

# It all starts with setting priorities

## D.I.Y. Time management

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**JOHANNA WEIDNER**  
RECORD STAFF

Some days at work seem like a blur with too much to do and not enough time.

Then once you're overwhelmed, it's hard to know where to start. That's where time management comes in.

Good time management at work depends on figuring out where to focus your attention, rather than haphazardly flitting between tasks and getting little done or, even worse, wasting time on an unimportant endeavour while something crucial goes untouched.

Foremost, make sure you understand the job's priorities. Quite often an employee and supervisor will have a different idea of what's important. Get together and talk about the top three or four tasks for your job. Alignment of your notions and your boss' is crucial.

### TACKLING A NEW TASK

There are a few criteria that can be used to decide how to handle a new demand. Ask the following questions:

Who else thinks this is important? Answering this question gives you a good handle on how critical the task is.

Does this belong to me? Perhaps it's a task another person in the organization should be tackling.

What effect if it's ignored? If putting off a task will create problems for someone else, then get to it.

Who do I need to inform or consult with? If you need to rely on someone else to complete the endeavour, then it should be bumped up the queue.

Who can support me? People get overwhelmed quickly and forget that there are people who can help.

Where does it queue up? Basically, where does it fit into your work schedule?

Take time to think about these questions because a little consideration can create order out of a chaotic work day.

### BUILDING BOUNDARIES

No matter your role, you shouldn't feel at the beck and call of everyone. Make boundaries and stick to them.

Remember, it's OK to say no.

There are times when it's reasonable to decline a task: if it's not your job, if someone else left it to the last minute and now wants you to pick up the slack, or if the task used to be part of your job but you now have a different role.

Without boundaries, you will be overwhelmed with work demands.

## A FEW MORE TIPS

If someone asks you to do something, it's OK to say you'll consider it and get back to the person about when they can expect it done.

Recognize we all have personal limits, and that includes both time and physical limits. Try and take time for a lunch break to rejuvenate yourself for the rest of the work day. Avoid juggling several things at once; concentrate on one.

Get a grip on e-mail. E-mail is a handy tool, but also a time-waster (especially for those employees prone to procrastination). People can save a lot of time by learning to handle e-mail better.

Of course, how that goes will depend on the work setting. Some employers expect immediate responses to e-mails, which means employees must constantly check incoming messages.

For most, it's not necessary to always keep tabs on e-mail. Set aside blocks of time in the day to deal with it.

When you're sifting through the inbox, don't simply read messages and plan to deal with them later. Do something with each message right away; either file, answer, delete or forward.

This is where file folders help. Messages you need to save should be filed immediately in an appropriate folder. Ideally, empty your inbox every day.

Keep your desk tidy. Only items you're working on at the time should be out. Everything else should be filed.

Don't expect perfection. Some days at work will be good, some days will be a mess. Focus on making a daily effort to find balance.

SOURCE: Kitchener consultant and coach Jill Malleck, [www.epiphanyatwork.com](http://www.epiphanyatwork.com). Malleck is giving a free talk on time management at the Kitchener Public Library on Nov. 27 at 6:30 p.m. Register by calling 519-743-0271, ext. 255.

[jweidner@therecord.com](mailto:jweidner@therecord.com)