

## **Time Management: Getting More Done in Less Time (1,252 words)**

We're busy taking phone calls, handling drop-in visitors, responding to emails and text messages. We need to answer these questions: What controls our time? How do we handle phone calls? How do we handle drop-in visitors? How do we handle email and paperwork?

**What controls our time?** Tasks or activities in which we have total control and tasks or activities in which we have some control.

Let's examine the tasks or activities in which we total control. It's kind of a short list. We have total control of our attitude, we can coach ourselves to look for the positive rather than the negative. Being optimistic can be a habit. Whether we exercise or not. Everybody asks, when we are going to lunch, no one ever asks when we are going to exercise. We have total control of what we eat. I have never accidentally eaten anything. I'm sure you haven't either. However, I know if I eat a heavy lunch, I'm kind of tired and sluggish in the afternoon. If I eat a lighter lunch, I feel a little peppier and enthusiastic. We also have total control of what we say. We can slow down our thoughts, and the feelings that follow, and respond rather than react. We do have options. It is sometimes wise to bite our tongues. We also have total control of what we read. I am always amazed at the difference a good book can make.

What are the tasks or activities in which I have some control? Everything else in our lives. We just need to take some of that control back. How we spend our free time, what we volunteer to do, where we live, what we do for a living, what time we go to bed, what time we get up, who we spend time with and how much? The list of tasks or activities in which we have some control goes on and on and on. If we can control our decisions we can control our time and our life.

When we feel overwhelmed, it is important to take stock of our life, and consider all of the activities we have become involved. Seriously consider if it is a good use of your time. It might just be time to trim your task list.

**Handle Phone Interruptions:** Let's take a look at some causes and solutions for phone interruptions. Here are some causes. No planning for handling unexpected calls. No plans for un-availability. Lack of delegation. Inability to terminate the conversation. Possible escape activity that supports procrastination.

Here are some possible solutions for handling phone interruptions. Develop a plan to screen, delegate and consolidate. Communicate your schedule to others. Set aside certain times for making and taking phone calls. Batching helps you control your schedule rather than being a victim of somebody else's schedule. When making phone calls, always prepare a checklist so that nothing is missed and you are prepared to leave a voice mail message if necessary. When taking calls ask, "What's the point questions" to keep the conversation brief and focused. You can also listen briefly and delegate. If you're not facing an emergency, postpone your involvement and delegate as much of the

detail work to somebody with available time and resources. Refer calls to others and provide them a list of points to discuss. Create a few different strategies for accepting and ending conversations. Preset a time limit, “Yes, I can talk for about 5 minutes.” Or say, “I am just on my way out of my office for a meeting.” You can also foreshadow the ending. “Angie, before we hang up...” Be candid, “Sorry, Scott, got to go now.”

Take action. Don’t use the phone call to procrastinate and avoid unpleasant tasks. Stay on schedule with short-term goals with time sensitive targets. Analyze the problem. Develop a plan. Discuss your strategies with your coworkers to avoid surprise or offense. Ensure understanding. Implement your plan and modify strategies to improve your telephone management.

**Handle Drop-In Visitors:** Let’s take a look at some causes for drop-in visitors. Open-door policy. No plan for handling. Desire to be available. Fear of offending. Inability to terminate visits.

Here are some possible solutions for handling drop-in visitors. Develop a plan to screen and arrange appointments. Tell them politely if you are busy at the moment. Ask them to come back later and set a specific appointment time, or better yet, go to the offices of others. Distinguish between being available for business for business and for socializing. Plan social visits at coffee or lunch.

Modify your open-door policy by closing it as needed for periods of concentration. Recognize “open door” does not necessarily mean physically open, but open to those who need assistance. Manage by exception and accept information concerning only deviations from the plan. Meet coworkers outside your office. Or stand up when others enter your work area and keep standing. Preset a time limit for the visit. Say, “I have just a couple of minutes, what’s going on?” If they don’t leave as scheduled, walk the back to their work area. Foreshadow the end by saying, “Is there anything else before I leave?” Excuse yourself and then leave.

Limiting the time taken by drop-in visitors requires courtesy, good judgment, and tact. You don’t want to be rude, however, you need to protect your schedule. Scripting a few statements that help to send drop-in visitors on their way will minimize the frustration of working with others and support your high individual performance.

**Handle Email and Paperwork:** Let’s take a look at some causes for paperwork pressure. Problems often include indecision, lack of a system, and perfectionism.

Here are some possible solutions for handling paperwork. Develop a system for simplifying paperwork. Reduce copies and standardize forms. Reduce report lengths. Deal with mail standing up. Don’t sit down, read it once and handle it. It is your ability to make decisions that gives you the ability to control your life. Be decisive. Screen and scan for essentials. Ask yourself, “What is this?” “Does this require action?” If it will take just a couple of minutes, do it right away. If it will take more time than available at the moment, paper clip a sticking note that describes the next step to take, so you don’t

have to review or re-read the document, again later to finish it. If you can, delegate the document to someone else. Remember, paper follows responsibility that has been delegated.

Split up the paperwork: to do, to pay, to file, or to read. Consider using color for quick reference to find different subjects and interests. Develop a filing system that is quick and easy and making filing a habit, first thing in the morning, right after lunch, or at the end of the day. Name files with the words you would use in conversation so you don't have to stop and think, "What would I have called that?" Just get started, take action, and start sorting. It doesn't have to be a perfect system right away. Fine-tune your system as you go along.

As they say, if you have piles, you probably don't have files. Sit back and consider the paperwork. Recognize the amount and frequency from each source and create a system that works for you. Take on a stack at a time and be decisive.

Kit Welchlin, M.A., CSP, is a professional speaker and author and can be found at [www.welchlin.com](http://www.welchlin.com).