

WILY MANAGER

*Just-in-Time
Management
Advice*

Time Management



This is one of a series of booklets available at www.wilymanager.com

Most people have attempted to tackle time management at one point or other, and are often disappointed by the results. Looking at time management without considering **priorities** is almost always futile, because by simply trying to cram more things into your day, you will only get frustrated faster. Most people find they are successful when they do less, NOT more. Identifying opportunities for efficiency may help, but finding opportunities to improve *effectiveness* is far more important.

Luckily, there are a few **simple, proven techniques** that will help you to focus on the few critical things that will make a difference for your situation. You also

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need to understand where your time is currently allocated, and identify some of the activities that may be robbing you of valuable time.

By taking the initiative to improve your time and priority management skills, you will not only increase the quality and quantity of your output; you will also **feel more in control**, and reduce the stress and anxiety that is caused by feelings of being overwhelmed.

The 5 Keys to Improved Time and Priority Management

By following the five steps below, you can begin to regain control of your life. The necessary prerequisite to getting any value from the points below is to **be honest with yourself**, and ruthless in your self-discipline in applying them.

1. Understand how your time is currently being allocated
2. Be aware of your time wasters
3. Identify priorities and set goals
4. Plan your activities to achieve your goals
5. Take initiative and overcome procrastination

Looking at time management without considering **priorities** is almost always futile.

When people are challenged to track and report how their time is currently being spent, the result is usually a mix of shock and embarrassment.

Understand How You Are Currently Allocating Your Time

When people are challenged to track and report how their time is currently being spent, the result is usually a mix of shock and embarrassment. Most people are completely unaware that they may spend upwards of 10 hours a week tending to email or other 'busy' activities that have **relatively little value**. As with any improvement initiative, it is important to understand where you are currently performing before engaging in any improvement activity.

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The 5 Keys to Improved Time and Priority Management, continued

There will always be exceptional circumstances – just the specifics will change... Every week, you will have a different set of circumstances that affect your ability to get things done.

An excellent first step in your journey to improve time and priority management is to track how you currently spend your time for a week or two. It is important to pick a 'typical' week, but do not make excuses for what you learn. There will always be exceptional circumstances – just the specifics will change. It is akin to a golf game where somebody says, "If I hadn't sliced into the bushes on the twelfth hole, then my score would have been two strokes lower". This may be true; however, every golf game has its unique challenges. Every week, you will have a different set of circumstances that affect your ability to get things done.

Appendix A contains a [Time and Priority Management Tool](#) that you can use to keep track of your time. You can also keep a simple time log, where you note in 30 minute increments how you spend your day. There are **two keys** to tracking your time well:

- a) Be honest with yourself. If you take an hour for coffee one morning, then record it that way.
- b) Do not allow the time tracking tool to take more time than doing the work

itself. Even if you choose to keep a time log, you should be able to accomplish this in just a few minutes per day. You do not need to keep track of the exact details of every activity to get value from this exercise; rather, just keep track of major groups of activities.

Be Aware of Your Time Wasters

If you've been honest when you tracked your *actual* time usage, you should have a good head start as to time wasters that you fall victim to. This is nothing to be embarrassed about, and many of them may be unavoidable. You need to objectively decide whether there are ways for you to eliminate time wasters. Here are some of the most common time wasters and some mitigation strategies:

Email: Although email helps us move around data much more quickly than we did before, it is a necessary evil at best. You may want to set a time limit per day that you are willing to deal with email.

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The 5 Keys to Improved Time and Priority Management, continued

Also, **do not be afraid to delete email without opening it.** Anything that looks like a chain-letter or a joke can be eliminated immediately. Also, emails that either have nothing in the subject box, or a subject line that starts with “FW: RE: RE: RE: FW:” is quite likely nothing you need to read.

Interruptions: People or telephone calls can cause interruptions that seriously erode your ability to get things done. **It is possible to be accessible to people without being at their disposal at all times.** If you manage others, set up regular [One-on-One Meetings](#) with your direct reports to pre-empt constant drop-in meetings. Appendix B contains a [One-On-One Meeting Tracking Form](#). You can also set office hours where your door is always open, versus work time that is not be interrupted. Being *available* to people and being at their disposal at *any time* are two completely different approaches.

Meetings: Be critical about what meetings you attend, and don't be afraid to push back if you don't think a particular meeting will be a good use of your time. [Effective Meetings](#) are critical to effective time and priority management. Appendix C contains [Ten Points to More Effective Meetings](#).

Perfectionist tendencies: There are very few situations that absolutely require a near perfect solution. **Most other situations are satisfied by an 80% solution.** Those that properly differentiate between the two situations are those that are successful.

Administration: Some administration is required in most organizations. Many (if not most) organizations have far too much administrative work that keeps the Risk Management people happy, but has no real value for employees or stakeholders. In such cases, **minimize or delegate non-value added**

Related Wily Manager Topic Bundles

The von Manstein Matrix:
Using the 80:20 Rule to
Get More Done at Work

Effective Meetings

Delegate and Get More
Done

Action Planning

The One on One Meeting

Visit
www.wilymanager.com
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about these topics
(and many others)

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The 5 Keys to Improved Time and Priority Management, continued

administrative tasks. In some cases, you may want to not do it at all, and see if anyone notices.

Other people's crises: It has been said that you shouldn't allow other people's poor planning to become your crisis. This is absolutely true. When someone comes to you with an emergency that needs to be dealt with today, you can legitimately choose to say "no" if you believe you have more pressing matters to deal with. You will want to **consider the source of the request and the history** (does this crisis come up every month at this time?), but do not buy back other people's problems.

Lack of organization and/or planning: If you are unorganized or generally fail to plan well, you will almost always be feeling stretched for time. Taking 15 minutes to **plan your activities** at the beginning of the week, and taking another 5 minutes daily to update that plan can gain you a great deal of time – if you stick to your plan. Appendix F contains a [Weekly Planning Tool](#). Running from activity to activity like a moth to the brightest light is fun – it's just not productive.

Procrastination: I'll write something about this later... when I get around to it. Actually, there is no secret to addressing procrastination. **You need to be more self-disciplined** and get things done! People love to say they don't have enough time to get important things done. Yet, after probing a bit deeper, it becomes clear that they do have time for many *unimportant* things.

Unclear or conflicting goals and/or objectives: Many people fall victim to this, and don't think they have the ability to change it. In

cases we've seen, it is simply a matter of pointing out this problem to the appropriate stakeholders and then ask for resolution. Better still, an individual or department can point out conflicting objectives, and then announce to the world what they intend to do (and ultimately *not* do).

Identify Priorities and Set Goals

In the first two steps, we are trying to understand our current performance in time and priority management, and identify areas for improvement. Now it is time to plug the gaps between current performance and desired performance.

When identifying priorities, there are a few **guidelines**:

- There must be a **limited number** of priorities. You will probably have at least three, but you shouldn't have more than eight. Once your priorities exceed this number, you will be diffusing your effort, and will likely fail to deliver on them.
- Your priorities should clearly connect to the **priorities of the larger organization**. If you cannot see a clear link between your priorities and those of your department or organization as a whole, then you need to seriously question whether you are doing the right things.
- You need ask whether your key

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The 5 Keys to Improved Time and Priority Management, continued

stakeholders will care about your priorities. For people at higher levels in organizations, you might ask if the shareholders would care. At other levels of the organization, you may want to ask whether customers or other stakeholders will care. A good question to always ask is, ‘**will my boss care about these priorities**’? If you don’t think s/he will care, then you will need to re-evaluate your priorities.

- Finally, try to focus on your efforts and priority on those few actions and activities that generate most of your outputs. The 80/20 rule exists in most organizations for just about anyone: **Eighty percent of your results will be generated by twenty percent of your effort.** Appendix E describes [How to Value Your Time According to the 80-20 Rule](#).

Once you understand your priorities, you need to **set goals** to get those priorities accomplished. Goals should always be SMART:

Specific: Your goals need to be as precise as possible. ‘Improve revenue’ is not a goal, it is a wish. ‘Improve revenue from existing customers by 5% in the next year’ is a goal.

Measurable: Following on the above example, your goals should be measured – otherwise, how will you know if you’ve achieved it?

Attainable: There is nothing wrong with setting stretch goals. The problem arises when they are completely unattainable. In such cases, people give up before starting, and the goal becomes meaningless.

Relevant: Make sure the goals pertain to a priority that is important to your organization. Setting goals that have no meaning to people means they will be ignored.

Time Bound: Specify what period of time is required to achieve the goal. In some cases it will be part of an annual planning cycle, in other cases, time periods will be different. You need to specify this.

If you cannot see a clear link between your priorities and those of your department or organization as a whole, then you need to seriously question whether you are doing the right things

... action you take against your goals should pre-empt any emergent issues unless they are *true emergencies* ...

Plan Your Activities to Achieve Your Goals

People often perceive planning as an onerous, largely academic exercise that is done annually, and not looked at again until the next annual planning cycle. When planning is done well, it will guide your actions, decisions, and activities on a **daily and weekly** basis.

Above, you were asked to set priorities and goals. The next step is to **take action** to achieve those goals. The best way to do this is to have a list of your goals, and plan what action you are going to take against those goals on a weekly basis. It is possible that you do nothing against one or two of these goals in any specific week, but you should make this decision *consciously*, rather than just not getting around to working on a goal.

Further, you need to update your weekly plans on a daily basis to allow for emergent issues. Both these activities should not take more than a few minutes at a time. Also, action you take against your goals should pre-empt any emergent issues unless they are true emergencies.

There is a [Weekly Planning Tool](#) in the Appendix.

Take Initiative and Overcome Procrastination

If you've followed the steps above, you are now self-aware of where your improvement opportunities are, you understand potential pitfalls to improvement, and you've identified and planned your key actions required for success. Now all you need to do is **get it done**. Conceptually, it is that simple – there is no magic at this point that separates high performers from those who like to talk about high performance. The high performer simply gets things done.

Here are a few simple **tools and techniques** to help you get started:

To-Do Lists (Appendix D illustrates a [Structured To-Do List](#))

- Question the value of anything you put on a list. Many people spend ridiculous amounts of time writing and rewriting endless lists. You need to fundamentally question the value of anything you put on your to-do list, and how it pertains to your priorities and your goals.

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The 5 Keys to Improved Time and Priority Management, continued

Do not respond to emails in real time if you can avoid it...

- Estimate the time to completion for when you find yourself with unexpected time:
 - A 5 minute list
 - A 10 minute list
 - A 30 minute list

Figure out what might be causing you to procrastinate.

In many cases procrastination is caused by a simple lack of discipline. However, you may need to address one or more **other potential root causes of procrastination**:

- Fear (of failure, of success, of completion, or other)
- Not having it perfect
- Being overwhelmed – if you don't know where to start a seemingly big job, start *anywhere*.
- You don't like what you have to do. We all have to do things we don't like, and the sooner we get it out of the way, the better off we'll be. Get it done.
- Waiting for a deadline – if you're a last minute person, and it works for you, then go ahead and wait. For most of us, leaving something to the last minute generates unnecessary stress, and causes the job to be done poorly.

Ten Things You Can Do *Right Now* to Improve Time Management

1. Forward the phone when necessary for short periods of time.
2. Turn off the email chime, and only tend to your email two or three times per day. Do not respond to emails in real time if you can avoid it.
3. Keep focused on the 'end product' at all times. If you cannot see a clear line of sight between a particular activity and a high level goal, then that activity should be questioned.
4. Learn and follow your rhythm – Assign tasks to the appropriate time of the day or week. If you are a morning person, schedule tasks requiring concentration and effort at that time of day.
5. Carry tasks through to completion. Do not allow tasks to linger.
6. Avoid picking-up and putting-down – get small irritations off your desk now.
7. Arrange set times for recurring tasks.
8. Set specific times when you must not be disturbed. An open door policy is a good idea, but there's nothing wrong with closing that door for one hour per day.
9. Learn to say 'no' by clearly articulating your goals. If a task or activity does not clearly relate to one of your goals you should push back at whether you should be involved in that task.
10. Develop an 'unexpected visitor' strategy. Regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings with direct reports can preempt multiple interruptions during a week because those employees will save their issues for the appropriate time.

Related Topic Bundles

[The von Manstein Matrix: Using the 80:20 Rule to Get More Done at Work](#)

[Effective Meetings](#)

[Delegate and Get More Done](#)

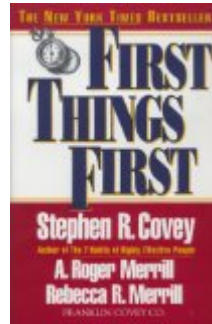
[Action Planning](#)

[The One on One Meeting](#)

Wily Manager Picks

[First Things First](#)

Stephen R. Covey



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Appendix: Tools and Resources

- A. [Time and Priority Management Audit Tool](#)
- B. [One-on-One Meeting Tracking Form](#)
- C. [Ten Points to More Effective Meetings](#)
- D. [Structured To-Do List](#)
- E. [How to Value Your Time According to the 80-20 Rule](#)
- F. [Weekly Planning Tool](#)
- G. [Where to Get More Information](#)

Visit www.WilyManager.com for more just-in-time management advice

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Just-in-time Management Advice

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Appendix B

One-on-One Meeting Tracking Form

Refer to [The One-on-One Meeting](#) topic bundle for more information.

One-on-One Tracking Form	
Team Member:	Date:
Personal: (Spouse, Children, Pets, Hobbies, Friends, History, etc.)	
Team Member Update: (Notes you take from their "10 minutes")	
Manager Update: (Notes you MAKE to prepare for YOUR "10 minutes")	
Future/Follow Up: (Where are they headed? AND, Items that you will review at the next O ³)	
• Tell me about what you've been working on.	• Is there anything I need to do, and if so by when?
• Tell me about your week – what's it been like?	• How are you going to approach this?
• Tell me about your family/weekend/ activities?	• What do you think you should do?
• Where are you on () project?	• So, you're going to do "X" by Tuesday, right?
• Are you on track to meet the deadline?	• How do you think we can do this better?
• What questions do you have about the project?	• What are your future goals in this area?
• What areas are ahead of schedule?	• What are your plans to get there?
• Where are you on budget?	• What can you/we do differently next time?
• What did () say about this?	• Any ideas/suggestions/improvements?

Appendix C

Ten Points to More Effective Meetings

Refer to the [Effective Meetings](#) topic bundle for more information.

1. Ask what would happen if you did not have the meeting, and then make a decision whether or not to have it.
2. If the purpose of the meeting is solely to distribute information, look for an alternative medium to do so.
3. Insist on an agenda being distributed in advance.
4. Provide any materials or reading material well in advance of the meeting. Do not drop a 100 page report in front of people at a meeting and expect them to discuss it.
5. List the objectives of the meeting on the agenda.
6. Appoint a facilitator, a time-keeper, and a scribe if appropriate.
7. Start on time, and do not forgive lateness.
8. Stick to the timelines on the agenda, and finish on time.
9. Encourage discussion from those not heard from often. Discourage those who dominate the discussion.
10. Record action items, along with by whom and by when they are to be completed.

Appendix E

How to Value Your Time According to the 80-20 Rule

(Richard Koch)

Top 10 LOW VALUE Uses of Time

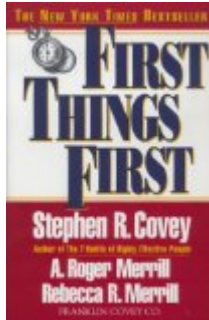
- ✓ Things **other people** want you to do
- ✓ Things that have **always been done this way**
- ✓ Things you're **not unusually good at** doing
- ✓ Things you **don't enjoy** doing
- ✓ Things that are always **interrupted**
- ✓ Things **few other people are interested in**
- ✓ Things that have already taken **twice as long** as you originally expected
- ✓ Things where **your collaborators are unreliable** or low quality
- ✓ Things that have a **predictable cycle**
- ✓ Answering the **telephone**

Top 10 HIGH VALUE Uses of Time

- ✓ Things that advance your **purpose in life**
- ✓ Things you have **always wanted to do**
- ✓ Things already in the **20/80** relationship of time to results
- ✓ **Innovative** ways of doing things that promise to slash the time required and/or multiply the quality of results
- ✓ Things other people tell you **can't be done**
- ✓ Things others have done well in a **different arena**
- ✓ Things that use your own **creativity**
- ✓ Things that you can get other people to **do for you** with relatively little effort on your part
- ✓ Anything with **high quality collaborators** who have already transcended the 80/20 rule of time
- ✓ Things for which it is **now or never**.

Appendix G

Where to Get More Information

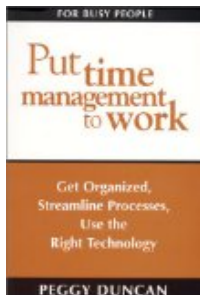


First Things First (Stephen R. Covey)

“What are the most important things in your life? Do they get as much care, emphasis, and time as you’d like to give them? Far from the traditional “be-more-efficient” time-management book with shortcut techniques, First Things First shows you how to look at your use of time totally differently. Using this book will help you create balance between your personal and professional responsibilities by putting first things first and acting on them. Covey teaches an organizing process that helps you categorize tasks so you focus on what is important, not merely what is urgent. He points you toward the real human needs--“to live, to love, to learn, to leave a legacy”--and how to balance your time to achieve a meaningful life, not just get things done.”

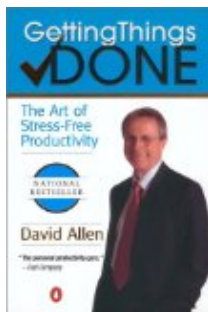
Put Time Management to Work: Get Organized, Streamline Processes, Use the Right Technology (Peggy Duncan)

“Duncan offers time management tips that go beyond setting goals and knowing how to juggle priorities. The book begins with ways to eliminate clutter—whether it’s on your desk or in your mind—and explains how to create a system so that it doesn’t come back. After you get organized, you’ll be able to think more clearly, so you’ll then set goals to help you focus on the right things.



After that, you’ll learn other timesaving techniques such as how to delegate, handle interruptions, say no, overcome procrastination, reduce time spent in meetings, and more. The book moves on from there and explains how to eliminate useless work by streamlining processes and creating procedures that are easy to follow.

To top everything off, the author explores timesaving technologies and computer tips that will help you finish work quicker. To help bring everything together, Duncan outlines two case studies that include practical tips and techniques you can use at home and at work to help you get back in control”



Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity (David Allen)

“Allen provides insights into attaining maximum efficiency and at the same time relaxing whenever one needs or wants to. Readers learn that there is no single means for perfecting organizational efficiency or

Continued on next page

productivity; rather, the author offers tools to focus energies strategically and tactically without letting anything fall through the cracks. He provides tips, techniques, and tricks for implementation of his workflow management plan, which has two basic components: capture all the things that need to get done into a workable, dependable system; and discipline oneself to make front-end decisions with an action plan for all inputs into that system. In short, do it (quickly), delegate it (appropriately), or defer it”

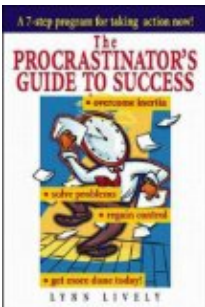


Ready for Anything: 52 Productivity Principles for Work and Life (David Allen)

“No one makes the challenges of productivity more understandable and manageable”.

The Procrastinator's Guide to Success (Lynn Lively)

“Everyone procrastinates. The question is, is doing nothing working for you or against you? Author Lynn Lively, a self-confessed (but reformed) procrastinator, will help you get to where you want to go...with no more excuses. With ‘The Procrastinator’s Guide to Success’, you can stop losing precious time, break the cycle of self-blame, overcome inertia, and create the life you really want.

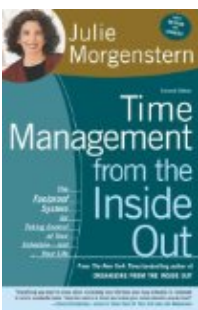


Procrastination can be defined as the failure to make things happen. But are you really procrastinating, or simply thinking about a problem to be solved? ‘The Procrastinator’s Guide to Success’ will show you how to tell the difference!

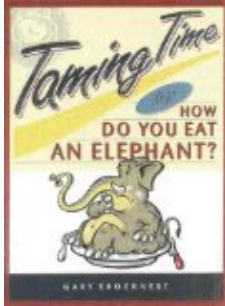
You will also learn how to: work through “worst-case” scenarios; figure out what’s within your control and what isn’t; procrastinate strategically; and, finally, practice self-direction! Special sections include: Confessions of a Procrastinator; “Brain-dumps,” “Gut-wrenchers,” “Busywork Alerts,” and other handy lists. Want to be your own biggest fan? Be the hero of your own life by making your own dreams come true. Read ‘The Procrastinator’s Guide to Success’ and prepare for your life to change.”

Time Management From the Inside Out: The Foolproof System for Taking Control of Your Schedule and Your Life (Julie Morgenstern)

“Those who fear “time management” because they worry about living uncreative or overly scheduled lives will find themselves reassured by Morgenstern’s ability to customize her system. The most important thing readers must do, she emphasizes, is to create a time management system that fits one’s personal style--whether it be spontaneous and easily distracted or highly regimented and efficient. “Just as everyone’s living room looks different, reflecting the individual’s or family’s values and

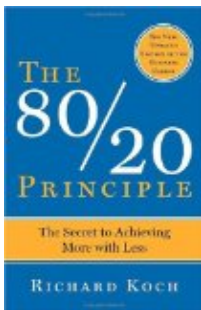


priorities, everyone's time management system will look different, reflecting what's important to him or her," she explains. Fortunately, readers can easily customize her excellent advice while learning how to create a personal time map, streamline routine tasks, conquer procrastination and chronic lateness, and manage all the inevitable crises and distractions of daily life. Speaking of procrastination, what better time than now to try this book out--ridding yourself of all that draining clutter so you can get on with living the life you want?"



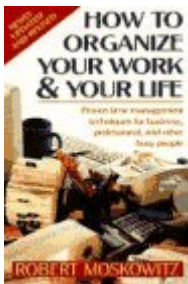
[Taming Time: How do you Eat an Elephant?](#) (Gary Kroehnert)

"Through readings, exercises, quizzes and activities, author Gary Kroehnert explains key time-management concepts. This heavily illustrated, worksheet-filled book will improve your time-management skills, both professional and personally. Learn to: develop a better awareness of the value of managing your time and identify your typical time-wasters; define your own time-management priorities and goals; develop a system for using checklists, planners, and calendars".



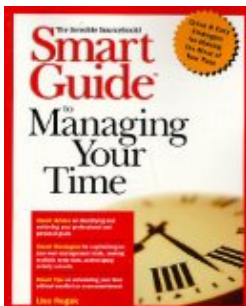
[The 80/20 Principle: The Secret to Success by Achieving More With Less](#) (Richard Koch)

"Whether you're investing in stocks, analyzing company sales, or looking at the performance of a Web site, you'll find that it's usually 20 percent that produces 80 percent of the total result. This means 80 percent of what you do may not count for much. Koch helps you to identify that 20 percent and shows you how you can get more out of your business, and life, for less."



[How to Organize Your Work and Your Life](#) (Robert Moskowitz)

"A book that shows you how to take charge of your life rather than becoming a slave to its demands. This newly revised and expanded edition addresses the many changes in life-styles and technology that have affected everyone so radically, from divided families and second incomes to flex-time on the job and the onslaught of personal computers."



[Smart Guide to Managing Your Time](#) (Lisa Rogak)

"An all-you-need-to-know introduction to time management—starting you on the Smart path to a well-balanced and fulfilling life

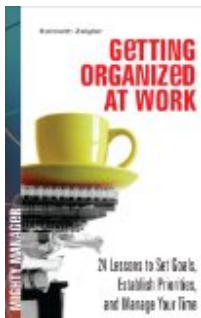
- Smart Advice on how a series of surprisingly simple lifestyle changes can truly liberate your overloaded daily schedule
- Smart Strategies for coping with information overload at work—how to negotiate and prioritize the overwhelming demands of nonstop meetings, correspondence, presentations, and deadlines
- Smart Tips on identifying and modifying your particular management style—maximizing strengths, minimizing shortcomings, and ensuring lasting change
- Smart Information on using time-saving computer programs and daily planners to help clear a path through all the clutter
- Quick reading and easy referencing with a comprehensive index and loads of sidebars and tables"

Appendix B, continued



Time Management: Set Priorities to Get the Right Things Done (John Hoover)

“There are only twenty-four hours in a day, but you can make them count. Time Management, a comprehensive and essential resource for any manager on the run, shows you how. Learn to: / Set and prioritize goals, objectives and tasks / Create an effective schedule / Avoid distractions and interruptions / Respect other people’s time / Build a time-conscious organization The Collins Best Practices guides offer new and seasoned managers the essential information they need to achieve more, both personally and professionally. Designed to provide tried-and-true advice from the world’s most influential business minds, they feature practical strategies and tips to help you get ahead.”



Getting Organized at Work: 24 Lessons to Set Goals, Establish Priorities, and Manage Your Time (Kenneth Zeigler)

“Getting Organized at Work supplies you with 24 tips, tools, ideas, and strategies for becoming far more organized with your tasks and priorities, gaining efficiency in everything you do, and getting more done in less time. Designed to work with virtually any time management system, the workplace-tested guidelines in this handbook will help you to:

- *Set goals* ● *Think realistically* ● *Plan your work and work your plan* ● *Use and manage a master list* ● *Prioritize* ● *Conquer and control your desk* ● *Limit interruptions* ● *Manage incoming e-mail and calls* ● *Delegate* ● *Plan, schedule, and run meetings smart”*