



IT'S ABOUT TIME

Six Steps to Successful Time Management

BY LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA

"I don't have enough time." These words permeate countless conversations today in many aspects of daily life when the occasion merits an excuse of some kind. In fitness, potential enthusiasts consistently use time as the rationale for not going to the gym, not attending group fitness classes, and not having a personal trainer (WebMD). To be sure, while the number 24 remains the fixed number of hours in a day, learning some secrets of time management can help fitness professionals be more productive with their daily responsibilities.

The standard calendar organization that most of the world adopts has not always been what the current international system follows. The Egyptians as far back as 3,000 B.C. have given us a 12-month year, seven-day week and 24-hour clock. The clock system of 24 hours became widespread in Europe in past centuries, with two systems of counting. The first uses "a.m." and "p.m." to reference the sun's highest point, called "ante meridiem" (before noon) and "post meridiem." The second system, called military time, counts in continuous 24-hour cycles, in which 1:00 p.m. is 1300, and so forth. One of the great advantages to military time is the impossibility to misunderstand time. Whether we consider our hours in military time or traditional meridiem time differentiation, learning to boost our productivity in the waking hours of each day can make our fitness business the most profitable.



A TIMELY SUGGESTION

This author recommends learning how to incorporate the "6 Ps" for maximizing time management on a daily basis for the seven days of the week. For all of the following tips, consider having the specified items on hand before proceeding:

- an inexpensive kitchen timer or smartphone timer to easily set designated increments of time. Holding yourself to a timer before moving on to the next assignment teaches you discipline at the start. To be sure, you may not finish each project in the time allotted originally, but the process teaches you time management in favor of productivity.
- an agenda showing daily, weekly and monthly start and stop times of projects, ranging from the simplicity of a paper agenda to the technically advanced iCal calendar organizer, henceforth referred to as your "calendar."
- sticky notes of various colors.

THE 6 Ps OF PRODUCTIVITY:

Tip 1: Preplan

Action Items: This category refers to everything you must do on a given day. These are your "action items" on your calendar, such as planning for clients to train or classes to teach. Generally, we cannot manipulate these time frames, but we can control the amount of time we spend preparing for, and recovering from, these activities. Consider making a checklist of what you need to do before and after these steady activities to make this routine work as efficient as possible. For example, think about packing the night prior to a long day of teaching classes everything you need in your gym bag before going to bed. Similarly, schedule a definite time to check Facebook and read emails.

Fitness professionals often spend a great deal of time eating to hydrate and nourish, so planning snacks in advance can save time also.

Tip 2: Process & Polish

Action Items: Projects, emails and Facebook

Consider giving yourself 30 minutes per day to check your inbox. When checking emails and doing other projects, apply one of the remaining 5 Ps, as follows:

Process & Polish: This is the first and foremost of all task-management skills to master—completing a project. A "project" ranges from simply deleting an email to complexly writing a book. Learning how to do a project in the most time-efficient manner helps you organize your time for accommodating, not only more projects, but "me" time as well.

When an email requires a specific reply that you can answer in five minutes or less, consider being as brief as possible without being rude, and address the requirements then and there, viewing each email only once (with noted exceptions). Alternatively, you may start a response without concluding it, needing to "polish" it later. If you deem the email heated in nature, then delaying a reply probably will prove most appropriate.

Jeffrey Howard, Face of Milestone lead instructor at Baptist East/Milestone Wellness Center in Louisville, Kentucky, agrees, claiming, "If I answer immediately, I'm more apt to react instead of respond, so I avoid answering immediately in the heat of the moment instead and [reply] a few hours later in a more professional way. Additionally, the [extra] time allows me to find a solution where needed."

Processing a Project: Setting a timer can assist with this option for emails and other plans. Aside from regular projects like personal training sessions and group fitness classes of designated time frames, some projects require sit-down time, such as doing taxes, end-of-month client reports, making lesson plans, and music management for classes. To help you pace yourself, start with budgeting on paper or printed calendar allotting 30-minute increments for projects, and set the timer of a smartphone to warn you when 15 minutes have passed. When the timer goes off, reset it for 15 more minutes. Splitting the 30 minutes into two sections allows you to pace yourself to understand better where the halfway point is during projects instead of getting caught off guard when the entire block of time has passed.

"If I find that a project takes me longer than 30 minutes," states Howard, "I simply extend the timer immediately if I can, or rearrange my schedule, or find another 30-minute slot in the near future."

Tip 3: Purge

If the emails merit neither a response nor additional action, consider deleting immediately. This further decreases your inbox and to-do list of action items.

Tip 4: Pigeonhole

Be sure to have categories and files in your email software that organize your life according to the "hats" you wear, such as "choreographer," "trainer" and "researcher." If the emails need saving, simply drag them to the appropriate folders in a matter of seconds. If an email requires reading, such as a subscription to *American Fitness* online, have a folder called "Reading." Budget 30 to 60 minutes per week to peruse your Reading folder, such as on Sundays, for example, and put this designated time in your calendar.

Tip 5: Pass

When an email or project requires involving other people, pass on the email using the "forward" button, and delegate your responsibilities to others. This can be a powerful tool to help you manage projects for groups to share. Always ask others to "carbon copy" or "cc" you on future correspondence regarding the same topic so you stay in the loop of the project's development.

Delegation should have clear rules. Regularly pass on tasks to those who are expecting to share responsibility of them. Be sure that everyone understands all protocol for any given project, or spell out your expectations for everyone involved. Always provide a time frame when making assignments. Mark



Fisher, co-owner of Mark Fisher Fitness based in New York City, recommends having team members who assist you with daily email and other duties. "When I delegate something and say, 'Please spend five minutes and respond to this email in about 50 words,' I don't expect the same type of response as if I were to delegate instructing. 'Please spend an hour drafting a document to respond to this in about 1,000 words.'" Specifying both time and word count suggestions proves key to getting the kind of response you want.

Tip 6: Procrastinate

"Procrastination" is not a dirty word! If an email or certain task requires a response that you can neither answer immediately nor pass on, then procrastination is necessary. When procrastinating, make an action item on your calendar at a definite time with a suggested time allotment to revisit the project in question. Once an action item project appears on your schedule, hold yourself to it.

UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY

One of the most useful functions of smartphones today is the spoken alarm reminder feature (e.g., Siri for iPhone or Dragon Dictation for others). Making a verbal alarm, such as "remind me to pack extra sneakers when I get home," "create an event tomorrow morning at 10:00 a.m. to check email," and "move Nancy's appointment from 1500 to 1600," not only saves time, but keeps your calendar the most up-to-date possible, without ever having to stop to write.

BALANCE THE TIME BUDGET

During your day, you will often find that some projects beget other ones. Instead of getting distracted, simply have your virtual secretary remind you to schedule the additional project. If speaking action items don't work for you, jot down on a sticky note the extra project, and set aside three minutes before bedtime each day to schedule on your calendar all of the notes from your little papers, discarding the papers once entered. Keeping different colored papers may help you prioritize, such as having yellow for "immediate," green for "important," and pink for "pending" or "family/personal."

Learning how to make the most out of time does not mean creating more hours in a day. It requires a trial-and-error budgeting of the minutes allotted to projects, and planning time to take care of yourself as you recover from work. When time management becomes an art, you can plan time to work hard, and make time to play even harder. AF

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