

Tools and Tips to Help You Do More with Your Time
Tools & Tips Discussion Group
2008 NCURA Annual Meeting, November 3, 10:00-11:30 a.m.
Julie Guggino, Central Washington University

Grab 15

Identify a project that you've been avoiding and spend just 15 minutes a day on it—15 minutes x 365 days = 91.25 hours a year. A person can finish a number of projects in that amount of time! This tool can also help you sidestep the common obstacle of just getting started on a project.

One benefit to working on a task a bit at a time is that your subconscious becomes engaged and works creatively on the project even when you're not actively working on it. Another benefit is sometimes you'll be motivated to work longer than 15 minutes on the task.

Do the Hard Thing First

I've found this tool to be quite effective. After I identify which 6 or 7 things I intend to focus on in a given day, I tackle first the one I least want to do. It really does make the load lighter and helps me avoid procrastinating. And if I get nothing else done due to interruptions or changes in priorities, at least I've done the hard thing.

Fill Your Stimulation and Excitement Quota in Positive Ways

Everyone needs stimulation. You can learn positive ways to fulfill your need for stimulation and excitement instead of creating negative time-related crises. Positive ways include varying your activities throughout the day to provide greater interest—switching between conceptual tasks, detailed tasks, people-oriented tasks, and manual tasks; scheduling something exciting every day; scheduling things in advance that interest you; varying your social activities to include one-on-one time and group activities; and alternating structured time with unstructured time.

Finish Fully

Make a habit of completing each task fully. For me this means making a file for a new project now instead of just adding a paper-clipped wad of papers to an already existing stack of things on my desk. It also means color-coding my emails when I first open them rather than going back later to see which ones require following up.

Get Closure

Lack of closure is an energy drain. Dr. Decker's analogy of a computer with a number of open files and the resultant slowing down of all processes illustrates what happens to us when we have too many "open files." Bringing closure to as many "open files" as possible will increase your energy and ability to think more clearly. Your open files may be literal files but can also be relationship issues or unfinished hobbies or a bookcase you want to organize. The next two tools help bring closure.

No Temporary Parking Places

Establish as many permanent "resting" places for things as possible so your energy isn't used up remembering where you put the keys or that important document.

Not-to-Do Lists

Thoughtfully consider which things you are likely never to get to and give yourself permission to be okay with that. Some things I might include on a not-to-do list are not ever cleaning the bottom drawer in the kitchen and not reading work-related magazines that are already older than a year.

Credits: Decker, D. S., *Finding More Time in Your Life*, 2001, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene OR; Decker, D.S., *Stress That Motivates*, 2002, Thomson, Boston MA