



**PDHonline Course P182 (1 PDH)**

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# **Time Management Tips for Busy Professionals**

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**PDH Online | PDH Center**

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## Course Description

You are about to learn secrets that many people will never know about effective time management. Whether you are a professional engineer, land surveyor, construction manager, superintendent, or architect, you will benefit greatly by applying some of the time management tips contained in this course to your personal and professional life.

The tips compiled in this course are based on the advice of time management experts and on the personal experience of licensed professionals like you. If you feel that you can contribute additional time-saving techniques to this course, please send us your feedback through email or through "Contact Us" on our website. If your feedback is more than 250 words, you will receive one additional PDH through the companion course "Time Management Tips for Busy Professionals – Feedback." Your effort will also be credited within the course content if your tips are incorporated into the next version.

This course includes a multiple-choice quiz at the end, which is designed to enhance your understanding of the course materials.

## Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, you will have learned many useful tips for better time management, including tips for better space organization and information management. In addition, you will have gained a better appreciation for the value of your time and the purpose of your life.

## Intended Audience

This course is designed for engineers, land surveyors, architects, contractors, or anyone who would like to utilize their time more effectively and live their life more productively.

# Time Management Tips for Busy Professionals

*ACE Group, LLC*

## Introduction

As we all know, time is money. Managing your time efficiently is equivalent to managing your wealth effectively. This course presents "Time Management Tips for Busy Professionals." Although this topic has been covered in numerous books, we have strived to cover the techniques that are most relevant to design professionals and provide the information in a concise format. The course sets out to help you establish your vision and goals - the "big picture", then discusses the value of your time, and finally presents specific time-saving techniques.



## Course Content

### 1. Establish Your Vision

Time management is not just about minimizing the time you spend on each task. It is also about how you allocate your time for different activities or tasks based on your personal value and priority. In the end, time management is really self-management. Therefore, you must create a vision or life purpose so that you can effectively manage your time or yourself.

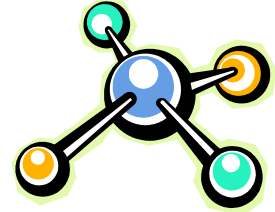
Your vision should reflect your personal value toward work, family, leisure, community, and society as a whole. Many people volunteer their time in libraries, museums, churches, and schools. Are they wasting their time? No. They have dedicated some of their time to what they stand for and believe in. To live a meaningful life, you should develop a vision that is inspirational and realistic, covering all important aspects of your life. Keep your vision statement where you can see it every day for it can serve as a guiding light in your life voyage.

The website [www.timethoughts.com](http://www.timethoughts.com) coaches people on how to write a personal vision statement under their Goal Setting section. To help you create

your own vision statement, we have developed the following sample vision statement covering several aspects of life for a licensed professional:

I will... treasure time spent with my family and friends above everything else by putting aside time for them every week.

I will... continue to exercise my body a few times a week so that I can live a long and healthy life and achieve my personal goals.



I will... contribute to my community or local charity by spending at least eight hours a month as a volunteer.

I will... attempt to maintain my professional competence through technical training, personal reading, or other educational activities.

I will... recognize at all times that my primary obligation is to protect the life, health, property, and welfare of the public as a licensed professional.

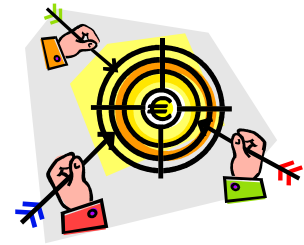
## **2. Allocate Your Time in Writing: Scheduling**

Now that you have a clear vision for your life, you can allocate and schedule your time effectively and adequately toward each activity in your life. A schedule is vital in getting things done. Set aside time for everything you have on your to-do list so that you can decide whether or not you can finish what you need. Prioritize tasks and give priority tasks a guaranteed place in your schedule. You should also set aside a certain amount of time each week for activities of interest, even if they are not as urgent as some other tasks. You will have a sense of fulfillment every day if you stick to your vision.

## **3. Set Goals**

Few people write down their daily, weekly, or monthly goals because most people do not want to be accountable for achieving their goals. If you have the determination to write down your goals and try to accomplish them, you are already on the path to success. Setting short-term goals can be as simple as writing down a list of what you need to accomplish every day. However, you must align your daily activities with your intermediate and long-term goals. Otherwise, you will be bogged down by daily work and never achieve your bigger goals in your life. Examples of long-term goals include starting a business, writing a book, having a family, or planning for your retirement. Once you have established your long-term goals, you can plan backward for your monthly and weekly activities so that your daily activities contribute to your long-term goals.

In the book *The 25 Best Time Management Tools & Techniques*, authors Dodd and Sundheim suggest the following SMART Model when you set your goals:



- **Specific** - State your ultimate goal.
- **Measurable** - Spell out the steps that you need to achieve so that you will know that you are making progress.
- **Achievable** - Able to accomplish under the current situation.
- **Realistic** – Stretch your goal to a point that is still reachable. Otherwise, you will just get frustrated and give up.
- **Time-Bound** - Set a deadline and then stick to it. This will create a clear target.

#### 4. Prioritize Your Tasks

There are several distinct stages in everyone’s life: childhood, youth, adulthood, beginning career, mid-career, later career, and retirement. During each stage of your life, you will have different obligations and priorities. As a mid-career professional, you are the backbone of your company and the pillar of your family. Whenever there is a conflict between work and family, you should put your family first. A secure and happy family can make you more productive on the work front.

When you deal with multiple tasks at the same time, you should also prioritize. In his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey divides common tasks into four categories using the following time management matrix:

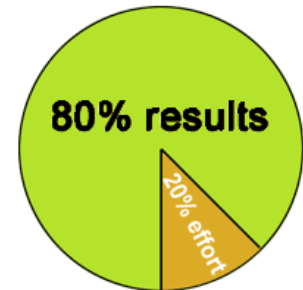
<p><b>Urgent &amp; Important:</b>  Examples:  Family emergency  Deadline-driven projects  Meetings with important clients</p>	<p><b>Not Urgent But Important:</b>  Examples:  Career planning  Physical exercise  Professional development</p>
<p><b>Urgent But Not Important:</b>  Examples:  Some phone calls or emails  Some meetings  Most instant messages</p>	<p><b>Not Urgent &amp; Not Important:</b>  Examples:  Irrelevant emails or mails  Internet surfing  Excessive TV or entertainment</p>

Obviously, you need to complete the urgent and important tasks first, avoid urgent but not important tasks, and tackle not urgent but important tasks on

a regular basis. Ignoring urgent and important tasks could result in more work or even a crisis in your life.

## 5. Follow the 80/20 Rule

No time management course is complete without revealing the 80/20 rule. Discovered in 1906 by Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto, the 80/20 rule, also known as the law of the vital few, states that 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. This rule applies to many different fields, from marketing to production. For example, 80% of the revenue is normally generated by 20% of the sales force, and 80% of the project is accomplished within 20% of the time. Understanding the 80/20 rule will help you effectively manage your time: achieve 80% of the results with just 20% of the effort. Following this rule will also steer you away from being a perfectionist.



## 6. Estimate the Time Needed

A good manager realizes that things take twice as long and cost three times as much. Correctly estimating the time that you need to finish a task can help you plan out your time. However, many people underestimate the amount of time they need for a task, so time yourself on frequent tasks for the first few weeks before writing down a sure estimate. This should prevent your tasks from spilling over into the time that you designated for something else.

## 7. Do Not Overlook Hidden Time Costs

When writing your schedule, always look out for hidden time costs. In her book *Time Management from the Inside Out*, Julie Morgenstern lists a variety of hidden time costs. They include:

- (1) **Travel Time** – If you need to commute, are you traveling during rush hour? Are you using public transportation? Will you need to wait for a bus or train? Calculate how long it will take for you to get from place to place.
- (2) **Setup and Cleanup Time** – Do you need time to gather materials and get ready? Setting up for a new task usually takes a couple of minutes. You will also need a couple more minutes to clean up everything once you are done.
- (3) **Stewing Time** – Some tasks need additional thinking time. This may be time before you actually begin the assignment, or as extra time throughout your task.
- (4) **Interruption Time** – If you expect interruptions, add some extra time.

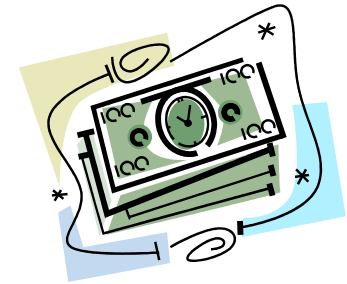
- (5) **Unexpected-Problem Time** – Few projects can go off without a hitch. As a project manager, you should factor in a 20% time cushion to deal with unexpected problems.

## 8. Know Your Time Value

To manage your time effectively, you must know the value of your time. For salaried workers, it is very easy to determine one's hourly value. Here is a simple formula:

Your hourly value = 1.5 x Your hourly rate

The factor of 1.5 is an average multiplier, which includes employee benefits, such as health and life insurance, 401(K) match, pension plan, paid holiday, sick days, training days, and vacations as well as the employer's match of your Social Security and Medicare benefits.



For an entry-level engineer whose starting salary is \$72,000, his/her hourly value is:

$$1.5 \times (\$72,000 / 2,080 \text{ hours}) = \$51.92$$

According to a recent salary survey conducted by the American Society of Civil Engineers, salaries for engineers with significant experience range from \$100,000 to \$130,000. Therefore, their hourly value is between \$72 and \$94 without markup.

For small business owners offering professional services such as engineering or architectural design, their hourly value is usually higher than \$94 because of their business profit and business growth potential. It is no exaggeration to say that the hourly value for a small engineering business owner is greater than \$100 in the US.

In his book *No B.S. Time Management for Entrepreneurs*, Dan Kennedy argues that people are productive only one out of every three hours. Using his formula, the time value for an engineer would range from \$150 to \$350 per hour, which is close to the actual billing rates for design work.

## 9. When to Delegate?

Now that you know the value of your time, you can decide which tasks are suitable for delegating or outsourcing. But first, you must realize that a task that takes you one hour to accomplish will take at least 1.25 hours to accomplish by someone of your caliber because of the effort needed for communication. It may take someone with less experience up to two to three hours to accomplish the same task, plus your own time to explain and review the task. So it is usually not efficient to delegate small but complicated tasks

to others unless you accumulate a large amount of them. Here are the rules of thumb when it comes to delegating:

- (1) Give the task to another person if you have higher priorities that only you can carry out;
- (2) Give the task to someone who can do it a lot quicker, better and cheaper.

### **10. Need a Gatekeeper?**



You can decide whether you need a gatekeeper or not based on the number of interruptions you have during your work day. For a small business, it is estimated that up to 50% of incoming phone calls and mail solicit business from you. If you find yourself being interrupted too often, you should consider hiring a full-time receptionist to keep these unwanted calls from interrupting your work.

### **11. Use a TeleZapper to Block Telemarketers**

An alternative to hiring a gatekeeper is to use a TeleZapper, which is an electronic device that is connected to your phone line and terminates all computer-dialed telemarketing calls automatically. The device can be obtained from Amazon for less than \$40. In lieu of a TeleZapper, you may use a digital call blocker that can be programmed to block unwanted calls or



### **12. Send Appointment Reminders**

If an appointment or a meeting was scheduled more than a week ago, send out an appointment or meeting reminder two days before the event. Otherwise, your client may have forgotten about the appointment and have something else on their schedule.

### **13. Investigate Before You Drive**

When you need to buy a product and you do not know where to buy it, check it out on the Internet first. Instead of driving around looking for what you need, you can also call ahead and ask first. You will save time and gas.

### **14. Check the Map Before You Leave**

If you are going to an unfamiliar place, type the address into Google maps and print a copy of the map to take with you. This way, you can make sure you will not get lost.



## 15. Get a GPS Device

If you are on the road a lot and have to go from place to place to meet your clients, GPS is your best guide on the road. You can save money and mobile data by buying a GPS device without a monthly subscription fee.



## 16. Order Online

Ordering your books and supplies online can save you time, money, and gas. Stores like Best Buy also allow you to order online and pick up the merchandise in approximately 20 minutes. This service works especially well when you need something right away. By ordering online, you can also check if the merchandise is in stock at a particular store.

## 17. Buy More Phone Features

Caller ID and call forwarding are time-saving features that can be obtained at very low costs from your phone service company. Using a caller ID, you can weed out the calls you do not want to answer. Call forwarding can forward incoming calls to your cell phone or another landline so that you do not need to check phone messages.

## 18. Use an Online Calendar for Planning

Although old-fashioned paper planners are still in use, more and more people are turning to online calendars for their daily and weekly planning because the online calendar is accessible at any time and place where there is an Internet connection. Nowadays, many busy professionals can access the Internet at any place through cell phones or PDAs. If necessary, you can print a paper version of your calendar for convenience. Best of all, it does not cost a penny to use the online calendar.



One free online calendar is provided by Google and is available to anyone who has a Gmail account. Google Calendar comes in several different layouts: daily, weekly and monthly, and can be shared among colleagues and friends. With permission, a colleague or receptionist can access your calendar and will know your whereabouts on a particular day.

## 19. Set Best Meeting Times

The best time to schedule a meeting is around 11 AM or 4 PM because you can keep the meeting short, and everyone can leave for lunch or home right after the meeting. These meeting times cause minimal interruption in everyone's workflow.

## 20. Attend Webinars Instead of Seminars



What is a webinar? A webinar is basically a web seminar, or a seminar conducted over the Internet. Attending a webinar is much more efficient than attending a seminar in person because you do not need to travel anywhere. Besides saving time, you also reduce your carbon emissions and save gas.

## 21. Consult the Expert

We all live in a knowledge society nowadays and many fields have become very specialized. To accomplish your project, you may need the help of other professionals to complement and supplement your own skills. To use your time efficiently, it usually pays to utilize the expertise of others, be it a lawyer or an architect.

## 22. Always Have a Backup

Using at least two vendors for the similar or same service will help you save time and reduce stress. For example, it is a good idea to open two bank accounts (one primary and the other secondary) in two different banks close to your office/home. When you need to have a document notarized immediately, the notary at one bank may not be available that day. Then you can go to the other bank to get the paperwork done. To minimize account maintenance, you can maintain only the minimum balance in the secondary account.

The same technique also applies to other services, such as printing and legal service. It applies to your office equipment as well – it is always a good idea to have a backup computer or printer in case something goes wrong.

## 23. Have Online Meetings

Arranging online meetings is not only an environmentally friendly thing but is also a time-saving measure for everyone. Having online meetings allows participants to join a meeting without having to travel anywhere. The cost of running online meetings is very affordable these days (less than \$15/month) if you use GoToMeeting or Zoom. You can have up to 100 active participants for each meeting under the regular plan.

## 24. Never Take the Last Flight Out

Airlines often cancel flights without giving advance notice. If you book the last flight out, chances are that you will get stuck and end up having to spend another night before you can catch the next flight.



## 25. Avoid Late Afternoon Flights in the Summer

Thunderstorms occur most frequently in late afternoons during the summer. Booking earlier flights will likely eliminate or reduce hours spent on the runway waiting for the sky to clear up. This makes it less likely for you to be late or miss your appointment.

## 26. Check-In at Least 45 Minutes Before Departure Time

Airlines require all passengers to check in at least 45 minutes before the scheduled take-off time. Otherwise, you will have to take the next flight out if there are seats available. If your time is tight and you cannot afford the delay, you can check in from the airline's website and print out your boarding pass so that you can go directly to the boarding gate.

## 27. Avoid Checked Luggage

Usually, you have to wait at least 15 minutes to get your checked luggage at any airport. Starting mid-2008, airlines began charging \$15 to \$25 per bag each way if your seat was coach class. So using a standard-sized carry-on and a large-sized computer bag instead of checked luggage can save time and money when you travel.

## 28. Combine Business with Pleasure

If you are traveling to a popular tourist city, consider taking your spouse or kids for the trip. You may have to stay an extra night so that the whole family can do some sightseeing together. But it is well worth the time to have some fun with your family.

## 29. Keep Active Files Close By

In her book *Time Management from the Inside Out*, Julie Morgenstern points out that if you cannot file or retrieve your documents without getting out of your chair, your file storage is inconvenient. If a four-drawer cabinet does not fit in your workspace, consider getting a two-drawer cabinet. By keeping active files within arm's reach of your workstation, you can file as you go.



## 30. Organize Your Workplace and Schedule

A well-managed space can save time and enhance productivity. Before sitting down to work, take some time to put things in order. Desk space should be used for your work, not to hold piles of paperwork. Consider using a wireless keyboard and mouse to free up some space on your limited desk surface.

### **31. Organize Your Bookcase**

You can place all unread books on a particular shelf so that you do not have to search for them when you are ready to read. Also, sorting your books into different categories can help you find what you need at a glance.



### **32. Find Your Peak Performance**

Some people work best in the morning and others in the evening. Whether you are an early bird or a night owl, finding the best time for your work is essential. Try to find when you are most attentive and alert, and then schedule your most important tasks at that time. This allows you to create your best quality work for assignments that are a top priority.

### **33. Avoid Multitasking**

Although it seems like multitasking can get things done faster, it actually slows most people down. Doing multiple tasks at once can distract you from important assignments and mixes up your schedule. Also, multitasking prevents you from determining exactly how much time one assignment takes, which can interfere with billing and scheduling.

### **34. Decide What to Do with Extra Tasks**

If you do not have time to finish some of the assignments you have on your to-do list, figure out what to do with them. There are four basic options: discard them, put them off, shrink them, or delegate them. Discarding tasks simply means getting rid of them. You should discard unneeded tasks if possible to free up more time in your schedule. Putting off tasks is essentially rescheduling them. Shrinking assignments is skipping certain parts or steps of an assignment so that it takes less time and can fit into your schedule. Finally, delegating tasks is giving away tasks to someone else. See Tip #9 to decide when to delegate tasks.

### **35. Eliminate Unwanted Mail**

With less mail, you have less to sort out at your office. Unwanted mail can cause clutter and make it harder for you to find what you are looking for. If you receive publications you always do not have time to read, cancel your subscription. Remember, most publications are now available online. Try to get off and stay off mailing lists. Even if you opt-out of many mailing lists, you will still have other mail. Set aside a daily time to go through the mail. Be decisive with each piece: reply to it, file it, or throw it away. If you are decisive, it will be easier for you to get things done.

### **36. Improve Your Speed**

Speed reading and fast typing can save you a great deal of time. Learning to speed read helps you get through emails quickly and efficiently. However, do not try to read so quickly that you miss important details. With speed reading, speed and comprehension are equally important.

Also, consider practicing typing to increase your typing speed. This can help you get through writing reports and emails. Instead of spending half an hour painstakingly typing out your ideas, you can speed through your reports and spend more time on something you find more enjoyable.

### **37. Create Templates for Writing**

If you find yourself writing letters, thank-you notes, reports, and other documents over and over again, you should consider creating templates for them to make it faster and easier for you to finish them. Microsoft 365 offers many ready-made templates for you to download. For details, visit <https://templates.office.com/>.



### **38. Leave Clear Phone Messages**

When leaving voice messages, you should speak slowly and clearly, and mention the specific purpose of the call. Repeating and pausing between the phone numbers can ensure the recipient is getting the correct phone number. To avoid a phone tag, you should mention the best time to reach you.

### **39. Spend Less Time Looking for Missing Items**

Statistics indicate that most of us spend at least 75 hours a year looking for something. Here are a few time-saving tips when it comes to finding a lost item. The first strategy is to think of the last time you used or saw it, which usually will remind you where you placed it. The second strategy is to ask others to see if any of them used or saw it recently. If you cannot find something in the first 10 minutes, do not get agitated and waste your precious time trying to find it right away - chances are that you will not be able to. If you do not need that item immediately, the best strategy is to wait – it will usually appear by itself in a day or two. If you need it immediately, think of a way to get a duplicate of the item/document. For example, you are in the process of selling your old car, but cannot find the title paper for the vehicle. You can go to the Department of Motor Vehicles to get another copy in less than two hours. Of course, there is also a small fee involved, but your time is worth much more than that.

### **40. Use Similar Projects as a Basis**

One time-saving strategy is to use documents from a similar project as a starting point when you begin a new project. You will find out that many details

from a similar project can be used directly or modified only slightly for the new project.

#### **41. Team Up with Others**

Teaming up with others can easily save at least 50% of your time on certain tasks. For example, you can carpool to work. On the days you are not driving, you can accomplish a few tasks on your way to work or home. If you have kids with regular extracurricular activities, forming a carpool group can save all parents time and add fun for kids.

#### **42. Live Off-Peak**

If your work schedule is flexible, commuting in the off-peak hours can save you a lot of time each year. If you go shopping during an off-peak time, you also spend less time at checkout. Finding out the off-peak time at places that you plan to visit can save you not only time but money as well.

#### **43. Manage Digital Information Effectively**

Adequate information management can save you time and money for both personal and business activities. A good computer folder structure helps you organize your documents and makes it easy to find what you need. To make finding folders more efficient, you can add "0" or "1" in front of the folder names that you access frequently so that they will appear near the top of the list. However, try not to create too many folders, or else you may become confused as to where you stored your files.

#### **44. Create a Few Useful Digital Files**

A digital address file is an efficient way to manage the contact information of your friends, family members, and colleagues. Digital files can also be used to store your passwords, financial information, and personal data. Of course, these files should be password-protected for security purposes. A spreadsheet is probably the most convenient way to store such information. For added protection, you should not name sensitive files with obvious words, and do not put them on your desktop. When you travel, you can put them on a flash drive if necessary.

#### **45. Buy a Bigger Monitor**

A 24" LCD monitor has almost 60% more display area than a 19" one. A bigger monitor can reduce a significant amount of mouse clicking and dragging. Therefore, it is highly recommended to buy a 24" or larger monitor if you spend more than one hour a day on a computer. If your computer can handle dual monitors, go for them. Bill Gates used three monitors (one for incoming emails, one for replying to emails, and one for the



Internet browser) while he worked at Microsoft. Once you have that large display area, you will never go back, because it has a direct positive impact on your productivity.

#### **46. Tune up Your Computer**

The most cost-effective way to speed up your computer is to add more RAM. With more RAM, your computer is less likely to hang up in the middle of the day. This increases your productivity and minimizes the chance for you to lose valuable data. Turning off your computer at the end of the day will save you not only electricity and money but also time - computers tend to slow down after you have opened and closed many applications. A freshly rebooted computer is usually at the peak of its performance.

#### **47. Create a Paperless Office**

There are three major advantages to having a paperless office:

- (1) It takes no more space than your computer;
- (2) It is usually faster to find a document on a computer than from a file cabinet;
- (3) It takes only a few clicks to back up your entire record.

If you have an all-in-one printer, you can scan almost all incoming paper documents into a PDF file and file the document on your computer. For outgoing communication, use email instead of fax to reduce paper consumption. If your client insists on receiving a hard copy from the fax, you can fax your document through your computer.

#### **48. Be Punctual**

Being punctual is very important in the business world. Being late is an indication of disrespect for others. It is highly recommended that you arrive at meetings a few minutes earlier and deliver your completed project ahead of schedule. Remember that a person who is often late will not be trusted by others.



#### **49. Review and Reflect**

Managing your time effectively also requires you to take some time to review and reflect on your actions. In their book *The 25 Best Time Management Tools & Techniques*, Dodd and Sundheim suggest that you should set aside around 1 to 2 hours every week to look over everything. The best time for reviewing is early Friday afternoon. That way, you will still have time to act if you missed something important.



During the review time, you will be sorting through any notes, entering any information into the appropriate places, evaluating your projects' statuses, and looking through the dates on the calendar for preparation for upcoming events.

Your review and reflection time is also the best time to check if you have focused your time and energy on what you truly value. Your changing life may require you to revise your vision once in a while.

## Course Summary

Planning ahead is the key to effective time management. Writing down and following your values, vision and goals are as equally important as using a particular technique. So establish your vision, set your goals, and get into action.

