



# Mitigation Strategies for Time Wasting Activities within the Workplace

Mohammadreza Aslani

Manager, Rah Arvin Machine Company, Tehran, Iran.

Mohammadreza Azimi

Engineer, Rah Arvin Machine Company, Tehran, Iran.

[Mreza.azimi@ut.ac.ir](mailto:Mreza.azimi@ut.ac.ir)

## Abstract

With only twenty four hours to complete responsibilities at work and home, we need ways to help beat the challenges and roadblocks. By using time management we will achieve this. Using time management in the workplace allows managers to prioritize all projects and daily tasks by ranking them in order of importance. This ends up being a prioritized list or to do list. This will keep manager and employees focused on a daily basis. Adjusting the way tasks are executed will save time and minimize procrastination. Delegating tasks to the most appropriate person will reduce wasted time for you and others. However, dealing with the sources of procrastination will go a long way to making you an effective manager of time. The essay below will point out those activities that can result in less productivity in organizations and what to do about it.

**Key words:** Time Management, Industrial Management, Time Wasting, Workplace.



## Introduction

As a manager, there will be interruptions, questions, and probably some disasters throughout the workday. The key is to remain focused on important tasks and small jobs that must get done to prevent overlooking anything. According to Marshall Cook [1] one of the best ways to prioritize is create a “to-do list.” Creating the list can be very important because there are a few do's and don'ts to remember. First, list all the tasks that need to be accomplished, and to be most efficient, rank them in order of importance. Remember to keep the list realistic. If the list is too long it will be discouraging and overwhelming. Some tasks may need to be carried to the next day's list if they are not completed by the end of the day. If the high priority tasks are large, break them down into smaller jobs, which will be less overwhelming.

To avoid time wasters and being more productive in the workplace, managers and supervisors need to examine their behaviors that may cause wasted time. Efficiency across the board is the name of the game. The new reality in the workplace is doing more with less. Organizations want workers who are highly efficient in an environment that fosters productivity because increased productivity in the workplace increases profit [2, 3].

Managers and supervisors need to examine their time-wasting behaviors, such as finding new ways to disseminate information to workers rather than holding frivolous meetings. Workers need to become better time managers and protectors of their workspace so that it doesn't become a hangout spot for co-workers. Additionally, everyone can avoid the big time wasters: use of cell phones, visiting websites that are not job related, and engaging in frivolous conversation. All of these activities can be completed in your off time or on official breaks.

Finally, managers, supervisors, and workers should respect each other's time in the workplace. For example, holding workers hostage while the supervisor or manager is



preoccupied with distracters such as emails and unscheduled interruptions should be vigorously avoided [4].

### Time Wasting Activities

According to a recent survey of over 1,300 managers (including more than 500 presidents and vice presidents), such poor priority setting is common [5]. The survey reports that, despite most executives' long hours, "only 47% of their working time is taken up with managerial activities." They fill most of the remaining time with hands-on work, what the survey writers term "doing as opposed to managing." Since many of these managers worked their way up through the ranks of the "doers," their attention to nonmanagerial tasks may represent a systematic retreat to more familiar and less threatening activities. Completion of these activities becomes the measure of daily success, while more difficult and challenging tasks are squeezed out and remain unmastered. By observing managers in almost every kind of industry, we have identified three job requirements common to almost all executive levels that often give rise to anxiety. These anxiety-provoking tasks are among the most prevalent sources of busyness we have observed:

1. Managing and modifying one's daily work patterns and routines.
2. Responding to tough pressure from above to improve performance.
3. Obtaining better results from subordinates.

The first time waster is managers and supervisors holding frivolous meetings that regurgitate information that can be emailed or personally delivered to the affected individuals. Some would say that attending a boring and useless meeting is like going to the doctor for a rectal exam or to the dentist for tooth extraction. I understand that in the federal government meetings are frequent and sometimes non-productive. The old saying in the federal government is that "we have a meeting before the real meeting takes place".



The second time-wasting activity that affects productivity is preoccupation with the wrong things instead of the task at hand. Most of us can be preoccupied, wrapped up in our thoughts and feelings and sensations, and not aware or instrumental in the task at hand. When someone is preoccupied, nothing else matters. The good side of preoccupation is the focus that accompanies it, and I'm sure everyone has experienced this phenomenon. For example, when we are in love with someone, nothing else in this world matters at that time. The people around us, even our mother and father, do not matter at the moment.

The third time waster is workers engaging in frivolous or time-consuming gossip; even supervisors and managers can be guilty of this. Every organization globally deals with, for example, workers using cell phones/texting more frequently than when regular phones were in use or visiting websites that are not job related, which may cause the worker to shift focus formatively project that needs to become the next day.

### **Time Waste Mitigation Strategies**

Most managerial jobs are a blend of familiar routines and innovative activities. In general, people experience more anxiety when they embark on new activities than when they engage in those parts of the job that they have already mastered. We can invoke a Gresham's Law of Time Management to describe how managers pattern their daily activities: other factors being equal, the desire to avoid anxiety will cause an executive to repeat familiar patterns and shun innovative activities. Writing a to-do list is an essential habit if you want to practice good time management in the workplace. But it's so easy to add tasks to it as and when they crop up, building an ever growing list of things to do. The result? Things are done based on urgency. Important but not urgent things get put off until they become urgent. Once executives have successfully carried out a few focused projects, they can "capture" other aspects of managerial work by further breaking up big, complex, ill-defined goals and projects into achievable, short-term increments—and by organizing them with some



disciplined approaches. Thus, when one inventory category is brought under control, managers can attack additional categories in a similar way. When one production line has made some progress in reducing scrap, others can use the same processes; when one branch office has upped the number of visits per day of salespeople, other branches can apply the same approaches.

Managers and supervisors must be aware of the people around them and treat them with respect. When you speak to an individual, get into the position of listening. This may mean that your eyes are glued on this person's eyes and mouth as you listen and repeat back the person's message. Consciously and unconsciously, we all pride ourselves on being effective listeners, but we are frequently preoccupied with other things that take the attention that should all go to the worker.

## Conclusions

If you work in an office for a small or large organization, you will notice managers, supervisors, and even your co-workers engaging in time-wasting activities during the day. Typical examples of such activities are talking around the water cooler spreading office gossip or sitting in non-productive meetings. These non-productive, time-wasting activities are common in the workplace. The objective of this article is to help you to identify time-wasting behaviors and what to do about them based on information gathered through observations in the workplace and recent research articles on the topic. In particular, the article identifies three areas of non-productivity such as preoccupation, attending useless meetings, and time-consuming communication unrelated to office business.

## References



- [1] Cook, Marshall. *Streetwise Time Management*. Avon, MA: Adams Media Corporation, 1999.
- [2] Rosen, C. (2008) The Myth of Multitasking. *The New Atlantis*, **20**, 105-110.
- [3] Crenshaw, D. (2008) *The Myth of Multitasking: How Doing It All Gets Nothing Done*. 1st Edition, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 144.
- [4] Time Management Training.com. *Learn how to avoid the stress of work!* <http://www.time-management-training.com>. Visted on February 9, 2002.
- [5] Phillip Marvin, *Executive Time Management: An AMA Survey Report* (New York: AMACOM, 1980).