

PEP TIP

Eight ways to lift your productivity

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A dilemma that many executives face is how to develop their staff when they barely have time to do your **real** work, let alone any extra?

The hints and tips in this article may help you, as an executive, buy back some time and do all those proactive things you've been promising yourself you will do, but never seem to get around to!

Step one – Do it Now. Despite all the articles by the time management gurus, the only method I've found that really produces the result people want is to **Do It Now**. This is the key to everything.

Act on an item the first time you touch it or read it. I'm not talking about those things that you can't do now or even those things you shouldn't do now. I'm talking about all the things that you could and should do, but you don't. I'm talking about routine paperwork and emails that you encounter every day. Take care of these things the first time you touch them and you'll save yourself a lot of time in the long run (and get rid of excess paper and the groaning inbox).

If you're not going to actually **act** on your email and paperwork, don't waste time looking at it. If you're not going to return your voice mail messages, don't waste time listening to them. Don't clog up your day with things you **aren't** going to do. Instead, move on to what you are going to do, and Do It Now.

Step two – clean up clutter. Clean up your office, desk and files, and get everyone else to clean their areas too—both paper and electronic. Many of us hide our jobs under a layer of unnecessary information. By removing the overburden, we can clear the way for new systems and processes which enhance our efficiency and effectiveness.

Step three – set clear guidelines for information retention. Most people ask themselves, "Is it possible I will need this again?" Of course it is always **possible!** The more useful question is "If I throw this out, and I need it again, where can I get it?" Determine who is responsible for keeping specific information, and let everybody else throw away or delete their copies.

Step four – set up communication management systems. Develop true systems, not ad hoc ways of handling paper and email. Keep trays for incoming, outgoing and pending work. Maintain lean files and set them up according to frequency of access. Store active files in the desk, reference files elsewhere in the office, and archives in a central location. Label the files clearly so that others can locate them in your absence. Process email two or three times a day, and your in-tray only once. Organise your computer files to match the paper file system you create. In other words, get the basics in order so that you are ready to produce.

Step five – institute planning routines. This may surprise you, but the best way to plan is **Plan It Now**.

One purpose of planning is to get clarity, to know what you ought to be doing on a day-to-day basis as well as on a long-term basis. Too many people do very little planning, particularly when their own work is involved. One reason why the personal diary made such a hit when it appeared on the market in the 1980s is that people saw it as an opportunity or a tool to help them get organised, to plan things in advance, and to keep track of work done.

Get into the habit of developing action plans for each of your projects and key tasks. Having these with the papers will make it easy to review your work on a regular basis to ensure that you are meeting deadlines and milestones.

Plan to review your plans! Your review mechanisms should be on a daily and weekly basis. Take a couple of minutes at the end of each day to figure out what you have to do the next day. Each Friday, plan the upcoming week, using your project and key task plans to provide the framework.

Step six – make meetings with yourself to get the non-negotiable tasks in your job done. Regain control of your diary by blocking out a few hours each week for work on your critical projects and tasks. Then, turn up for the meeting!

Step seven – choose what you will and won't do, based on importance, not just urgency. These days, all of us have too much to do, and too little time in which to do it. We must make decisions about what we can and can't do. We must do the things which define our jobs or roles, and we don't really have time to do anything else, do we?

Step eight – create backup systems. Do not depend on your memory. Instead, make these systems a part of your routine, using your electronic or paper-based diary as a reminder. Make sure you refer to them on a regular basis. The most effective people I come across in my work have their diaries open on their desks at all times, and use them aggressively and proactively.

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