

Managing Your Time

Of course, if we're talking about being prepared, goal-oriented, and organized, it is inevitable that we discuss the importance of wise time management. I know—you think you've heard all there is to be said about it. But before you skip ahead, let me ask you this: would you like to work less? Most people will answer yes. A very potent little detail that often gets overlooked is that when time is well managed, you actually work less.

It's the same for persuasion—great persuaders work less than the average persuader and accomplish more. It's the old "80/20 Rule." The most highly successful people expend 20 percent of the effort and get 80 percent of the results, while the less effective folks put out 80 percent of the effort only to get 20 percent of the results. Sound unfair? Let me give you a tip for entering the world of 20 percent work/80 percent results. Great persuaders understand that time is more important than money. They are fanatically aware that while we can accumulate money, we *cannot* accumulate time. This knowledge informs how they spend every moment. They don't waste time quibbling about things that don't matter. Every ounce of energy is allocated where it will have the most impact. It really is that simple. It's not even a matter of intelligence. It is just being aware and being organized.

Do you realize that most persuaders are productive less than half of the day? Let's say, for example that the wasted moments throughout the day add up to two hours (though research shows that for most people, it's likely more). For a five-day work week, those two measly hours add up to forty hours a month—the equivalent of another entire work week.

Everything is something you decide to do, and there is nothing you have to do.

—DENIS WAITLEY

I mentioned earlier that successful persuaders could show you their goals in writing. This absolutely holds true for excellent time managers, too, because their daily tasks are their short-term goals. It doesn't take too long before these short-term goals add

up and significantly influence whether or not we're hitting our bigger goals. As you work to get a better handle on your time management, commit to scheduling and planning things in writing. This doesn't mean you have to be a rigid, uptight person. It just gives you a guide. So often, we waste time just because we didn't have anything else to fill that time with. If you don't assign the way you're going spend a block of time, it *will* get filled, even if the activity has no meaning.

Great persuaders never start the day until it is finished on paper. Research at the Persuasion Institute shows that only 2.9 percent of persuaders have a handle on time management and fewer than one-third plan their day in advance. This means there is definitely room for most of us to gain greater control over our time and how it is spent. The good news is, as you get organized, you will probably start to work less and achieve more.

Commit to writing out your plans and goals the night before or first thing in the morning. Make sure the most important things in your life make it onto your list. Here are some questions to consider as you reflect on how you want your time to be spent:

- What is the best use of my time throughout the day?
- What part of my day should be reserved for the most difficult tasks?
- Do I do the simple, enjoyable things first?
- Am I spending important time on unimportant things?
- Do I confuse being busy with achievement?
- Do I know my priorities? Is this knowledge reflected in the way I spend my time?
- Am I clear about what I want to accomplish?
- What unnecessary things can I remove from my life?
- Is there any redundancy in my daily activities?
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We all have the same amount of time each day. The first step in using your time more wisely is being aware of how your time is currently used. Our research has shown that persuaders waste 57 percent of the day with non-income-producing activities

(i.e., traveling, paperwork, waiting, idle chit chat, etc.) Sure, some of this is necessary, but top persuaders maximize income-producing activities and limit or delegate non-income-producing activities.

At the Persuasion Institute, we discovered the following:

- 4 percent of persuaders have perfected prospecting.
- 11 percent consistently spend time each week finding more customers.
- 12 percent will ask for referrals after every visit. (Referrals should comprise the majority of your business.)
- 81 percent of average persuaders spend less than five hours a week creating new customers.

Once you have a clear handle on where you stand now, you need to settle on what improvements are necessary. Comparing the two—your current use of time versus your desired use of time—will help you assess what you need to adjust. You can always use the success of others as a model for your own success. Below are some time management skills successful persuaders possess. See if you could add any of these skills or techniques to your toolbox:

- Grouping and batching similar tasks.
- Monitoring interruptions.
- Multitasking.
- Implementing deadlines and rewards.
- Restricting sleep to only what is necessary (not sleeping longer than is needful).
- Exercising.
- Scheduling all activities and events, even “catch-up” time and rest time.
- Using technology to automate your contact, email and tracking systems.

Avoiding Procrastination

It is impossible to talk about time management and not end up talking about procrastination. Why is the tendency to procrastinate so prevalent? We know it does us

no good, and yet it plagues even the best of us. Putting things off until the last minute never gives the best results. Great persuaders don't have time to procrastinate.

While there are many different psychological factors motivating a person's tendency to procrastinate, the number-one reason is fear of failure or rejection. We often exhibit avoidance, reluctance, apathy, and rationalization when we are afraid.

What are some other reasons we procrastinate? Another big one is indecision. We fear being wrong and making mistakes. As much as we want to see life as black or white, good or bad, we need to let go of the need for tidy compartmentalizing; life just isn't that way. Often, there are many ways of accomplishing the same thing, and there can be many right answers to any one question. Successful persuaders are good decision makers. They act in the moment. They decide now, not later.

Sometimes we procrastinate because we are tired or we don't have the energy. Other times, it's because our goals aren't big enough, and we become apathetic. It can also be the reverse: if our goals seem too big, they will overwhelm us and we'll start to shut down. When you feel overwhelmed, the key is to break tasks down into smaller, more manageable, bite-size pieces. Yet another reason for procrastination is lack of knowledge or no drive to acquire that knowledge.

All these reasons are really more correctly called "excuses." There is no reason to postpone an important activity. As President Theodore Roosevelt said, "In a moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing."

No matter the root of the problem—fear, indecision, apathy, lack of knowledge, or something else—there are four basic excuses people use to justify their procrastination behavior.

1. *Perfectionism*. The first excuse is when a person insists that everything be perfect, that all their ducks be in a row, before taking the next step. These people are your classic perfectionists. There is always one more thing they need to fix or fine-tune before they can get down to the business of talking to potential customers.

2. *Pessimism*. The second common excuse behind procrastination is pessimism—always entertaining worst-case scenarios and all the reasons *not* to proceed. There are always many excuses not to do the work, but never any good reasons. These people spend all their time worrying and negatively forecasting the future.

3. *Amiability*. The third excuse for procrastination is “amiability.” These are the folks who are always afraid of being too pushy, intrusive, and annoying. They avoid anything that will put them in a situation where someone might get upset or, even worse, not like them.

4. *Credibility*. The final excuse-maker is the superficial expert. Superficial experts fear that if they let others find out that they don't really possess all the skills they pretend to have, they will lose all credibility. They like being looked up to and admired from a distance, but the thought of being in a situation where they might actually have to demonstrate their alleged knowledge and abilities is terrifying. It would also force them to have to actually do some work. Instead, it is easier to avoid the call of duty.

It is helpful to know the underpinnings, but you can look at procrastination in an even more basic way. There are many fairly surface-level giveaways that tell you if you're dealing with (or happen to be) a procrastinator. According to Dr. Joseph Ferrari, a procrastinator tends to possess these five tendencies:

1. They overestimate the time they have left to perform tasks.
2. They underestimate the time it takes to complete tasks.
3. They overestimate how motivated they will feel the next day, the next week, the next month—to do whatever they are putting off.

4. They mistakenly think that succeeding at a task requires that they feel like doing it.
5. They mistakenly believe that working when not in the mood is suboptimal.⁷

Eliminate Common Excuses

The Persuasion Institute found that the following were the most common excuses that got in the way of getting the task accomplished. Are there any that sound familiar?

- “I’m too busy to . . .”
- “They’ll never talk to me.”
- “I don’t want to seem pushy.”
- “What if they’re not interested?”
- “They’re always in a bad mood.”
- “I need to finish the paperwork.”
- “I need some coffee before I start.”
- “It’s lunchtime and no one will be in.”
- “I left a message; they’ll call me back.”
- “Maybe I should do some more research.”
- “They won’t want this product/service/idea.”
- “I need to get lunch before I can think straight.”
- “I need to get some office supplies before I can start.”
- “Someone may have left a message on my cell phone.”
- “I have a meeting in an hour, so I can’t start calling now.”
- “It’s Friday and everyone is getting ready for the weekend.”
- “It’s Monday and everyone is catching up from the weekend.”
- “Someone else already tried to contact them, with no success.”
- “I need to check my e-mail again in case someone has responded.”