compensation underpins delegation – people on your team offer their time, for which they're compensated with money. They're paid to accept the work you delegate.

Bartering for Skills and Time

This is another important approach, particularly where funds are limited and where you don't have the right to delegate work. This will often be with coworkers, or people elsewhere within your organization.

Where someone else has an asset you need, or a skill that you want, or they have the capacity to take on tasks that you don't have time for, then it may be worth bartering to secure access to this.

And again, the idea of fair compensation is important here. You need to compensate the person that you're negotiating with for the time you want. While this may not be on an immediate, transactional basis, you should expect to return the favor at some time in the future.

Bartering does, however, have a downside. It often takes a lot of effort. Also, no market exists to price the time you exchange, and, because of this, people's expectations of compensation can often be unrealistic.

This is why hiring from outside your organization is often preferable to bartering.

Hiring Consultants – Bringing in the Expertise You Need, Only When You Need It

In module 5 we saw that your time has a cost, and that this can be quite high. We also saw in this module that if you don't have expertise in an area, you can waste a lot of time learning about it. Even then, you risk doing a poor job.

This is where it can be cost-effective to hire in an expert for a short, focused consultancy exercise.

Remember, though, that consultants' time is usually expensive, and you need to be careful to make the best use of it.

Tip:

Consultants can be very useful. However, it's in their interests to expand the scope of their work to be as large as possible. This may or may not be to your advantage, particularly as a good consultant will often cost a lot!

If you hire consultants, first make sure that you ask the right questions of them, and that you carefully define what you want from them.

Second, make sure that you carefully review the consultant's expertise. Ensure that the person is as much of an expert as you think. Often, people's experience is wider and shallower than you may want.

Third, having checked credentials, make sure that the person you've researched will be doing the job. If not, you may find that a junior actually does the work, with only hazy oversight from the person you hired. This is how consultants lever their own time!

Finally, make sure that you control the scope of their work carefully, and ensure that you evaluate any expansion of this scope properly. This can be a challenge when you are under time pressure yourself. However, make the time to stay in control!

Outsourcing – Using Money to Save Time

In module 6, we discussed delegation. Now we discuss outsourcing, a close cousin. The purpose of both the tools is the same: you farm out a task – a non-preferred, low priority, routine, or specialized task – to someone else, so that you can concentrate your energy on another task – a preferred, high-priority or high-payoff one.

The idea is that by focusing as much of your time as possible on high-payoff tasks, and paying someone else to do the low-payoff tasks, you end up ahead. At the very start of your career, this may not work for you. However, as you become more and more skilled, this should become increasingly relevant.

Where you have a team, delegate these tasks to them. However, where your team is over-stretched or not specialist in the appropriate area, or where people outside the team are exceptionally efficient or cost-effective at the task, then you should think very hard about outsourcing.

Many big companies do this. They swear by the "core-competencies" formula, whereby they carry out the tasks that are a critical part of their reason for existence, but outsource other, non-core processes.

By investing in an outsource relationship, rather than developing expensive in-house systems or maintaining status quo, they often get a better job done, by a specialist, and at a significantly lower cost. The classic example of this is management of a company's payroll. This is a difficult, complex, time-consuming, and unpleasant task requiring considerable expertise, but contributing little to the specialist mission of most companies. By outsourcing payroll to specialist payroll managers (who have this expertise and gain major economies of scale), companies can often improve reliability and reduce costs.

You can use the same formula. What you have to evaluate is whether, by freeing up time with outsourcing, you can make a better overall return than would otherwise be the case. Obviously, you need to factor in intangibles such as peace of mind, risk, reliability, opportunities, and quality. And, be careful – the wrong outsource partner may leave you with nothing more than empty promises.

Yuan and her sister Kim manage an export surplus shop. They buy rejects from factories that manufacture and export garments to big multinational brands, and then they sell the clothing at exceptionally low prices in their shop.

There are two clear functions that the business requires:

- *Traveling to the export factories and buying rejected lots from them.*
- *Overseeing the day-to-day operations of the shop.*

Early on, one sister would run the shop, while the other interacted with factory owners. But, slowly they realized that demand outstripped supply in their business. Their problem was not getting customers to buy, for the designer garments were offered at such low prices that they sold quickly. Instead, they struggled to find reject lots.

So, the sisters decided to hire a shop assistant. Often, both would go traveling at the same time to get more supplies for their shop. The assistant would handle the shop.

The salary that they had to pay the assistant was recovered many times over by the profits they made.

While Yuan and Kim decided to hire an assistant, getting help doesn't mean immediately going out and getting a full-time employee. You can start with a part-time worker, or by outsourcing some tasks. One of the most time-consuming tasks, for instance, is handling financial matters – generating invoices, paying bills, and entering data. Can you find a reliable, trustworthy outside bookkeeper to do most of this for you? And, just think how much easier it will be when it's time to prepare your taxes!

Outsourcing makes sense in your personal life, too. Maybe you hire people like cleaners, shirt-ironers, gardeners, packers, babysitters, and plumbers. Remember, you can often earn more money, but you can't get time back.

Initially, outsourcing feels financially, logistically, and psychologically challenging. Most of us tend to wait until we're buried before we reach out for help. This means that we're frazzled long before we find assistance. A better idea is to ask yourself, "How much time can I free up if I get some assistance? How much more money can I make?" and then use the answers to take an outsourcing decision.

Politics – Time Leverage on a Massive Scale

Politicians sometimes have a bad reputation, however, they use the leverage of other people's time on a massive scale. To achieve power, politicians must have the support of huge numbers of people, taking all of the time and effort that this implies. Once they win power, however, they have the leverage of an entire region or nation behind them.

This scale of politics needs a range of sophisticated skills way outside the scope of this course. However, if you move into this area, you need to learn these skills.

8.2.5. The Leverage of Money

Some of the sources of leverage that we've looked at so far are education, technology, delegation to a team, consultants, and outsourcing. To a greater or lesser extent, you need money to take advantage of all of these.

If you don't pay, you don't get the leverage!

However, once money is available, people will make tremendous efforts to help you. This is why people say "you need money to make money," and also why they say "you have to speculate to accumulate."

That can sound hopeless if you're struggling to make ends meet, but there are ways around this. You can:

- **Set up a business with a low capital requirement**: If you have little money, start up a business that has low costs. For example, instead of setting up a shop, start a home-based service business.
- **Start on a very small scale**: This is what many entrepreneurs do. They start with very small businesses, and slowly work up to larger ones. The very small businesses have low leverage because the owners have very little money to spend. As they being to make money, they reinvest it (gaining leverage), which helps them grow a little bigger, and so on, as leverage builds. Building a good business this way is usually a slow, grueling process, but the ultimate rewards can be huge.
- **Borrow money**: On a very small scale you may be able to borrow from friends and family. But if you do this, it's essential to pay them back fairly. On a slightly larger scale, you may be able to borrow from a bank.

  If you're going to use other people's money, you have an obligation to have researched and planned carefully and thoroughly, and you have to be reasonably confident that you can repay that money. (If you can't, you'll probably find it difficult to raise money in the future.)

  However, use the money you borrow wisely, and your business will be up-and-running that much more quickly.
- **Get venture capital**: If you want to raise venture capital (VC), you need to have strong, well-researched business plans and a good team. You also need to be prepared to work extremely hard and grow your business very fast. That said, venture capital can give you massive leverage. However, be alert – if you're not careful and you can't achieve the growth you've projected, you can lose everything you've worked for.

Spending money is essential if you want to acquire the leverage you need. And if you want to spend money, you have to raise it or earn it first.

Tip:

Some people think that "money is the root of all evil." However, the quotation that underlies this view states that: "The love of money is the root of all evil." Money is merely a medium of exchange – it's neither good nor bad, just a morally neutral thing.

Get over any mental confusion you have with this point – it will only hold you back. If necessary, look the quote up for yourself, and think the issues through. You need to shed any negative attitudes towards the use of money: by using money appropriately, you can create a great deal of good.

8.3. Applying This to Your Life

Now think about this, and ask yourself how leverage applies to you.

Look at the different types of leverage that we've discussed this module. Think about the way that these types of leverage could apply to you, and how you could take advantage of them.

9. Moving On

I hope that you've found this workbook useful, and that you've enjoyed putting the tools and techniques we've covered into action.

On page 95, you'll find a reminder sheet, which acts as an aide-mémoire of the key points that the course has covered. Why not print this off and put it on your notice board? This will help you to keep what you've learned from this course fresh in your mind.

As a final point, we've put a great deal of effort into developing this course and our other material. If you have any suggestions on how we can improve it for the future, then please let us know at customer.helpdesk@mindtools.com.

Best wishes, and thank you!

James Manktelow
CEO
MindTools.com
Essential skills for an excellent career!

10. Acknowledgements

The development of this course has been a major team effort. We would like to thank the following people for their help and hard work on this project:

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Plan 60 Worksheet

If you could have or do everything you wanted by age 60, what would this be? Spend 30 minutes brainstorming your goals and dreams, and write them down on this worksheet. Obviously, make as many copies of it as are necessary – don't stop at 12 because there is no more space!

My "Wants" at Age 60
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
11.
12.

Goals by Category Worksheet

For each of the categories that you think are important, write down your top goal for that category. Example categories are shown on page 13.

Goal Category	Goal
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
11.	
12.	

Life Goal Detail Worksheet

List the actions that you'll need to take to achieve your life goals, on this sheet. First, list the major actions. Then, break the major action that logically comes first into smaller actions. Next, break the first of the smaller actions down into still smaller actions, until you have a series of tasks that will each take no more than two hours to complete.

Obviously, make as many copies of this worksheet as are necessary – don't stop at 10 because there is no more space!

Life Goal:
Actions Needed:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Interrupters Log Worksheet

Person	Date & Time	Nature of Interruption	Valid?	Urgent?
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				

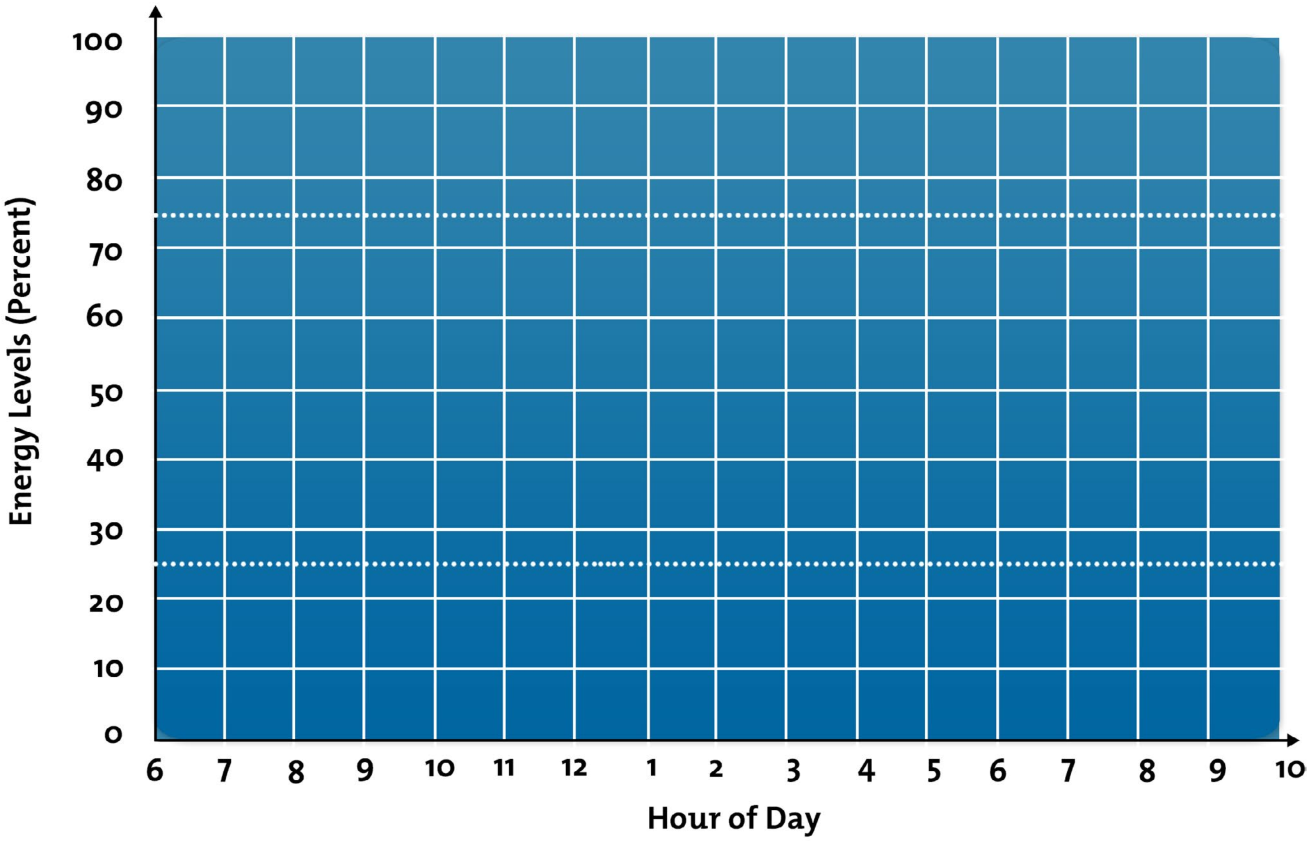
Activity Delegation Log

Activity	Time Spent	Delegate?		
		Fully	Partially	Not at All
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				

Delegation Worksheet

Task:	
Purpose & Context:	
Completion by Date (if appropriate):	
Specific Goals:	
Responsible to:	**Extent of Authority:**
When to Refer Back:	
Reporting Mechanisms:	
Checkpoints:	
Support Available:	
Resources Available:	

Your Daily Energy Graph



Make Time for Success – Reminders

Print out this page and pin it to a notice board as a reminder of what you've learned.

Your Top Four Life Goals:
1.
2.
3.
4.

Using Your Action Program:

- Use your Next Action List to plan the small next steps to progress your projects.
- Use your Delegated Actions List to record actions that you have delegated.
- Use you Project Catalog to log all projects and project information.
- Make sure that your life goals are in your Project Catalog.
- As you complete tasks, bring the highest value tasks up from the Project Catalog.

Use your schedule to plan time and manage commitments to other people.

Use the Input Processor tool to keep total control of your email and paperwork.

Keep control of interruptions, perfectionism, and procrastination.

Schedule high-importance work in your "up time."

Remember the importance of delegation!

- Delegate fully and to the right people.
- Define the task carefully.
- Set regular checkpoints and insure appropriately.
- Guard against reverse delegation!

Power up your career with maximum leverage:

- The leverage of time management, knowledge, and education.
- The leverage of technology.
- The leverage of other people's time – your team, consultants, and outsourcing.
- The leverage of money.