Time Management to the Rescue:

36 ways to manage your workload through calendar management and productivity tools
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**Introduction**

It’s time to rethink the way you work. In recent years, businesses have been asking employees at all levels to take on new, expanded roles to achieve peak productivity. The reality is: Increased workloads are here to stay.

If your job has turned into a “stretch job,” you may be wondering if there’s a better way to get more done in less time, relieve stress and avoid taking work home at night.

While you can’t create more hours in the day, you can learn how to use your time to the best advantage. That’s where *Time Management to the Rescue* can help. This special report provides 36 quick tips on how to work reasonable hours, prioritize tasks, track productivity, organize your calendar, and use tech tools and software to manage projects efficiently. The report is divided into two parts.

“Part I: Work Smarter, Not Longer Hours” offers 18 tips ranging from calendar-taming techniques to running productive meetings and managing interruptions. It also challenges you with quizzes on two revealing questions: “Are you a micromanager?” and “And you ready and willing to delegate?”

“Part II: Use Technology to Speed Tasks” gives you 18 tips on meeting-agenda templates, keyboard shortcuts, web-based productivity trackers, using online tools to speed projects, and how social media can actually save you time.

Use these ideas as guideposts for regaining control of your time and stop working in a crisis mode every day. The payoff is more efficiency, less stress, improved performance and career wisdom. Ultimately, you’ll discover that the most important lesson about time management is the ability to identify what’s important—to you, your boss, your staff and your organization’s bottom line.
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PART I:

Work Smarter, Not Longer Hours

1. **6 ways to improve your time management**

For many managers, the clock is their biggest adversary. Finding enough time in the day to complete every necessary project can be difficult. But the old adage “Work smarter, not harder” is based on the concept of managing the minutes in your day more efficiently.

Here are six tips to help you work toward that goal:

1. **Create quiet times.** Essentially, this is time when you block out all interruptions. Inform your staff that a certain time, say 2 p.m. to 3 p.m., is off-limits except for emergency questions. Or you can set aside quiet times on a case-by-case basis by posting something on your door. Chances are, if you create quiet times, your staffers will solve problems on their own more efficiently.

   If quiet times aren’t an option, you can break away from interruptions by finding an empty office.

2. **Handle paper only once.** Productivity experts agree that the No. 1 way to save time is to handle each piece of paper only once. If you pick up a piece of mail, deal with it right there. Act on it! Toss it in the trash, file it for future reference in the appropriate place or hand it off.

   If you read a memo, report or article and then hold it to deal with it later, you’re wasting time. *The exception:* when you put it in a reading file for those times when you’re waiting at an airport and have time to kill. If you’re not saving it for an otherwise wasted time, act on it immediately.

   The same is true with email and voice mail. When you read or listen to it, decide right then and there what to do with it. Don’t save it for a later date; that creates more work in the long run.

3. **Limit the length of interruptions.** Be honest with employees or co-workers who stop to chat or run on too long at a meeting. Don’t expect them to pick up on your subtle cues—like a door half shut or your frazzled look—that you’re on a tight deadline. State clearly that “I have to finish this project by noon; can we discuss this problem right after?”

4. **Create a time log.** Jot down what you do all day, in increments of 15 minutes, for a week or two. You’re looking for patterns of waste, interruptions that can be halted and tasks that can be delegated. This will help identify inefficiencies in your day.

   Those informal conversations with co-workers can be valuable, but if they’re taking five hours out of your workweek, that’s more than 12% of your time! For time-management masters, a time log will help you further identify areas to curb.

5. **Do what’s most important.** Time management isn’t just doing more; it’s doing what’s important. Jotting down what you have to do isn’t enough, especially if it’s scattered on sticky notes.
You also need more than a list of what needs to be done. The most important part of time management is identifying what’s important: to you, your boss, your staff and the organization. Use that to decide what to tackle, and do it when you have your best boost of energy, such as first thing in the morning.

6. Stop working in crisis mode. If it seems like you’re always putting out fires, here are some tips to stop that cycle:

- **Set realistic deadlines.** Many crises occur because people rush through their work to make tight deadlines. So, when you’re involved in setting time frames for big projects, add a cushion to allow for emergencies that will inevitably arise.

- **Prevent recurring “emergencies.”** If you encounter the same emergencies over and over, find a way to fix them for good. If an employee keeps making the same mistake, hold him or her accountable with a progressive-discipline deadline. If a vendor keeps getting your order wrong, start searching for a new vendor.

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11 ways to reduce the stress of your job

There’s no single magic bullet that will erase your work-related stress. Instead, a series of little steps—like the ones listed here—can work even better:

1. **Write everything down.** Don’t rely so much on your memory.

2. **Allow a little margin** of extra time for everything.

3. **Review your standards** to make sure they are not unrealistic. Perfectionism breeds stress.

4. **Always have a “Plan B”** to fall back on if “Plan A” doesn’t work out.

5. **Organize your desk** before leaving each evening. Put the most important job on top so that you can focus on it first thing in the morning.

6. **Don’t lug around a full briefcase** with material you don’t need. It’s not good for your back or your outlook.

7. **Focus on using the resources** you have instead of complaining about the resources you lack.

8. **Tackle your toughest task** in the first 10 minutes on the job.

9. **Give yourself deadlines;** start early and stick to them.

10. **Set realistic goals** for each day.

11. **Question the purpose** of meetings. If possible, find an alternative way to distribute information.
• **Let employees solve the problem.** Your job as manager isn’t to dive in and automatically take over the moment a crisis occurs. It’s usually best to guide employees to their own solutions. If you give them the opportunity to fix a problem, they’ll learn how to stave off problems in the future.

2. **Which time management system works best?**

When your job is to keep things from falling through the cracks, a good time management system can serve as a tightly woven net. But which time management method works best? The one that works for you.

Sue Shellenbarger, a columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*, recently took the most widely used systems for a test drive, trying each one for a week. Here’s what she learned:

1. **Getting Things Done (davidco.com):** “GTD” aims to corral all the projects and tasks floating around in your head into an organizing system that you update weekly. The system (in theory) enables you to quickly identify the next step to keep all your projects moving forward.

   **How to start:** Do a weekly “mind sweep” by writing down everything you should be doing, want to do or dream of doing.

   Next, create new files, action lists, calendar items or reminders based on next steps. Your daily calendar is reserved for the most urgent items. Everything else is displayed on a “workflow map.”

   **Benefits:** It clumps together your tasks by context, making it easy to, say, tackle phone calls all at once. Shellenbarger says that GTD also forced her to better manage paper flow.

   **Downside:** The system requires time to master.

2. **The Pomodoro Technique (pomodorotechnique.com):** You tackle tasks in 25-minute increments, with the help of a kitchen timer.

   **How to start:** Begin each day with a log of things to do, then tackle each one in 25-minute intervals called “Pomodoros.” When a Pomodoro is over, mark an X on the log next to the item, and then take a three- to five-minute break. If you feel tempted to break a Pomodoro, put an apostrophe over the X on the log.

   **Benefits:** Shellenbarger became more aware of how often she interrupted herself, and the regular breaks improved her mental agility.

   **Downside:** The system demands interruption-free time blocks, which may prove difficult for many.

3. **FranklinCovey’s Focus (franklincovey.com):** Focus aims to break users’ “urgency addiction,” the habit of going from one unimportant-but-pressing task to the next.

   **How to start:** Spend a half-hour each week thinking through your values, identifying goals and blocking out time to pursue them.

   Enter daily tasks on your calendar, prioritizing them based on urgent and important, important but not urgent, urgent but not important, or not urgent or important.

   **Benefits:** Shellenbarger says she felt calmer by week’s end and more comfortable with letting small stuff slide.

   **Downside:** Like GTD, Focus requires an up-front investment of mental effort.
Lesson: Try different approaches to wrangling your time, and adopt the practices and rituals you can stick with. And realize that, ultimately, the key to getting more important stuff done is to do less of everything else.

3. Micromanaging: 5 signs you’re doing it, 4 solutions

When it comes to assigning projects, do you spend most of your time telling employees how to do the work? Or do you give them clear goals and guidelines, and then get out of the way?

Micromanaging is an inefficient use of a manager’s time. It signals distrust of employees and inhibits them from taking initiative.

Effective managers strike a balance: They provide hands-on supervision and pay attention to detail without excessively monitoring the minutiae.

Here are key signs of micromanaging and advice on how to reduce it.

**Traits of micromanagers**

1. **You require frequent updates** and reports on details and procedures involved in daily tasks and long-term projects. You feel the need to be “on top of” everything employees do.

2. **You believe that you should have better skill,** knowledge and judgment than everyone you supervise. You feel that nobody in the department can make better decisions than you about anything.

3. **You rarely delegate responsibilities** and decision-making. You ask employees to consult with you before making decisions and become irritated when they don’t.

4. **You have a low tolerance for mistakes** and withdraw work assignments before completion because of even small slip-ups.

5. **Employees are disengaged.** They agree with everything you say and no longer offer suggestions to handle job duties and resolve issues.

**4 ways to stop micromanaging**

1. **Clearly communicate expectations,** in both project quality and deadlines. Managers who communicate imprecisely can end up micromanaging because employees don’t understand performance expectations. Create a checklist if needed.

2. **Determine who, what and when you micromanage.** Is it all projects or certain types? Is it some employees or all of them? Do you tend to micromanage at certain times of the day or week?

3. **Learn to delegate gradually.** Steadily reduce the time spent micromanaging top performers and those who demonstrate the ability to be productive without constant, detailed supervision. Delegate the least critical tasks and decisions first, and eventually include more important assignments as your comfort level with delegating increases.
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Quiz: Are you a micromanager?

As a manager, you must remain involved in your employees’ activities. But where does involvement stop and micromanaging begin? Sticking your nose too deeply into an employee’s work process can be counterproductive. Learn to control the process, not the people.

Let’s say you overheard an employee refer to you as a micromanager. To find out if it’s true, answer the following questions using this scale:

4 = Very often  3 = Often   2 = Sometimes   1 = Seldom   0 = Never

How Often Do You ...

___  1. Give specific directions about how you want a task completed?

___  2. Wonder what employees are doing and whether their time could be spent better?

___  3. Reject an employee’s suggestion because it isn’t how you would perform the task?

___  4. Get annoyed when a normally capable employee makes a simple error?

___  5. Worry about whether a key task will be done right or on time?

___  6. Sneak a peek when your employee isn’t around to see how a project is progressing?

___  7. Delegate work in increments rather than explain the entire project at once?

___  8. Resent or refuse to answer questions about “why” a task needs to be done?

___  9. Find employees coming to you with multiple questions to which they should know the answers?

___ 10. Talk most of the time during strategy meetings or brainstorming sessions?

(Scoring on next page)
**Scoring: Are you a micromanager?**

30 to 40: Your employee is right: You’re a micromanager. You may be focusing too much on how employees perform the work, not the outcome. Instead of always explaining how something should be done, explain what you’re trying to achieve. After all, your employee may know a faster, better way.

20 to 29: Shift your focus to results. You’re not a “dyed-in-the-wool” micromanager, but you need to loosen the reins a bit. Give employees more space to make decisions.

10 to 19: It’s not your fault. If you’ve answered the questions honestly, you’re not micromanaging your employees, but you still have a problem. They view your critiques negatively, so you need to work on communicating your expectations and feedback more effectively.

0 to 9: He must have been talking about someone else. The complaint is probably an isolated remark.

4. Start with a question. Begin every discussion about a new project or task by asking employees for suggestions.

   **Bottom line:** Realize that micromanaging hampers the ability of managers and employees to perform to their full potential. Learn to find that balance between effective quality control and empowering your employees.

4. 5 ways to get your calendar under control

   By Scott Eblin, Next Level leadership blog

It seems like I talk with clients about the challenge of taming their calendars at least two or three times a week. In the age of interconnected scheduling systems like Outlook and the continuous push to get more done with less in any given day, more and more leaders feel like Sisyphus rolling that big rock up the never-ending hill.

What the heck can you do to get your calendar back under control and have time to think, reflect, relax, connect, and have some fun and a life outside of work? I’ve been brainstorming that question with my clients lately.

Here are five strategies we’ve come up with that make a difference:

1. Keep your most important objectives in mind

   If you’re really clear and honest with yourself, you likely have three or four big objectives that represent about 80% of what success looks like for you. Keep that list in front of you and make sure you’re not spending a lot of time on things that don’t further those objectives.
2. Use the help that’s available
If you have a good assistant, help them help you. Have regular conversations with your assistant about your goals so they can help prioritize requests for your time. Ask them to schedule and protect regular blocks of administrative time for you to think and catch up. Give your assistant permission to say “No” on your behalf.

3. Negotiate on requests for your time
For example, if your boss asks you to attend a two-day conference to wave the company flag, look for the highest-impact half-day on the agenda and negotiate to just attend that portion. Get clear with the requestor on specific desired takeaways from your participation. If there are no specific benefits, maybe you don’t have to be there at all.

4. Beware of standing meetings
Don’t fill up your calendar with standing meetings that you attend because you’re not doing anything else. Get in the habit of asking yourself, “Is this the highest and best use of my time?” If you’ve already attended three status meetings on a project in one week, how much marginal value is there in attending a fourth?

5. Bundle meetings by location
The time it takes to travel to and from meetings is an often overlooked and insidious time suck. Don’t waste time traveling back and forth to the same place multiple times a week. Reduce your cumulative travel time by bundling your meetings together by location.

5. Before you panic, work this checklist
The next time you face an emergency situation, work through these four steps:

1. Set your current work aside; you can come back to it later.
2. Take a moment to decide whether to treat the situation as a true emergency or not.
3. Seek help immediately from the right people: those who will help define the next steps to take. Then, delegate.
4. Remind yourself that you and your organization have the capacity to bend, not break, in response to emergency.

— Adapted from *Time Management for the Creative Person*, Lee Silber

6. 4 ways to beat procrastination
Procrastination could be the quintessential modern problem: The percentage of people who admitted to difficulties with procrastination is on the rise, according to studies.

As people grapple with the urge to put things off, economists and psychologists have turned the study of procrastination into a significant field. And what have they discovered? Simply trying harder to “stop procrastinating” doesn’t work.
Here’s what will work:

1. **Make a contract with your future self.** The classic example is Ulysses’ decision to have his men bind him, which would force him to adhere to his long-term aims. A modern example is making a monetary bet with a friend that you’ll lose weight or finish a project.

2. **Set a deadline and share it with others.** The external pressure of a deadline can make you do what you actually want to do.

3. **Break up an open-ended task** into short-term projects. Procrastination is driven, in part, by the gap between effort (required now) and reward (which you reap in the future, maybe). David Allen, author of *Getting Things Done*, emphasizes turning abstract to-dos into concrete tasks. The vaguer the task, the less likely you’ll finish it.

4. **Reduce your choices.** When people are afraid of making the wrong choice, they end up doing nothing.

   — Adapted from “Later,” James Surowiecki, *The New Yorker*

7. **Frazzled? Try managing projects, not time**

Admit it: You’re too busy for all that time management jazz. You prioritize in your head—who has time to make silly lists? And you’ve tried to block out appointments, but emergencies always throw everything awry.

The solution? Try managing *projects* instead of *time*. That way, you won’t need to check your watch every few hours or grow frazzled trying to jam too much into your day.

Here’s how to gain efficiency through project management:

- **√ Match task with the person.** Break a project into its component parts—the specific jobs that you can delegate. Then assign these tasks to the appropriate people with deadlines (day and time) for them to complete each stage. Explain what you want done in writing, and include a numbered list of to-do steps to increase clarity. Distribute a master list of everyone’s role to the whole unit so workers can share information easily.

- **√ Give snappy introductions.** When you’re asked to introduce a guest speaker to a group, distribute the person’s full written bio in advance. That way, you can limit your intro to two or three sentences and direct the audience to the handout for more on the speaker’s background.

- **√ Cluster related jobs.** Maximize every trip from your office by arranging groups of meetings, inspections and errands near your destination.

   Also, combine similar activities. If you’re visiting field offices to generate buy-in for your pet project, line up back-to-back meetings where you can sell the troops without distractions. If you schedule unrelated tasks smack in the midst of your “road show,” you force yourself to shift gears abruptly.

- **√ Make “just-in-time” decisions.** Smart managers choose the proper moment to gather and review the data they need to draw the right conclusion. If you rush to make a preliminary decision—only to revisit the issue repeatedly in the weeks ahead—you waste time.
As a rule, only make decisions once. If circumstances change or new information surfaces, then reassess. But otherwise, don’t dally or rely on committees to hash out something you can resolve faster on your own.

8. Managing interruptions: a key time-saver

Interruptions are a fact of every manager’s daily life. They come with the turf. The ability to manage them well is a hallmark of your time-management competence.

Although you want to budget time for the inevitable interruption, you want to hold that to a minimum. To discourage unnecessary disruptions, follow these tips:

- **Don’t allow your open-door policy to be abused.** By and large, the benefits of having an open-door policy outweigh the disadvantages. Easy access to the boss tends to pay off in higher productivity and morale. Workers who feel free to talk and gripe to the boss are more relaxed and more willing to work hard.

  But an open-door policy can be easily abused and lead to serious loss of time and concentration. If you’re not sure how much time your open-door policy consumes, keep a log of how many drop-in visitors interrupt you every day for a week. Write down who came in and how long they stayed. Chances are you’ll find that the famous 80/20 rule holds here, too: 20% of your visitors take up 80% of your time.

- **Let people know when you really can’t be interrupted.** Open-door policy or not, there are times when people should not feel free to drop in and interrupt you. It’s up to you to tell them just when those times are. You can simply say, “I’m busy now, but please tell me what the problem is and we can set up a time to discuss it this afternoon.”

- **Discourage upward delegation.** It’s unfair for staffers to pass work up to you if they can just as easily handle it themselves. The same goes for low-level decisions they could make on their own.

- **Encourage workers to make decisions for themselves.** How do you do that? By praising initiative when you see it. When staffers see that they are free to act autonomously, they will feel less need to come to you.

- **Put a curb on venting time.** Tell your staff you’ve set aside one hour a week (or every two weeks) to listen to them vent, but that you’re ready to handle any serious problem on an immediate basis. Define “serious,” and make sure employees understand your definition.

- **Arrange your office strategically.** Stand outside your door and look in. If Jane was planning to interrupt you, would she find a comfy, easily accessible chair ready and waiting? If so, move the chair to a less inviting space. Or, would Jane be able to catch your attention while you’re seated at your desk? If so, reposition your desk so that you’re not facing the door.

  Also, guard against a convivial atmosphere that invites drop-ins. Some managers, for example, keep a coffee machine in their office—that may turn the room into a corporate social center.

- **Stand up when an unannounced visitor enters.** Your body language will signal that you’re busy and don’t have much time. Don’t invite the person to sit down. You can be courteous yet firm in asking visitors to state their business right away.
Learn to dismiss irrelevant interruptions. If visitors can’t get their problems across in two or three sentences, they probably aren’t that urgent and will hold till later. Tell your staff that brevity is your policy.

Use silence as a weapon. Once business has been transacted, clam up. Chitchat wastes time two ways—at the beginning of a visit and at the end. Cut it off at the

Don’t let self-interruptions derail you

How many hours do you think workers spend on average at the office every week? Would you believe 60 hours? And some employees actually brag about working 100-hour weeks.

These people believe that the longer they work, the more impressive they look. But the true superheroes are those who work reasonable hours and manage their workloads like pros; get away from the office to recharge, then come back energized and creative; and don’t make careless mistakes because they’re tired and overworked.

The first step to managing your workload is handling self-interruptions. Here’s how:

√ Schedule time to work on top-priority projects—uninterrupted. Tell co-workers about your “do not disturb” time and when you’ll be available again. Ask them not to request “just a minute” of your time during those hours.

√ Address small irritants head on instead of letting them get under your skin. For example, turn off the “ping!” that alerts you to new email. Ask a nearby co-worker to stop putting his calls on speakerphone.

√ Keep “conversation enders” at the ready. It’s important to know how to bring a rambling conversation to an end. Not everyone will feel a sense of urgency about work when you do. Example: “I’d love to hear more, but this project is due in 20 minutes. Can we talk tomorrow?”

√ Don’t interrupt yourself. Productivity suffers when you think, “Oh, before I forget, I need to tell Bob ...,” and dash off to find him. Or, “I’d better do X before I forget.”

Tip: Write down a task or thought that distracts you, so you can revisit it later. Once you’ve written it down, put it out of your head. Tell yourself: “This isn’t my priority right now. Thinking about it isn’t productive.”

√ Get a head start. Come into work 45 minutes earlier than normal, three times a week. With a quiet office and no one to interrupt you, you’ll plow through your work.

Bonus tip: Ask yourself: “Am I able to say ‘no’ to the unimportant tasks and ‘yes’ to the important ones?” Post this sign in your office: “What’s the most important thing to do right now?” First, do what’s both urgent and important. Then spend as much time as possible doing important things that aren’t so urgent.
beginning, again by asking, “What’s on your mind?” Be friendly but not effusive. Use silence to close down small talk at the end.

■ **Show visitors out.** Some people won’t take a hint. If your visitor shows no sign of leaving, a physical gesture on your part may be the best tactic. Start walking your visitor toward the door.

9. **Delegating: a ‘must’ on your to-do list**

Delegating is management gospel. Unfortunately, some managers pay lip service to delegating: They do the job themselves because they think they can do it so much better and don’t have the time to explain how to do it to a subordinate.

This rationalization puts delegating skills right at the heart of any time management

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**Quiz: Are you ready and willing to delegate?**

*Check your readiness to delegate by answering the following questions:*

- Do you demand perfection from yourself and others?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- If you do, are you proud of it?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Do you always keep up with your daily “to do” list of priorities?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Are you always the last one to leave the office, or at least among the last?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Are you a detail person? Someone who demands to know more than one needs to know?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Are you under constant deadline pressure?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Do you hesitate to accept ideas that others present?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Do you keep a hand in the last job you had before you were promoted to management?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Do you give overly detailed instructions?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Do you hold more than one staff meeting a week?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Are you afraid that one of your subordinates will show you up in front of the boss?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Should top managers work harder than middle managers?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Is your in-basket constantly overflowing?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Do you take work home every night?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

- Do you have more followers than initiators on your staff?  
  - [ ] Yes  
  - [ ] No

*More than five “yes” replies indicate that you should take a second look at how well and how effectively you delegate.*
program: If you can’t or won’t delegate, you are managing your time badly. It’s as simple as that—and as difficult.

Letting go is hard. Some managers who moved up through the ranks regard their previous jobs as they would their children. Yet you will never gain control of your day unless you invest time in training somebody else to do a job, even if it’s done only 70% as well as you can do it.

Managers who delegate can double, even triple, their productivity by utilizing other people’s talents—a key definition of the managerial function. Poor delegators, by contrast, are constantly on the run, always late and behind schedule, with barely time to grab lunch.

**What to delegate vs. what to handle yourself**

To manage your time properly and get more done in less time, you must decide what to delegate and what to keep for yourself. Some guidelines:

- **Routine and repetitive jobs.** These are time-consuming but necessary. They’re also the easiest to delegate. You know them so well that they’ve become second nature to you. As a result, you can explain them quickly and clearly.

  Some of these jobs are unpleasant or boring. Others are social functions—necessary parts of the job but not always productive. Indeed, one way of managing your meeting time better is to assign someone else to attend those of marginal importance and to report back to you. Ask an eager young subordinate to sub for you at a luncheon or a routine budget meeting.

- **Jobs requiring special expertise.** Delegate tasks that require specific skills or demand extensive research. The most obvious example these days is adoption of a new computer system. Some managers do their own research, playing catch-up as they do and wasting lots of time. You would do far better to delegate the research and ask your IT department questions relating to fundamentals, such as benefit, functionality and cost.

- **Pet projects.** Give up your pets, the jobs you love but don’t have time to do—not only those you did before becoming a manager. Always ask yourself whether a “fun” thing can be safely delegated. Odds are, it can be, and you’re merely engaging in elaborate self-deception to keep something you enjoy.

  You can keep a few of these tasks, just for enjoyment, but limit them severely. It’s a little bit like drinking. The occasional drink is relaxing, but the three-martini lunch knocks you out for the afternoon.

- **Crisis.** Never delegate a crisis. That’s your business and calls for hands-on action. But note that if you have a history of delegating responsibilities, your staff will be prepared to pitch in and help. They will know what to do because, over time, you have taught them what you expect. That makes them better self-starters. People not used to accepting responsibility are more likely to freeze when the heat is on.

- **Policy making.** This is your job, but you should delegate its implementation. Policy sets the limits of decision making. It tells your staff what they should and should not do. *Example:* Corporate policy makers develop credit guidelines, but salespeople often decide how much credit to give favored customers within those guidelines.
Personnel matters. Tempting as it is, you should not delegate the tasks of evaluation, promotion or dismissal. Get input from others, but reserve the right to take action. Analyses of job classifications, pay scales, merit raises and so on are time-consuming, but you and your HR department must handle those. Others cannot ensure confidentiality; that’s a manager’s job.

Symbolic acts. Don’t leave celebrations to others. Be there to present the gold watch, eat the birthday cake or congratulate the bride. You can’t leave to others the symbolism that unites a company or a department. If you do, you risk being perceived as someone who doesn’t care. That perception isn’t worth the time you save by not attending.

10. How you delegate: the ultimate test of time

How you delegate is the ultimate test of your managerial and time management skills. Follow these steps:

1. Pick the right person for the task. There’s no use choosing your most trusted lieutenant if he or she can’t do the job. Feelings really don’t belong in this process. Obviously, delegation is a sign of trust: You expect the person to do the job. But don’t confuse trust with liking.

   There are jobs that your department’s proven stumbler can do better than anybody else, while your star performer may be an absolute dud in certain situations. It’s up to you to assess each person’s skills and decide who’s best suited to a particular job.

2. Explain the job and what results you expect. Make sure the person understands what you want done. Mention the issues that must be addressed, the points to include, the resources available and the format of any report to prepare. The essence of good delegation—and of good time management—is clarity. If your explanation is flawed or unclear, you will have to explain all over again and deal with a job poorly done—both prime time-wasters.

3. Specify how much latitude the person will have. Be especially clear about how much authority you’re delegating and how much control you plan to exercise. Remember: Delegating is not abdicating. Ultimately, you are still responsible for the job being done right, but you must calibrate how much rope you are handing out. You can reserve the right of approval or authorize various degrees of freedom to act—from action that’s subject to your veto to freedom to act without even communicating the results to you.

4. Be supportive. Encourage those who do a good job; be tolerant of those who don’t. Ignoring top performers is counterproductive. Stars will be miffed if you haven’t noticed—especially if you pat yourself on the back for being such a good manager. Coming down like a tyrant on failures is also counterproductive. Those who didn’t do a good job will then be too discouraged to try again.

   Note that both extremes cost you time in the long run: time you could have saved by making a small investment in praise and tolerance.

5. Don’t insist that jobs be done your way. As long as the results are good, you’re ahead of the game. Only nitpickers demand that their approach be slavishly copied.
6. **Give the person a chance to refuse the task.** Your subordinate may have good reasons for refusing a particular job, and it behooves you to listen. Some of the reasons may be valid, and if you don’t take them into account, the job could be mishandled—or cost you time unnecessarily.

   *Tip:* You can accomplish much more by using considerate language. The conditional tense is helpful. “Could you do something?” offers wider latitude than the direct “Do it.”

7. **Keep an eye on the job’s progress.** Check often if you’ve given the employee only limited authority, but check only occasionally if the person has carte blanche. Then be careful how you ask about the project. You want to make sure the person doesn’t interpret your interest as interference or criticism.

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11. **How top performers employ their time**

Most people think the key to being productive is working flat-out 100% of the time. Not so, according to John Zenger, former chairman of the Times Mirror Group.

   Zenger, who has studied highly productive people, says they:

   ✓ **Vary the pace.** For unfamiliar new activities, they slow down and work methodically until they’ve learned what they need to know. Yet, in activities in which they’re already experts, they work quickly—sometimes, with blinding speed.

   ✓ **Orient themselves** toward garnering big returns, fast. When possible, their goal is to seek the biggest advantage in the least amount of time.

   ✓ **Eschew monolithic** project management. When handling complex projects, they multitask by letting different implementation teams handle different parts of the project.

   ✓ **Take frequent breaks** to rest and recharge. That might be why top execs haven’t abandoned lunches.

   ✓ **Accelerate different parts** of big projects, whenever possible. *Example:* If the research they conducted last year gives them a leg up on a big project currently on their plate, they plug it in.

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12. **Take 10-minute breaks to boost productivity**

   *By Scott Eblin, Next Level leadership blog*

   If you’re like a lot of leaders, you’re thinking, “I don’t have time to take a break.” Well, actually, you do, and you really can’t afford not to. Making a habit of taking mini-breaks throughout the day will increase your productivity and effectiveness by clearing your mind and renewing your body.
Over the past four years, dozens of clients in our Next Level Leadership™ group coaching program have successfully taken on the challenge of pacing themselves so they show up at their best. Here’s their top 10 list of what they’ve been doing to create some mini-breaks and establish a more effective pace for themselves:

10 proven, simple ways to pace yourself

2. Schedule planning and review time for yourself every week.
3. Eat lunch away from your desk.
4. Set your computer or smartphone to chime five minutes before each hour. Use the chime as a cue to step back and assess what you’re doing.
5. Take five minutes before important meetings to ask what you’re trying to accomplish and how you need to show up to make that likely.
6. Take a five-minute deep-breathing and stretching break at least once in the morning and once in the afternoon.
7. Take a cue from a British client and make a habit of taking a mid-afternoon break for tea or a snack.
8. Take a 10-minute walk in the mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Stop to chat with the people you see. It’s a simple way to practice management by walking around.
9. Begin the day with exercise instead of email.
10. Set limits on the amount of time you spend responding to email in one sitting. It helps you avoid that “black hole” feeling three hours later.

13. Reclaim your calendar ... and your life

Stever Robbins, famous for advice on maximizing your creativity and whipping your email into submission, now is integrating time management and innovation into a coherent system for getting things done. From his new guide to working less and accomplishing more:

- **Live on purpose.** Figure out what’s really important to you, and then set your priorities through life maps with your goals plotted out. Expose your blind spot so you won’t have any nasty surprises sneak up on you.

- **Make technology your slave, not the other way around.** Gadgets should give you freedom. “When technology diverts you while pretending to help you, that’s the worst,” Robbins says. Turn off devices so they can’t hijack your agenda, and set a “designated interruption time.”
Don’t confuse “neat” with “organized.” Recent research shows you can spend too much time sorting and filing—even if someone is doing it for you.

Rather, “everything in its place” may well mean one of several dozen piles around your office, as long as you know which pile to attack when you need something. Don’t waste time keeping the place pristine.

Prioritize. The 80/20 rule applies not only to your customers; it also should govern your workload. Stop trying to do things perfectly. Focus instead on better preparation and speedier decision-making for the fifth of your work that counts most.

If you do add top priorities, take away low priorities. Make to-do lists that let you delegate, and create resource books for reference as you add new skills.

3 ways to accomplish more in your life

Robbins has developed a system that can help you maintain concentration and do more in less time. Divide your life into “focus,” “admin” and “spirit” days.

1. Focus days require a strong emphasis on your core work, including strategy sessions, reviews of research and employee evaluations.

   Stay focused on focus days. Even though you’ll have more concentrated time for critical projects, you still have to pay attention. Dedicate separate time for each topic. Ignore everything else—even if that means turning off the BlackBerry for two hours.

2. Admin days usually have lots of different content but similar, routine kinds of tasks, such as signing papers, returning phone calls and running errands.

   Admin days require lots of picking things up and putting them down. They also involve organizing and setting your calendar. They rarely require deep thought. Group tasks so that paperwork is together, as are errands and appointments. Clue in your support staff about admin days so they will be ready.

3. Spirit days nurture the soul. Set them aside for friends and family, reading and reflection. They used to call these days “the weekend.”

   Schedule slack time, too. Besides spirit days, you need plain old slack time. Generally, it will be soaked up with small crises and spillover on projects. But schedule it strictly for slack. Don’t think of specific things to slot in, like your kids’ games or your routine fitness program. Those need to be scheduled separately.

   If you feel it’s unrealistic to set aside a whole day for one type of task, start with half-days. But it’s better to begin with whole admin days, and as you find you’re getting done sooner, add half-days of focus time—professional networking leaps to mind.

   — Adapted from Get-It-Done Guy’s 9 Steps to Work Less and Do More, Stever Robbins, St. Martin’s Griffin

14. Follow the 3-day rule on to-dos

Transferring to-dos into your calendar will help you make more strategic choices about how to spend your time. And once you’ve attached them to a particular time and date, you’re more likely to get things done.
You’re also likely to end up with a handful of to-dos that don’t fit into your calendar. What do you do with them? Use the three-day rule to ensure that nothing stays on your list for more than three days.

Do one of four things with any task that’s been on your list after three days:

1. **Do it immediately.** You’ll be amazed by how many of those lingering items take only a few minutes. If it’s as simple as leaving a two-minute voice mail message, do it now.

2. **Schedule it.** It may not fit into your calendar this week, but pick a date—even if it’s six months away—to commit to doing it on a specific day.

3. **Let it go.** Just delete it. If you’re not willing to schedule, it’s time to face reality: The to-do simply isn’t a must-do.

4. **Add it to a someday/maybe list.** You may never get around to doing things on this list, but that’s OK. You’ll sleep a little better knowing that you have somewhere to write down “maybe” tasks.

   **Tip:** Keep a Waiting list. If you’ve sent someone an email and are waiting to hear back, put it on the list. That way, you won’t lose track and can follow up if necessary.

   — Adapted from “What To Do With Your To-Do List,” Peter Bregman, *Harvard Business Review* blog

### 15. 8 steps to a more productive meeting

Attorney Eileen Johnson recalls sitting in a nonprofit’s board meeting where the vice chair was on his BlackBerry, the treasurer was reading *The Wall Street Journal* and another board member was knitting.

These are over-the-top examples of what goes on during unproductive meetings. Between vague agendas and never-ending PowerPoints, meetings have become a waste of time for many.

Here’s how some “experts” structure their huddles to make them productive and run smoothly:

1. **Never schedule a meeting beyond 90 minutes.** Bob Pozen, a senior lecturer at Harvard Business School, told the *Harvard Business Review* that at 90 minutes, “people turn off” and “the diminishing returns are staggering.”

2. **Deliver meeting material the day before by email,** Pozen says. That way, you won’t waste precious minutes reviewing material as a group.

3. **Require a one-page executive summary for all materials,** Pozen says. The expectation is that all attendees must read the summary before the meeting.

4. **Let meeting participants agree on deliverables** and set their own timetables, at the end of the meeting. “Then they will have an ownership interest in the follow-up, rather than just going along with my directions,” he says.
5. **Post the mission statement in the room**, if you’re holding a board meeting, advises Johnson. Pick a mission-related topic to talk about first. Or hold the meeting in a location that’s central to the board’s mission.

6. **Gather opinions with a round-robin approach**, starting with the junior members, Johnson told Association Bisnow. No “dittos” allowed.

7. **Appoint someone to play devil’s advocate**, says Johnson, to make sure problems are brought up and hard questions asked.

8. **Do 80% of the work before the meeting**. At Intel Corp., meeting holders must circulate a draft agenda to gather suggestions and revisions in advance. The final one-pager includes the meeting’s purpose and goals, subtopics with time frames for each, a list of attendees and what each one should bring to the table.

   “We know from experience that 80% of the hard work gets done before the meeting even begins,” Michael Fors, Intel’s corporate employee-development manager, told *Harvard Business Communication*. “We’re all responsible for using our time effectively, and we’re aware of the opportunity costs.”

16. **Make every second count: Learn how to say no**

High performers usually focus on only a few things at a time. The more you take on, the greater the chance that you will lose effectiveness not only in getting that task done but most likely in all aspects of your life.

Use these tips for saying no to keep you on track and save you time:

- **Know what your goals and priorities are.** As *One-Minute Manager* author Ken Blanchard says, “A person who does not have goals is used by someone who does.”

  If you have a plan for managing your work and time, it is easier to say no to new activities that don’t fit into your agenda.

- **Be realistic about the consequences of doing one more thing.** The best approach is to be honest and direct.

  For example, say, “If I do this, I won’t be able to get to do the other things that I’ve committed to do.” When a new opportunity comes your way, compliment the idea (if you feel it has merit) before declining to participate.

- **Offer alternatives and solutions.** Suggest someone else who you think could do a better job or who’s available sooner to work on the task.

  If the request is from your boss, suggest a project or priority you’re doing that could be dropped, delayed or given to someone else.

  — Adapted from *101 Ways to Make Every Second Count*, Robert W. Bly, Career Press
17. Set yourself up for action: 4 tips to overcome inertia

What makes the difference between productive workers and those who simply think they’re productive? Doing vs. talking.

Here are four quick tips on how to set yourself up for action:

1. **Jolt yourself into action by trying something.** You may be accustomed to planning things out perfectly, yet for most of us, things often don’t go exactly as planned.

   So if you’re stuck in a planning rut, take action in any way you can. You’ll learn something by acting. And the momentum will help you refine your objectives and move ahead.

2. **Prototype your ideas.** Designers aren’t the only ones who can create a prototype—it’s really just a trial run. And it’s useful because we rarely strike upon the best solution right out of the gates. We get there through trial and error. The sooner you experiment, the sooner you gain the information you need.

3. **Replace update meetings with “huddles.”** When we all gather in the conference room, meetings tend to take a bit longer than they need to. Yet, when everyone remains standing for a meeting, the gathering automatically gains a certain urgency that encourages speedy updates and a swifter return to doing.

4. **Create testaments to progress** by taking time to appreciate what you’ve accomplished. For example, create a wall of “to-done’s” or use a project board to track each phase of a project, checking it off as you go.

   We feel spurred to action when we remind ourselves that every little step makes a difference.

   — Adapted from “5 Tips on How to Emphasize Action Over Inertia,” J.K. Glei, OPEN Forum

18. Time management done right

More important than getting everything done is getting the **right** things done. How do you figure out which priorities are most worthy of attention?

A structured to-do list is the solution offered by Peter Bregman, *Harvard Business Review* blogger and author of *18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction and Get Things Done*.

Start with your top five priorities for the year, such as “Do great work for current directors,” “Build repertoire of technical skills” or “Have fun and take care of myself.” Those things will become the organizing map for your day.

Set up a to-do list made up of blocks where each of those priorities becomes a headline. Add a final category titled “The Other 5%.”

Now, fill in your to-dos so that each item has a home within your six or so categories. The benefits:
√ Helps you visualize your priorities. “This structure helps carve up my day into manageable, digestible chunks,” writes Bregman. “And ensures I spend my time where I should. Saying I want to focus on something is meaningless unless I actually spend my time there.”

√ Allows you to rebalance your time. You may find that one category contains many to-dos, while another is empty. That’s OK for a short time. But if the trend continues, it’s time to refocus on an area where you’re lagging.

√ Sharpens your sense of what-not-to-dos. If you notice that the list of “Other 5%” tasks are dominating your list, it’s time for action. Perhaps it’s time to delay some tasks.

— Adapted from 18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction and Get Things Done, Peter Bregman
19. Can social media actually save you time?

Social media can be a tool to save you time and actually help your business. Here are five suggestions from OpenForum.com to get more out of it:

1. **Get the news fast.** Keeping up with the latest news on business or your industry can be a time drain. Two social media tools can help: RSS feeds and news aggregators.
   
   With RSS feeds ([www.problogger.net/what-is-rss](http://www.problogger.net/what-is-rss)) you can pull together various sources of information onto a single page. And news aggregators like [www.alltop.com](http://www.alltop.com) give you the latest news in easy-to-read pieces without spending a lot of time on various sites. *(See more aggregators in box at right.)*

2. **Digital archiving.** The Internet is great for keeping track of content and capturing ideas. Sites like [Del.icio.us](http://Del.icio.us) let you bookmark websites to come back to later. Having a digital archive can save you time when you need to go back and find something later.

3. **Save time “searching.”** One of the most frequently searched phrases online is “how to,” but when you do a simple Google search you get millions of results for any topic.
   
   Instead, focus on multimedia content. Do your “how to” search on YouTube and see what videos come up, or click the “Videos” tab when searching Google. Try going on [Slideshare.net](http://Slideshare.net) to see if anyone has already uploaded a visual presentation about the topic. Not only will your searching be easier, but what you find will be a lot simpler to understand than pages of text.

4. **Twitter search.** Use Twitter’s built-in search feature at [search.twitter.com](http://search.twitter.com). You can pinpoint what’s happening now and use it to build your business.

5. **Simplify with apps.** Getting the right apps can help you get lots of things done without ever needing to open the computer. Apps can make it much easier than navigating websites.
20. **Create a meeting-agenda template fast**

The monthly department meeting is next week, and you’ve already heard from four people who want to appear on the agenda. You expect a few more to chime in. It’s your job to create an agenda that affords adequate time for each item, as well as to make sure the meeting runs smoothly and ends on time.

Your best approach? Build an adjustable meeting-agenda template in Excel, recommends Annette Marquis, co-owner of TRIAD Consulting.

This simple worksheet automatically manages start and end times, she says. When you add a speaker at the last minute, time allotments for other items adjust automatically.

Here’s how to build one:

- Create your title and headings (location, date, etc.) for the top of your template.

- Enter column headings, beginning with “Start,” “End” and “Time” (or “Length”). You might also wish to add columns titled “Item” and “Presenter.” Your worksheet should now look like the example below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Meeting Agenda</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Title:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Location:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Date:</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Start</td>
<td>End</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Select the Start, End and Time cells in the worksheet’s first row (cells A8, B8 and C8 in the example above).

- Click Cells on the Format menu.

- Click Time in the Category list on the Number tab.

- Click 1:30 p.m. in the Time list, and click OK, so the cells will display time entries.

- Click the first cell in the End column and click OK, so the cells will display time entries.

- Click the first cell in the Start column and enter this formula: 
  =IF(ISBLANK(C8),””,A8+C8). This formula will calculate end times for each agenda item, based on how long each item will take.

- Click the cell in the second row of the Start column, and enter this formula: 
  =IF(ISBLANK(B8),””,B8)

- Copy (or fill) the formula in cell B8 to cell B9.

Before adding formulas to subsequent rows, test the worksheet. Enter a start time in the first cell under “Start.” Then, enter a time value under “Time.”
Example: If the meeting start time is 2 p.m., and the first agenda item will take 20 minutes, enter 2:00 p.m. and 0:20. You should see 2:20 p.m. appear in the “End” cell of the first row and in the “Start” cell of the second row.

21. 4 online services that track productivity

How much time do we fritter away at work? According to a Salary.com survey, Americans waste about 20% of their time at work. And a chunk of that wasted time comes from surfing the Internet.

One journalist, in a quest to find out where her time was going, tried out four online services that track productivity:

1. **RescueTime Pro:** It records activities, assigning them to categories and putting them into graphs. It also lets you designate sites or applications as productive or unproductive.

2. **Slife:** The software allows you to customize categories and labels to specify your activities, so you can see how many minutes you spend on, say, Facebook or email.

3. **Klok:** It doesn’t automatically track what you do on the computer. You note when you start and stop each project, so you can later compare your goals to reality.

   The journalist learned, for example, that a writing assignment took 3.5 hours instead of the two she’d budgeted, and that she accomplished fewer tasks than anticipated each day.

4. **ManicTime:** Windows-based, it tracks computer usage with line and bar graphs, then spits out a summary showing what percentage of your total time is spent with each application.

   What did the journalist learn from the experience? Just knowing that you’re tracking your time helps improve productivity.

   — Adapted from “Services to Help Us Stop Dawdling Online,” Alina Dizik, *The Wall Street Journal*

22. Work faster, smarter: 10 keyboard shortcuts

Whether it’s a speedy way to create a bar chart or a trick for switching from one window to the next, keyboard shortcuts can help even power users knock out their work faster.

Here are a few of our favorites:

1. **Create a simple bar chart within a set of data** in Excel by pressing F11 in any cell.

2. **Switch from one window to the next** with Alt-Tab.

3. **Use F4 to repeat your last action.** It’s definitely a time-saver in Microsoft Word. Say you’re changing the font in certain areas of a document. Once you change the first section, you can highlight the next section and simply use your F4 command to copy the changes.
4. **Move to another page quickly** with the F5 key, which brings up the Go To box.

5. **Take advantage of the shortcut power of macros.** Example: You like only one space after the end of a sentence, but many documents come to you with two spaces. Create a macro to take care of that.

6. **Control the appearance of text.** Examples: Control + [ to decrease font size one point at a time, and Control + ] to increase font size one point at a time.

7. **File away emails,** once you’ve read them, by pressing Shift + Enter + V to pull up your Folders. Type in the first few letters of a folder name to call it up, then hit Enter.

8. **Make up your own shortcuts** with ShortKeys Lite. (Other similar software: AutoHotkey and Keyboard Express.) Say you have to enter the same paragraph or contract section in many documents. By assigning a shortcut key to them, you can quickly move from one document to another.

9. **Lock your keyboard** with Windows Key + L, and minimize your screen with Windows Key + M.

10. **Generate white space between paragraphs** (12 pt. of spacing) in Word and Outlook by pressing Ctrl + Shift + 0 (zero).

    You can also use Ctrl + M to increase an indent, and Ctrl + Shift + M to decrease an indent.

**23. 6 apps for streamlining your day**

Six web apps for streamlining day-to-day tasks, recommended by the team at the99percent.com:

1. **NudgeMail.com:** Ensure you won’t forget to respond to an email by forwarding it to NudgeMail and indicating when you want it to be sent again in the “To” field (e.g., monday@nudgemail.com, feb12@nudgemail.com, etc.). The message returns to your inbox at that time.

2. **Hiphmunk.com:** This flight-booking service takes into account how much of a pain each flight is, when ranking flight results.

3. **Xmarks.com:** No matter which major browser you use, Xmarks will sync your bookmarks—even throwing in a set of additional features, such as restore capabilities.

4. **Ge.tt:** Upload and share large files, without being subjected to schlocky ads.

5. **TrackThis:** Ever find yourself ceaselessly refreshing the UPS website to find out when your package will arrive? This saves you the trouble by sending you a play-by-play via email, text, Facebook or Twitter.

6. **About.me:** Build a personal website in about two minutes. Post a picture, a short bio, and link to social media accounts.
24. Keeping up with all the online chatter

Tracking websites, blogs, social networking sites, Twitter—it can be overwhelming. And if you’re not fluent with online tools, it can sometimes feel like a serious waste of time.

Here are four tools to help you keep track, without straying to web pages you don’t have time for:

1. **Scan the big picture by using a “dashboard.”** An RSS-based dashboard gathers all the online pieces in one place. Try Netvibes ([www.netvibes.com](http://www.netvibes.com)), a powerful tool that’s lovely to look at and a cinch to use.

   Netvibes sets up one page, or several, for tracking headlines from sources you choose. For example, you might have one page track general news and another page track industry-specific news, and yet another page that pulls in headlines from top blogs and your Twitter account.

2. **Stay on top of specific topics with MyAlltop.** Alltop gathers 31,000 of the best blogs and websites on a range of topics. It organizes them by subject. So you can look under the broad “Work” heading to find “HR,” “event planning” and “marketing.” Set up a custom, no-frills MyAlltop page, and you can pinpoint which of those specific feeds interest you.

3. **Put your digital scraps somewhere.** Once you’ve found an interesting page, quote or image online, how do you save it? One option: Use Evernote ([evernote.com](http://evernote.com)) and save it in your Evernote “notebook,” which you can easily organize by topic.

   The snippets don’t even need to be organized within Evernote; when you want to retrieve, say, an article on fundraising, simply search in Evernote for “fundraising.” It pulls up the page or image you’ve saved.

4. **Join a web community** to share strategies, solve problems and see how others in your field are enhancing their roles. If you’re a member of an association, tap into their Facebook or LinkedIn web groups.

25. A cure for the ‘mouse potato’? Try add-ons

What makes the Internet useful is also what makes it so undeniably distracting: There’s no end to what you can find online.

Luckily, a few browser add-ons that work with Firefox can help make web surfers more productive (all available at [addons.mozilla.org](http://addons.mozilla.org)):

1. **Email Discipline:** Blocks you from spending too much time on personal email and social networking sites like Facebook. You’ll need to do productive work for two hours between “play” sessions. (You can always hit the “cheat” button to bypass the add-on’s rules.)

2. **ReminderFox:** Puts a to-do list, with deadlines, on the side of your browser. You can set up reminders to pop up, as well.

3. **Procrastato:** Works off a blacklist of sites that you deem “time-wasters.” If you visit one
of the sites, it starts a timer in the background. After your allotted time, a pop-up message tells you to get back to work.

4. **MeeTimer**: Simply keeps tabs on how long you spend on each site, then breaks it up into percentages, so you can see where the bulk of your time goes.

5. **LeechBlock**: Lets you set up blocks of sites, then identifies which blocks you may or may not use at what times of the day. Think of it as similar to the parental settings you have on your TV.

— Adapted from “PC knows best: Tools to nag, remind and track productivity,” Josh Lowensohn, CNET

### 26. Easy ways to turn your toolbar into a time-saver

Using the computer toolbar again and again to pull down the same functions will turn monotonous and stifle productivity.

Ursula Faix, of Sarasota, Fla., offers her time-saving strategies of bypassing drop-down menus so “every command I need is one click away. For me, the most important time-saving technique in Microsoft Word and Excel is to customize the toolbars,” she says.

She offers this advice:

Rather than altering the default toolbars (just in case you want them again), create new toolbars using another name. Start by going to Tools and Customize ..., or right-click on the toolbar.

**√ Choose the New option and name your toolbar.**

With the “Make toolbar available to:” box on that screen, you can choose whether to apply it to a specific document or template, or your Normal.doc. (When working in a document, you can go to View and Toolbars to choose the ones you need.)

**√ Next, drag the commands you regularly use onto the new toolbar.**

“I set them up similar to the Microsoft toolbars but eliminated all the commands that I never use and replaced them with the commands that are useful to me,” Faix explains.

Working in an accounting office, Faix uses Excel all day. Because she works with charts only occasionally, she removed the Chart Wizard from her new toolbar, along with Insert Hyperlink, Spelling, Drawing and the two Sort buttons.

Instead, her customized toolbar includes commands such as: Format Cells, Insert Rows, Delete Rows, Insert Column, Delete Column, Cell Height and Cell Width.

If you use Word all day and often address letters, for example, you can add the “Envelopes and Letters ...” tool to your custom toolbar.

“Once you become accustomed to (the button) placement, your work really becomes more efficient,” she says.

Faix particularly dislikes the Print command on the standard toolbar in Word and Excel, which instantly sends the entire document to the printer. “Many times I only want a specific page or a range of pages. To do that, you must go to the File menu, ‘Print...’ and only then do you see the print dialog box to make choices.”

Her solution: Replace the “Print” button on the toolbar with the “Print ...” button, which opens the box of printing options. “That way, each time I click on Print, I can
change my options prior to saying OK and not mistakenly send 100 pages to the printer.”

So go ahead and give “toolbar customizing” a try on your next Word or Excel document. It could be just the ticket for improving your efficiency and productivity.

27. **5 simple ways to tune your inbox**

Email is a source of productivity, but it can also become an out-of-control monster. Tune up your inbox with these tips:

1. **Keep your inbox skinny.** When you open your inbox, you should see only the most important things. Prune ruthlessly. Unsubscribe from everything that isn’t essential.

2. **Create a “Review” folder.** Move blog excerpts, newsletters and other interesting reads to this folder to keep your inbox focused on important, actionable items.

3. **Archive email into folders with broad headings,** like “Budget” or “Marketing Campaign.” Subdivide broad headings, if needed.

4. **Use a search tool.** The truth is, if you’re using a good search tool, you can find anything with keywords. Narrow your search to one of your broad-topic folders.

5. **Adjust, adjust, adjust.** Add new spam filters and set up new rules to fend off attention-stealing messages.

28. **Improve your tech life: 6 easy updates**

Your software is sluggish; your gadgets are glitchy. Here are six easy updates that will save time and improve your technological life.

1. **Get a smartphone.** Having instant access to your email, calendars, address book, GPS and anything on the Internet will make your life easier.

2. **Switch browsers.** While the latest version of Internet Explorer has some real improvements, it’s bloated with features. Switch to Mozilla Firefox or Google Chrome: Both are speedy, free and include useful features such as bookmark syncing.

3. **Upload your photos to the cloud.** Why? One computer crash could wipe out years of memories. Using an online photo service ensures their safety and you can more easily share them with family and friends. Try Google’s Picasa service, which creates a full backup from your photo library.

4. **Back up your data** using an online backup service. **Benefit:** No additional equipment is needed. Simply install the software, and it runs in the background, regularly copying all your files. **Recommendation:** sosonlinebackup.com.

5. **Set up a file-sharing service.** It’s a more elegant solution than emailing files to yourself. Set up a free account with Dropbox.com, and you’ll have an icon that sits on
your desktop. Drag a file onto the icon, and it instantly saves it to the cloud, where you can retrieve it from any computer or smartphone.

6. Call and ask for a better deal from your cable, phone and Internet providers.

Another tactic: Measure your Internet speed, using dslreports.com/speedtest; if it is less than what you are paying for, ask for a free upgrade.


29. Using social media: How not to waste time

If you find it hard to keep up with Facebook, Twitter and other social media tools, you’ll love this idea: Stop trying to keep up with social technology.

Alexandra Samuel, CEO of Social Signal, a social media agency, says you could spend half your life trying to figure out the latest, greatest tool—so don’t even bother trying.

To refocus your relationships:

√ Start with the social technology network you’re already on, whether it’s LinkedIn or something else. Reach out to former classmates, past employers, people who share your niche interests, or friends of friends.

It’s not about how many contacts you have in your circle. It’s about finding people with whom you can build a real relationship. Don’t waste time with people who will merely offer you the equivalent of a head-nod as you pass them on the street.

√ Think of status updates as a way to communicate, not to broadcast or brag. For example, it’s possible to use Twitter as a way to inspire, collaborate with, meet or learn from others. If you’re simply tweeting about what you had for lunch, you’re missing the boat.

Twitter tip: Use your Twitter tool (Tweetdeck, Nambu, etc.) to create Twitter groups based on what you seek from the individuals in each group.

To reach your business goals:

√ Spend your resources on the platforms that are a fit for your goals and culture. Put aside the rest. Start by “lurking” so you can see how people participate on a certain platform.

Samuel says you should consider, “What’s the minimum level of engagement required to have a credible presence on that platform? If you aren’t able to deliver that over the long haul, you probably want to call things off now until that changes.”

To feel good about your social networks:

√ Think of your online surfing as currency. “Invest” in the things that are important to you. You have a limited amount of time to spend online.
30. Are you as organized as Bill Gates?

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates uses lots of digital tools to get things done. No surprise there, but are you using any of his top tactics? Here are five of Gates’ favorites, according to a *Fortune* magazine article:

**Boost your productivity by adding a monitor.** Gates uses three screens on his desk, synchronized so that he can drag an item from one screen to the next. The left-hand screen holds all email; center screen holds the specific message he’s reading or writing; right-hand screen holds a browser.

**Make email time productive with aggressive filtering.** The only messages that reach Gates’ inbox are those from people within Microsoft or partner companies, or anyone he has corresponded with in the past. Inbox “rules” and search folders keep his messages organized.

**Centralize to-dos by moving them to your desktop.** Gates uses email flags, his online calendar and desktop folders to track to-dos. “So when I walk up to my desk,” he says, “I can focus on the emails I’ve flagged and check the folders that monitor particular projects and particular blogs.”

**Gain access to the right information with a collaborative tool.** Gates uses SharePoint by Microsoft, a tool that lets anyone in the company create websites for collaboration on specific projects.

> “SharePoint puts me in touch with lots of people deep in the organization,” he says. “It’s like having a super website that lets many people edit and discuss: far more than the standard practice of sending emails with enclosures.”

*(Note: Another such software tool can be found at [www.wiki.org](http://www.wiki.org).)*

**Save time hunting for what you need.** Windows Desktop Search has “transformed the way I access information on my PC, on servers and on the Internet,” says Gates. Instead of plowing through folders, he simply types in a search term, and all the documents and emails containing the information pop up.

*(Note: Google Desktop, [www.google.com/oto-dosptions](http://www.google.com/oto-dosptions), also allows you to search your hard drive for documents, emails and web history.)*

31. Using Outlook as project planner

*by Melissa P. Esquibel, Microsoft® Certified Trainer*

Most people don’t have specific software just for managing their projects. So they use what they can access on their desktops. One great tool for this purpose is Microsoft Outlook.

1. **Brainstorm tasks**

Starting in any one of seven task views, such as Simple, Detailed or by Category, you will see a Click here to add a new Task field at the top. You do not have to know the duration or even the order of each task: Just start typing and brainstorm your task list. Let’s use an event as an example, with a simplified set of tasks.
2. Set start/end dates
You have all your tasks, so start with the last task and work backward to determine when the preceding tasks would have to be completed before working on the current one. It might help to do the math in, say, Excel. For example, if the event will take place on 10/10/11, you can type in a simple formula to determine when travel reservations should be completed, say, 21 days. So, the travel arrangements would have to be complete on 9/19/11.

You might want to give yourself a week to get this done. To arrive at the start date for the task, begin with the end date of 9/19/11 and subtract seven to get 9/12/11. Do this until you have determined the start and end dates of all tasks. Use the date picker to do this right in the view.

3. Categorize tasks
Check the Task Timeline view to see if the order of things makes sense. Once you are satisfied with the timeline, assign a category. This will keep all the tasks together associated with a single project. That way, in the Category view of tasks, you can view all of your tasks as a chronological task list.

You also can filter other views by Category, to see only the tasks associated with this project. However, don’t overlook the value of looking at multiple categories in the timeline view to spot potential conflicts.

4. Add task details
The next step is to take a look inside each task item. You can insert more Outlook items, file attachments, diagrams and other illustrations, as well as Quick Parts (2007-2010), hyperlinks and contact cards. You also can set your reminders to stay on top of things. You might find it useful to record the preceding and succeeding task dependencies, so you can remember to change the dates should delays occur.

Repeat success by dragging all the completed tasks for a project into a folder. Use them again with different dates.

32. Become a speed reader: 2 online programs
So much to read, so little time. Could speed-reading boost your productivity? Two programs promise to improve your reading speed:

1. EyeQ (www.eyeqadvantage.com): The program helps speed up reading by exercising your eye muscles. You’ll complete tasks such as tracking images across the screen. The
promise: See an improvement in seven minutes and ultimately speed up your reading two
to 10 times.

2. The Reader’s Edge (www.readfaster.com): You’ve always read one word at a time, so
this program attempts to break that habit by teaching you “fluency.” Learn to view groups
of words horizontally and vertically, the program promises, and you’ll get faster at reading
and comprehending.

33. I didn’t know Excel could do that!

Have you discovered all the tools and shortcuts buried within Excel? Annette Marquis of
software training and consulting firm Triad Consulting bets that you haven’t. Many people
who use Excel every day are always surprised at what they can learn about it, she says.
Hedge your bet by checking out Marquis’ list of Excel features, tools and techniques:

√ Move quickly between work sheets
Right-click the navigation buttons (bottom) and select the sheet you want to move to. Or:
• Press Ctrl+PgDn to move to the next sheet
• Ctrl+PgUp to move to the previous sheet
• Ctrl+Tab to move to the next open workbook

√ Join text from multiple columns
Example: A2 contains first name, A3 last name. You want to join the two.
• =CONCATENATE(A2,” “,A3) Or:
• =A2&” “&A3
The space (in quotes) inserts a space between the first and last names.

√ Quickly view a total or quickly average, count
• Select the cells to total. View the SUM in the status bar.
• Select the cells to total. Click the SUM in the status bar and choose another
summarization method.

√ Create a drop-down list of values in a cell or range
1. Elsewhere in the same work sheet, enter the values for the drop-down list in the
order you want them to appear.
2. Then, select the cell(s) that will use the drop-down list.
3. Choose Data/Validation to open the Validation dialog box.
4. On the Settings tab, choose List from the Allow drop-down list.
5. Click in the Source text box, then select the list of values you typed.
6. Click OK to create the drop-down list in the selected cell(s).

If you must have the validation list on another work sheet (so you can hide it), name
the validation range and use the range name as the source. Need help with this? Open
Excel Help and search on Name.
34. Do your job like a master geek

What are the best online tools to help you get things done smarter and faster? Gina Trapani, lead blogger for Lifehacker.com and author of Upgrade Your Life, is an expert at helping people master modern technology.

Here’s how everyday Joes and Janes can be like master geeks, she says:

- **Keyboard shortcuts.** It may sound like a no-brainer, but people still waste energy moving their hands from keyboard to mouse, double clicking, moving the pointer, putting their hands back. “Most software comes with a quick reference you can print out and put near the keyboard,” Trapani says. “Use that instead of the mouse.”

- **Keep to-dos, calendars and reminders front and center.** Trapani keeps open only windows showing top tasks, a two-month calendar and daily reminders on her desktop. She uses GeekTool (Mac) and Samurize (Windows) to keep her on track.

  *Tip:* Make your to-dos doable by breaking them down into easy tasks. “Often when people get to the point when they are writing it, they are doing a brain dump. They just have to get things down on paper,” Trapani says. “But to get to the point where you’re checking things off, you want to make it a doable to-do list.”

- **Embrace “cloud computing,” or using online software.** “The Lifehacker staff uses a shared GCal calendar (on Google) to schedule vacations, conferences and software launches, and I use it for my personal calendar as well,” she says.

- **Stop storing passwords in your brain.** Trapani uses a program called KeePass, a free, secure database for storing passwords. It even arranges them into folders. One master password unlocks it all.

  — Adapted from “Clearing Up a Blurry Work Life,” Marci Alboher, Shifting Careers blog

35. Productivity tools: Organize to-do lists, notes

Everyone has a preferred method of organizing to-dos and notes. Your computer monitor may be littered with Post-its, or you may use your email software to track action items.

Increasingly, though, people are turning to web-based tools. The benefit? To access these “cloud-based” tools, you don’t need to be on a particular computer, network or browser. As long as you can hop online, you can find all your precious lists. A few suggestions:

**To-do lists**

- **RememberTheMilk.com:** a clean, easy-to-use tool that lets you access your to-do lists—and receive reminders—whether you’re on a computer or a smartphone.

- **Toodledo.com:** a popular newcomer with a full slate of ways to enter, organize and sort your tasks.
**TeuxDeux.com**: calls itself a “simple, designy, free, browser-based” app that syncs with the iPhone.

**Task.fm, TaDaList.com and Gmail Tasks** (mail.google.com/mail/help/tasks/): round out the list of list-trackers.

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**Note-taking**

**Evernote.com**: the gold standard of online note-taking. Grab ideas from virtually anywhere and turn them into notes. You can create voice or image notes, as well. You can even set up a contact database: Scan business cards and convert them into searchable text in Evernote.

**Google Notebook** (www.google.com/notebook) and **Zoho Notebook** (notebook.zoho.com): capture notes, share and collaborate with others using these tools.

**Springnote.com**: a great tool for group projects, allowing team members to easily collaborate.


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**36. Customize Word to step up the pace**

Don’t you just wish Microsoft Word would do what you want it to do and not what it wants to do? Word Options might just be your ticket to doing Word your way—and faster.

Here’s how to customize Word to suit yourself and your way of working. From the Office button (or File tab 2010), choose Word Options (Options in 2010).

√ **Control what Word selects when you click and drag across text.** In the Advanced category, unselect the option “When selecting, automatically select the entire word.” This eliminates scrolling back and forth when you just want to select multiple whole words and just a portion of another word.

√ **Check your documents by adding readability scoring** to your Spelling & Grammar check. In the Proofing category, look in the section marked “When correcting spelling and grammar in Word.” Be sure that the “Check grammar with spelling” box is checked. Then, check the “Show readability statistics” box. After running Spell, check the readability score. It will display several scales on how readable your document might be. For more information on readability scoring, check [http://tinyurl.com/testyourdoc](http://tinyurl.com/testyourdoc).

√ **Make sure your linked data (e.g., Excel charts) are up-to-date** before you print by selecting “Update linked data before printing” checkbox. You will find this in the Printing section of the Display category on Word Options.

√ **Put everybody on the same page.** Do you still have clients, co-workers or suppliers who use a previous version of Microsoft Office? If you are always getting phone calls about others not being able to open your documents, change a setting in the Save category called,
“Save files in this format.” By selecting Word 97-2003, you always save your document in that format, which eliminates making special selections each time.

Note: To see some of the items that may not behave the same in 2003 as they do in 2007, go to http://tinyurl.com/testpreviousdoc.

√ Create your own Word shortcuts. From the Customize category, click on the Customize button next to the words “Keyboard shortcuts” on the bottom left portion of the dialog box. Select the Ribbon tab or one of the other selections (e.g., Macros) on the left, and the specific operation from the list on the right. Then assign or reassign a keyboard shortcut. You can use Ctrl, Alt, Shift and any letter to create your shortcut. After entering your shortcut by pressing the keys you desire, check on the left side below the “Current keys” box to make sure you are not overwriting a shortcut you would like to preserve. Then simply click the Assign button.

If you get carried away, you can reset registry options in Word if you know how. If this makes you nervous, go to http://support.microsoft.com/kb/822005, which has a “Fix it for me” option, along with detailed instructions on how to fix it yourself. Proceed with caution on the do-it-yourself option. If you have an IT support department that installed your software, it should be your first call.