
The logo for 'infokit' is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, oriented vertically within a large orange rounded rectangle.

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Time Management

"Time is the scarcest resource of the manager; If it is not managed, nothing else can be managed" Peter F Drucker, (1909–2005), Management Guru

Introduction

You can't add any more hours to your day so learning to manage your time more effectively will help you plan your work more efficiently and ensure deadlines are met. Managing time effectively is a particularly crucial ingredient in successful projects. It is important to manage both your personal and professional lives because as much as you try to keep them separate they cannot help but infringe upon one another. Managing your own time will not only benefit you but those around you as well.

Within your team you will need to recognise that people work differently, some may have a structured view of working (where promptness is highly valued and most tasks are done one at a time) whereas others have a non-structured view of working (where promptness is more context related and greater emphasis is placed on multitasking). All project work requires a degree of flexibility but as a project manager you need to know when to be strict with schedules and plans and when to take a less structured approach. If your work requires you to deal with different countries then you will need to appreciate that different cultures have different perceptions of time i.e. in terms of how they view punctuality and average number of work hours.

One of the most important messages about time management is that it takes place in the present moment; the choices of how you manage your time are only available to you now.

This resource aims to help you manage your time more effectively by suggesting a number of tools and approaches that you may find applicable to your own circumstances.

Weekly Planning

A useful technique in managing and planning your time effectively is a weekly plan. This gives an overview of the tasks that will need completing each week.

Weekly planning helps you to:

- decide how to make effective use of your time
- work proactively rather than reactively

There are several ways in which you can record your weekly plan, whether it's a paper-based or electronic system, it is important that you find a method that suits you. It may be that you find it easier to use a diary, an online calendar, write a list, use the tasks in Microsoft Outlook or devise a spreadsheet. Follow this link to view a [weekly plan template](#).

When you come to devise your plan you will need to identify which are the urgent and non-urgent tasks. Alan Lakein devised an A-B-C, 1-2-3 Priority System, where:

- **A** priority = high value goals (urgent activities)
- **B** priority = medium value goals (important activities but not urgent)
- **C** priority = low value goals (activities without deadlines)

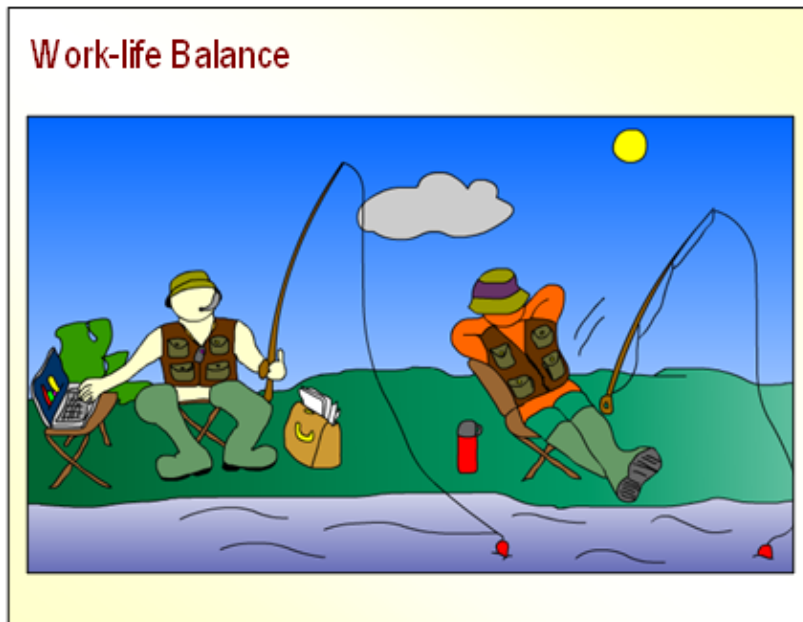
The system works by placing a letter next to each task according to priority. The importance of the task is graded using a 3 point scale and a number (i.e. 1–2–3) is placed next to the priority. It is possible for all of your tasks to be category A but then you can separate them out into order of importance by placing a number next to them.

Priorities change so it's worth noting that something that might be a B3 this week could over time become an A1 so it is important that plans are regularly monitored and updated.

In terms of individual planning whichever method you decide to use it is important that you set time aside either on a Friday afternoon or a Monday morning to devise your plan for the following week. Remember to allow yourself time for any interruptions and adequate breaks from your work.

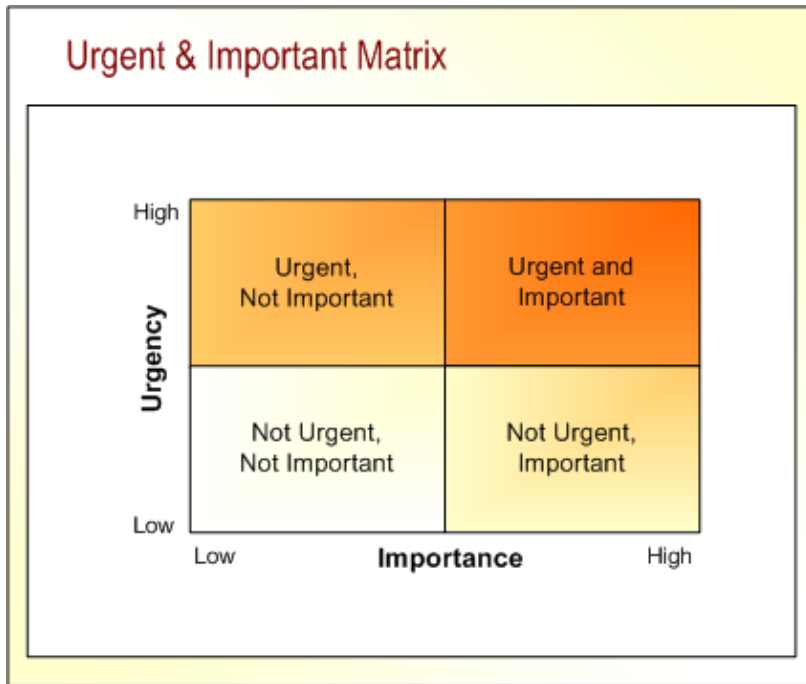
If you are the type of person who finds it difficult to leave work in the office then you may find it beneficial to devise a plan for how you spend your time at home, ensuring that you are getting work–life balance as opposed to focusing all your time on work.

When planning weekly tasks as a team, you may find it beneficial to have an update meeting at the beginning of each week. This would involve all project team members sitting down to look at the tasks which need completing in that week. The benefits of this type of planning are that all team members are aware of what needs to be completed. If one member of staff is off sick or is called away on urgent business then the other team members are more able to pick their work up.



Urgent and Important Matrix

A useful way of planning your tasks as a team is to use an "Urgent and Important Matrix". This is a particularly good tool to use at the beginning of a project as you are able to identify the tasks at an early stage and disregard those tasks which are viewed as being not urgent and not important. For the purpose of group planning you could use the matrix on a flip chart and simply write the tasks on post-it notes and stick in the relevant quadrants. At the end of the process you will be able to devise action plans for the important and non urgent tasks and begin working on these straight away. The purpose of tackling the important and non urgent tasks is to ensure that these don't become important and urgent. If you spend all of your time concentrating on the urgent and important tasks you will just be firefighting. You need to be proactive rather than reactive.



Note this type of planning can be used for either individual or team planning

Planning Software

As an alternative to the "Urgent and Important Matrix" you may find that Microsoft Project is a useful planning mechanism to use. This system will allow you to record your tasks electronically rather than having to rely on a paper system. The tasks for all team members can be added to the plan and printed off when required. The advantages of this type of system are that the details can be amended easily and, provided the software is installed and a shared facility is in place, it can be accessed by all members of the team. It is important to consider appointing an individual to the role of updating the plan as it could become confusing if all members of the team make independent additions/changes to the plan.

Daily Planning (To-do lists)

Once your weekly plan has been identified you are now in a position to devise a to-do list. The tasks in your weekly plan are broken down into smaller groups of tasks that can be tackled on a particular day. You can do this by either creating a paper-based or electronic system (similar to your weekly plan). When devising your to-do list it is important to set aside 10 minutes either at the beginning or end of each day to plan your time. Try to stick to your original to-do list, make the best use of your time. As with weekly planning, try to allow time throughout the day for interruptions and contingencies. Use the following link to view a [to-do list template](#).

To-do List

To-do List Template			
Name	A N Other		
Date	22 nd March 2006		
No	Task	Notes	Status (Complete/pending)
A2	To print out and collate delegate packs for Risk Management meeting	Need to print 15 packs and send to the ESC	PENDING
A3	Arrange car hire and accommodation for presenter	Need to book a hotel near the venue with car parking	PENDING
A4	Complete expenses and get them authorised	Need to be completed by end of today as Director is on leave from tomorrow	IN PROGRESS
B2	Update spreadsheet with new figures		PENDING

- When you are planning your tasks it is important to remember not to make your list too long.
- Don't set yourself an impossible list of tasks to complete in a day.
- Try to identify perhaps three or four tasks that you are aiming to get done.
- Don't focus all your attention on the easy tasks as you have to keep chipping away at the larger more difficult tasks as well.
- Don't focus all of your attention on the urgent tasks as the important tasks also need to be addressed.
- If you are unable to complete any of the tasks on your to-do list then carry them over to the next day but make them a first priority for completion.
- As soon as you've completed a task cross it off your list.
- Some tasks are fixed, for example scheduled meetings. It is important to ensure that any preparation work for these meetings is scheduled as a high priority and that all other tasks fit around your fixed commitments.

If you are the type of person who finds it difficult to manage your time then you may need to consider picking the best time of day to complete certain tasks. Some people find they work better in the morning whereas others work better in the afternoon. If you are having trouble starting a big task then you may find it easier to visualise the task as a journey. The idea behind this theory is to work backwards and identify what you would have needed to complete in order to finish the task. By doing this you are identifying the stages of the task which need completion.

Advantages of daily planning:

- By creating to-do lists:
 - ◆ you are already identifying ways in which to manage your time more effectively
 - ◆ you are minimising risk
- By managing your time appropriately, urgent matters may disappear altogether and if they do re-surface then your planning will make them less urgent and easier to deal with.

Best use of time right now

"Wisdom is the power to put our time and our knowledge to the proper use" Thomas John Watson (1874–1956), founder of IBM

By asking yourself Lakein's question "What is the best use of my time right now?" and doing the

task that best fills your time at that particular moment you will increase your overall efficiency.

Do you often find it hard to find the time for certain tasks or feel there just aren't enough hours in the day? Why not use the time when you're waiting for an appointment, or travelling to or from work to read that report you have been putting off due to more pressing matters, or for want of quiet space to read it. By using your 'waiting' time effectively you can avoid taking work home with you. Productive use of time that would otherwise be wasted will free you up for other things.

Using a diary, either electronic or paper based, will help you manage your time. It is often recommended to have a diary for both work and personal time to stop you infringing on one or the other. Make sure you have as much information in your diary as possible such as the location of the meeting and the phone number of the person you are meeting in case you have to call to change anything or let them know you are running late.

When working on a project it is advisable to have a shared team calendar that everyone has access to, by putting in all meetings or events that team members are involved in it allows the team to see what everyone is committed to on a particular day. Therefore if you need to arrange a meeting, you have readily available information on who is available when. The calendar should also include leave arrangements and personal appointments (such as hospital appointments).

When preparing work for a meeting or an event that is a few weeks away, make sure you have time put aside in your diary to do preparation work. Waiting until the last minute, doesn't allow for any unexpected interruptions and there may also be a lot of papers to read in preparation for the meeting.

Handle each piece of paper only once

A lot of time wasting occurs shuffling papers from one pile to another on your desk. When you receive a piece of paper either in the post or via email you should do one of the following four things immediately;

- Act on it
- File it
- Delegate it to someone else
- Throw it away – delete junk emails and throw away junk mail as soon as it is received. Unless you can justify keeping paperwork then you should bin it.

Do you really need a pending tray? Chances are it is full of paper that you don't know what to do with! Even if you decide to file a certain piece of paper you may find that you never look at it again. So if it really isn't necessary to keep it then just bin it!

A simple exercise to see if you are falling into the trap of shuffling papers around your desk is every time you pick up a piece of paper place a dot in the corner of the page and see how many dots you end up with on the page before you take action on it.

Organise your workspace

Handling your paperwork effectively will ensure you keep a tidy desk which in turn will make you more efficient.

Returning to a tidy and organised desk every morning will help you to feel calmer and more ready to approach the day's tasks, especially if you have your daily to-do list ready and waiting.

A chaotic desk clutters your thinking which often leads to wasted time. Even those people with messy desks who claim they know where everything is have to spend a certain degree of time searching through piles to find the right bit of paperwork. Colleagues stand even less chance of trying to find something if you are away.

Filing regularly will help everyone, including you, find things quickly, as long as colleagues are familiar with your filing system of course! At the very least paperwork should be arranged in folders on your desk.

Those team members who are not so good at keeping a tidy desk should be encouraged to have a tidy up day every so often, perhaps once a month.



Get into a Routine

You need to have the discipline to stick to key routines, such as regular filing, however irritating or boring you might find them. If these tasks are kept up to date it will help you manage time more effectively. The ability to manage tasks and use simple effective systems will ease the flow of work across your desk.

When you have material that needs to be read but doesn't necessarily have any action it is best to skim the contents first and then either bin it or put it aside to read later. You shouldn't, however, allow it to sit on your desk for weeks. When you do decide to read it you should aim to pick it up once.

Managing Meetings

Planning Meetings

Every worker in an educational establishment will have some experience of meetings. Some spend only a small proportion of their time in meetings whilst for others they are a major part of their working schedule.

Despite all the meetings that take place every day in every large workplace, the majority of meetings will be poorly run and will not meet their objectives. The reason is bad planning. Bad planning in terms of:

- Agenda setting
- Keeping discussion on topic
- Making decisions
- Recording accurately what has been decided
- Monitoring what should have happened since the previous meeting
- Producing timely and accurate minutes

Haven't We Met Before?

Many meetings seem as though they were planned by TV programme schedulers – they are simply a repeat of previous meetings with nothing new being contributed and with speakers simply saying what they have already said before.

This happens when the person chairing the meeting is not in control; or when the speaker has not undertaken a task that should have been completed since the last meeting and tries to hide it by reporting old actions; or when too many meetings discuss the same topic. This latter can lead to confusion over responsibility.

Where meetings are arranged at different levels, inviting someone to speak at a higher level after they have already said the same thing to a meeting shows lack of forethought, or trust, in the communications channels between levels.

Putting Names to Faces

There is a social aspect to meetings and that is an important point that should not be overlooked. Meetings are often the only place where some individuals get chance to meet and talk to each other, either formally or informally. Colleagues from different departments should be given opportunities to interact both informally as well as formally, as feelings of friendship and empathy generate care and bring incentives to help with, or contribute to, tasks that otherwise would be of little concern.

Lights, Camera, Action!

It is strongly recommended that minutes of meetings are 'action-oriented'.

This means that where the meeting agrees something needs to be done then the minute of that item ends with the word "Action" in bold type, followed by the name of the person responsible for the task and a description of what was agreed be done.

E.g. **Action:** L Smith to carry out survey of equipment for anti-virus software installation.

It may be that L Smith will not carry out this work personally but that they are responsible for it being carried out. It may be that the people with the specialist knowledge to carry out the task may not be under L Smith's line management and if this is the case it is vital that the meeting endows L Smith with some authority or sponsorship. The Process Review infoKit has more to say about Authority and Responsibility.

Just a Minute...

Ensuring that any actions to be taken are recorded accurately is half the battle. The other half of course includes monitoring and reviewing the carrying out of those tasks.

Many meetings have an agenda that starts with "Apologies" and then goes on with "Minutes of Last Meeting" and "Matters Arising". However, if minutes are to be useful, then they should be produced and circulated within a short period of time – preferably by the next day for a weekly meeting and within a week for any other period.

If this is not the case then meeting attendees are forced to write their own notes, which detracts from their attention and ability to take part in the meeting itself. There are very few people capable of both minuting and participating in a meeting. Not only do attendees end up with sketchy (if any) notes from the meeting, but the official minutes if produced weeks or months afterwards, may misrepresent in either a small or (occasionally) large way, the detail of events which cannot be remembered. This usually manifests itself in a bland, meaningless lack of detail. E.g. "There was discussion.."

On rare occasions it has been found that this approach of sending minutes out much later than the meeting is taken deliberately so that the views of the minute writer or chair person can be 'emphasised'. Such action is an abuse and it has to be said that management by deception is seldom remembered fondly and seldom engenders commitment.

What's on the Agenda?

If minutes are produced in a timely manner, a culture of swift feedback should be encouraged where errors and/or omissions are noticed. This means that the agenda item: 'Minutes of Last Meeting' can be a quick listing of already noted errors and an agreement that the minutes as amended are accurate. Too often this agenda item becomes a 5–minute reading session as attendees read the minutes for the first time.

The agenda item: 'Matters Arising' is far better labelled 'Actions'. The Chair of the meeting can then go down the minutes, picking out each item where there was an action, inviting the named person to report on progress. Each item of action then gets monitored.

There is an onus here on the people attending the meeting to prepare for it. Members of a meeting should be forewarned when a report is expected from them. They should understand beforehand the format, whether written; one side of A4 with bullet points, or verbal, or in writing as a formal detailed report. There can then be an expectancy that those reports will be completed and delivered. Those people who missed the football match or the big cliff–hanger on the TV soaps to prepare their report will not be impressed if some herbert tries to say they haven't "had time". Where this happens, unless there is a swift and public move by the chair of the meeting it can be almost guaranteed that there will be several reports not ready at the next meeting.

Project Meetings

Once the Actions are dealt with the meeting can move onto other items. If the meeting is a project meeting, the main item remaining would be 'The Plan'. This would be where each attendee would have a copy of the project plan and perhaps a more detailed personal plan, either in the form of a Gantt Chart (described in the Project Management infoKit), or a task list with expected start and end dates and showing dependencies where other tasks need to be completed before another task can commence and also where the person's own tasks are critical to the start or continuation of their own or someone else's future tasks.

It is recommended that a copy of these plans should have been sent to the Project Manager or chair of the meeting in advance, along with an indication of whether each current task will meet its targets or not. The targets may be thought of in terms of the three main variables – time, cost and quality.

It is this agenda item that will generate additional Actions for the period between the current and the next meeting. A good Project Manager will use this technique to share plans so that:

- Peer pressure creates a strong incentive to succeed
- Any clash of plans is identified. E.g. tasks requiring the same person at the same time or when a period of annual leave is due.

Managing Information in a Team

When working on a project or in a team generally you may find the following suggestions useful:

- Create a shared file space on your server so everyone in your team has access to all files.
- Different access rights can be assigned to individual project team members.
- Some documents can be made available as 'read only' if appropriate.
- Confidential files that are not for wider circulation can be saved in a sub directory that has restricted access.
- It is important that everyone knows where to save documents and in turn where to look for them.
- When all documents are saved in the same directory it is helpful to put a footer on each document with the filename and path on so that when a hardcopy is printed colleagues will know where to look for it on the shared drive.
- It is worth giving some thought to filenames, they should be sensible and reasonably straightforward for colleagues to locate. For minutes of meetings you could start with the meeting date and then the name of the meeting such as '2005 12 19 Weekly Staff Meeting.doc' – saving the document in this way with the year and month at the front of the name ensures that they appear together in the directory in date order.
- Giving people as much information as possible without making file names too long will save time in searching for documents. It is also an important housekeeping issue not to keep duplicated files either on the shared file space or as a hardcopy.

Use the following link to see an example of [a policy for saving, versioning, etc of documents and files.](#)

Managing your e-mail

Electronic mail has become ubiquitous in the last ten years and it is a very useful and relatively instant communication tool that can support and bring real benefits to an organisation. However the large volume of emails that populate our inboxes on a regular basis can prove a real headache and distraction to flow of work. It is vital that you take steps to manage your email in an effective way.

A constant flow of emails can really interrupt your concentration, and it is too easy a distraction to read and respond as soon as messages arrive, even if you're actually working on something else.

- Instead of having your email inbox open constantly try to allocate times of the day to read and reply to messages.
- Get rid of junk emails.

- Avoid cluttering your inbox
- File away emails in sub folders set up with topic headings relevant to your work.
- Back-up important emails by saving them to a shared drive/or to a local drive on your PC.

Being systematic in your approach can help you focus on tasks and make the best use of your time.

Being able to lay your hands on information quickly will make you feel more in control and you will have more time to spend on other work.

Backing Up Information

If all of your information, including your diary, is stored on your computer you can potentially be quite vulnerable if the system crashes. The inability to access files can leave you at a loss as to what to do or where to begin. It is important that you weigh up the pros and cons of holding all of your information in one place. Project deadlines could suffer if the system is down, and repercussions could be major if the data cannot be retrieved. Taking regular back up copies of electronic information is sensible. You may also decide that it is important to have regular printouts of the diary and the plan for instance. To save wasting time and losing work in the long term it is worth carrying out a risk assessment. Further information on risk management can be found in the [risk management infoKit](#) and the [records management infoKit](#).

Do it Now!

If a task seems particularly daunting you could try the "Swiss cheese" method described by Alan Lakein. When you are continually putting off a task try breaking it into smaller tasks and do just one of the smaller tasks or spend an allotted time on a big task. By chipping away at the task in this manner it will eventually seem more manageable and not such a monster!

When faced with large or difficult tasks you may find it useful to ask yourself, "What's the one thing I can do to move me forward on this?" There are some tasks that you should just do that don't require any decision making, many tasks can be done immediately.

Create a Work Breakdown Structure, breaking down big tasks into shorter timeslots. Use the following link to view a [Work Breakdown Structure Template](#). Use your to-do lists and look at your priorities as these tasks can not be put off if you have given them an A1 status. Use the following link to see an [example Work Breakdown Structure](#).

Be proactive, don't procrastinate!

Administrative Principles

- Do it ONCE
- Do it RIGHT
- Do it QUICKLY
- Keep it SIMPLE
- TRUST me
- I am ACCOUNTABLE

Basic administrative principles – Do it Once, Do it Right, Do it Quickly, Keep it Simple, Trust Me, I am Accountable can be explored in JISC infoNet's [process review infokit](#).

Procrastination

"Procrastination is the thief of time" – Edward Young (1683–1765)

Usually when people delay things they are procrastinating – putting off tasks until they are unavoidable. It can be very tempting to put off particular tasks in favour of something more enjoyable or a task that you are more comfortable dealing with. Procrastination can often occur when you do not understand the difference between urgent and important tasks or spend too long doing one and not the other. You need to ask yourself are you really the only person who can deal with urgent tasks? Delegate tasks where you can. Procrastination delays progress, wastes time and can restrict future opportunities.

Procrastination can come about in a number of ways:

- **Paralysis by planning:** Here the planning process is drawn out to avoid confronting an issue. Plans are argued and polished and perfected, but implementation of the plans is delayed unnecessarily.
- **Perfectionism:** Often tasks are fussed over long after they have been achieved to a quite sufficient level. This often serves to delay tackling other problems. Often perfection simply is not required, and is not cost-effective to achieve.
- **Boredom:** Boring jobs are very easy to delay for spurious reasons. Here self-discipline is needed.
- **Hostility:** Where you are hostile to the task, or to the person giving the task, there is a strong temptation to delay.
- **'The Deadline High':** Coming up against a tight deadline and meeting it is immensely satisfying. It can be associated with strong rushes of adrenaline. The problems with this are that you may find that jobs are being delayed precisely to get this rush of adrenaline, and

that occasionally jobs may fail because they have been left too late.

The way to tackle procrastination is to set deadlines by which goals should be achieved. The way to avoid Deadline High procrastination is to set intermediary goals which must be achieved. © Mind Tools Ltd – The points above were taken from the article, "[Negative Delay – Procrastination](#)" from the [Mindtools](#) website.

Say No

It's such a small word but people find it very hard to say no. Are you one of those people who drops everything just to do a task for someone else because you don't want to let them down? You'll do it even if you're inundated with your own work and the task puts you behind schedule.

Being unable to say no leads to over-commitment. There are many reasons why you may find it hard to say no, you may feel that you are losing personal power. Some of us need to feel like a superhero, someone who is always there to be relied on to do any tasks. Others can't bear the guilt of saying no to colleagues, they don't want to let them down. Some people have a need to please others and therefore saying no is not an option for them.

Tips to help you say no when you need to:

- Focus on your goals.
- Block time for important, but often unscheduled, priorities. Once you have sorted your priorities and you know how important they are, saying "no" to the unimportant in life gets easier.
- Be understanding to the person requesting the work and state you know it is important but stay firm and explain that you have prearranged tasks and priorities which have to come first and ask if anyone else can help with the task or try and schedule another time in the week when you can look at it.
- You can't be expected to do everything for everyone so there is no need to be defensive, try instead to set realistic limits about what is possible.
- If you are unsure whether you have the time to take on a task don't commit yourself to saying yes or no until you have learnt more about what is involved and how long it will take and then let the person know an answer, as soon as you can, taking into account your current commitments and deadlines. This way you can check what priorities you have and whether by doing this task your own tasks will fall behind schedule.

Summary of Tips and Tools

- Set goals
- Produce a weekly plan and include all team members
- Prioritise tasks – use Lakein's A–B–C, 1–2–3 priority system to help you
- Use an Urgent and Important Matrix
- Plan daily, use to-do lists but make sure they're manageable and not over-ambitious
- Don't focus all of your attention on the easy tasks
- Keep chipping away at the more difficult tasks
- Pick the best time of day to complete certain tasks if necessary
- Make the best use of your time right now
- Use a diary – it doesn't matter if it's electronic or paper based
- Use a shared team calendar
- Schedule in preparation time for events and large pieces of work

- Use 'waiting' and 'travelling' time creatively
- Handle each piece of paper only once
- Work towards and equitable work–life balance
- When you receive a new piece of post or email you should – Act on it, File it, Delegate it to someone else or Throw it Away!
- Get into a routine
- Focus on moving forward, don't spend time on unnecessary distractions
- Organise your workspace – keep your desk tidy!
- File regularly
- Use shared file space
- Manage your email effectively, don't let it distract you from your main work
- Be proactive, not reactive
- Don't procrastinate
- Set sensible deadlines and work towards them

Further Reading

Time Management – Debra Allcock Tyler, Spiro Press, 2003.

http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_96.htm

<http://www.peter-drucker.com>

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