

Ask SCORE

EIGHT WAYS TO MANAGE YOUR TIME AND MULTIPLE PROJECTS

As a small business owner, you must have fallen into the trap of having to juggle many tasks in a limited time. While there is no magic formula to hitting the right balance and managing your time seamlessly, you can improve your time-handling skills to accomplish more tasks on your to-do list. Here are some ways to help you keep everything in check when working on multiple projects at the same time.

1. Make a to-do list before you start your day

We get so preoccupied while working on multiple tasks, that we usually tend to undervalue the importance of a to-do list. Although most things in the business

world are highly unpredictable in nature, and things can change every second, developing a to-do list can help you clearly define your ideas, visualize your thoughts and work towards your ultimate goal.

Keep in mind that you may have to modify your to-do list as the day progresses. You can also jot down all the important assignments the night before, wake up with a fresh start, and focus on delivering the best results.

2. Determine urgent VS. important

As unusual as it may sound, once the deadlines start approaching, it may be difficult to see the wood from the trees. We get so overwhelmed with everyday tasks that we sometimes fail to see which tasks require immediate attention. By immediate attention, we mean the tasks that will have a detrimental impact on the entire project if not completed and possibly lead to failure.

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Prioritize, prioritize, prioritize. Determine the urgent tasks and handle the burning issues before answering an endless list of emails and returning less timely calls.

Also, don't try to avoid dealing with urgent problems because you want to run from an uncomfortable situation. For example, if one of your clients is complaining about your service because he has an issue with the application, you need to deal with the problem immediately and suggest a possible satisfying solution. You don't want to keep your client waiting as they will easily become upset and maybe even decide to stop using your services.

These kinds of issues aren't going to solve themselves and will often eat at you. Then, you won't be able to concentrate on critical tasks.

3. Schedule time for interruptions

From endless notifications coming from either social media, your cell or people, there are many interruptions that can break your focus. While it is necessary to prioritize your daily tasks, it's also important to allocate some time for the concerns that interrupt your creative workflow.

Plan some time, an hour or even two, and name it "office hours." During the office hours, leave all the communication channels open, and start handling the information coming from the outside world. This way, you can focus your attention on the real work, and minimize the time wasted doing less relevant things.

4. Create an email-free time of the day

Julie Morgensen, the author of the book "Never check email in the morning," suggests setting aside at least one hour a day when you won't be checking your emails. She also claims that the best time to do it is early in the morning when we are energized and enthusiastic enough to work on the high priority tasks instead of randomly answering our emails.

5. Time-box your tasks

The easiest way to fight the panic that results from looming deadlines is to create fixed time slots, and adhere to them. This is called time-boxing. Time-boxing helps you to get the work done in time and prevent your tasks from dragging on and on. No matter whether your deadline is in a day or in a month, the time you will need to accomplish your task depends on the time you give yourself. Naturally, make sure you set a time that is achievable, and strive towards successfully meeting your deadlines.

6. Upgrade your skillset

If you want to increase your output, consider investing in your and your team's knowledge and skills.

By upgrading your skills, you will be able to manage your tasks more efficiently and effortlessly, boost the overall productivity and get the most of your team. For example, if you wish to produce more pieces of good quality content per day, you should read about new writing techniques, and keep up with trends by reading A-list personal development blogs.

7. Invest in time management tools

With the rise of technology, it's almost unimaginable to handle multiple tasks without using some time management or communication tools, such as Slack or Hubstaff. Also, if you want to minimize your time organizing files and documents, consider using tools like Dropbox and OneDrive.

You should do an extensive research, review the best project management tools, and choose the one that fits your workflow. If you're working on a weekend project, something like Trello will suffice. However, if your projects last for several months or even longer, then you should look more at tools like Active Collab and Basecamp.

A project management tool can help you and your team save a noticeable amount of time every day by creating a more efficient workflow. It will allow you not only to communicate but also share images and brainstorm ideas in a matter of seconds. It can also help you and your team stay on the same page, focusing on meaningful work.

You shouldn't limit yourself only to PM and communication tools. Identify the repetitive tasks that take a notable amount of your time and look for apps that can help you work more efficiently.

8. Be realistic

Know your limitations. Taking the ever-increasing demand of the market into account, it's very hard to escape the harsh reality of having to multitask on a daily basis. As much as you would like to be able to complete all your daily tasks, you must be aware that our productivity levels are not always the same. After creating your list of priorities, determine how productive you are and how many tasks you can handle on that particular day. Instead of overextending yourself, focus your efforts on doing your best on the tasks at hand.

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