

DEFEAT BUSY AND MASTER TIME MANAGEMENT

We're all busy at work. It's a "good thing," right? Well, it is—unless your to-do list is a mile long, you're always stressed out, and you don't know where to start.

THE
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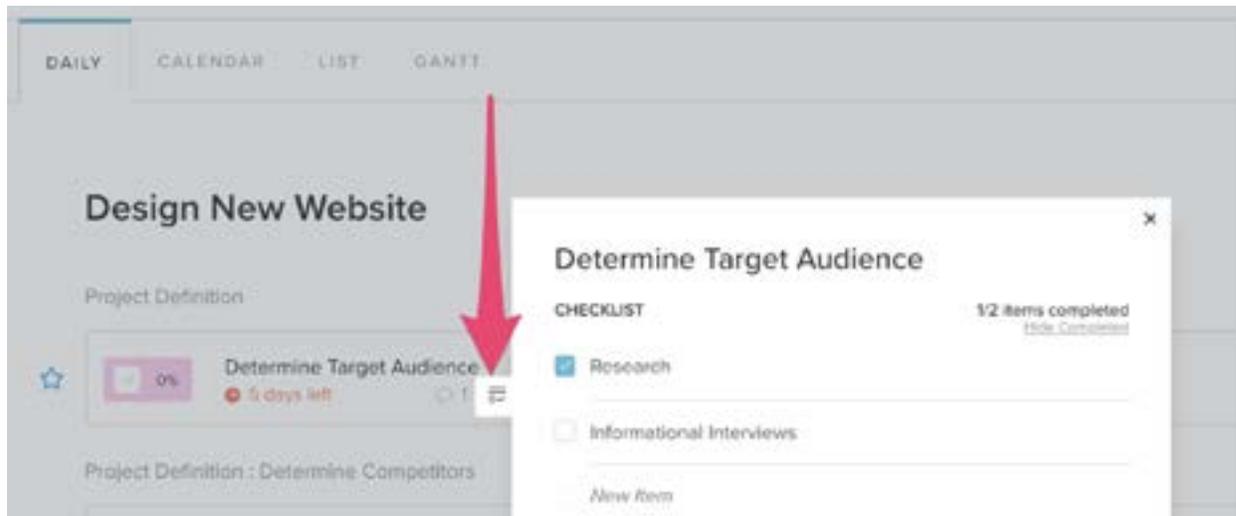
You see, there's an art to being busy, and it's not easy to master. You have to stick to your obligations, do a good job, and enjoy yourself while working. Oh, and you totally need to protect your time off.

That's where good time management skills come in. If you take the time to plan your days and weeks effectively, you should be able to meet your deadlines and keep a smile on your face (and your clients' too). There's no "silver bullet" to keeping it together, but I've got a few recommendations for how to take control of your time.

1. KEEP A MASTER TO-DO LIST.

Record all of your tasks, large and small. Divvy up your list by day, project, or task type. Update it by the end of the day, and feel like a superstar when you cross something off. This is an obvious concept, and there are tons of ways to do it—whether you use paper and pen to create a list or an app to track all your to-dos. The best part? You can get as high-level or granular as you want. After all, your to-do list is helping you manage your time, tasks, and priorities.

Sometimes you need to keep up with project to-dos. Did you know TeamGantt can actually help you here? If you're working on a task that requires several subtasks or steps, you can use our checklists feature to track them. It's as simple as opening a task, clicking on the checklist icon, and filling in your task to-dos. Then just check them off as you complete them. This is an awesome way to keep track of those more granular to-dos.



2. GET YOUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT.

You need a good understanding of how you can structure your weeks and days. So sit down for 20-30 minutes at the beginning of each week to review your deadlines, meetings, and “free” time, and figure out how you’ll get everything done. That way you’ll know what tasks take precedence for the day or the week.

If you need help, check with your leader or project manager. They should always be able to help you sort out task priorities. You can also look at project milestones. (Don’t know where those are? [This article can help.](#))

3. MAKE YOUR TO-DO LIST #1 ON YOUR TO-DO LIST.

Review and revise your to-do list each morning before you get embroiled in the dramas of inbox zero. Determine what must be done today and what can be completed tomorrow, and prioritize accordingly. Then check your email.

If you have to rework your to-do list after you get through your unread messages, that's fine. You just need some time to pull your thoughts together before interacting with the world.

4. STATUS!

Be sure to check in with your team. A quick in-person (or phone/video chat) review of the day's tasks with your team can work to your advantage.

A brief check-in forces you to organize your thoughts and task priorities in advance of the meeting. And bringing tasks up with the team will make you feel more accountable. (Bonus tip: Someone might hear you're overloaded and offer help!)

5. FOCUS ON ONE THING AT A TIME.

No matter what you're doing, it's easy to be side-tracked by another task, conversation, or awesome story. All of those things divert your attention and leave your to-do in the dust.

When you've got one task to complete, do it. If that means you need to throw on your headphones and crank the jams, do it. If it means you need to ignore the office or your best friend from high school on text, do it.

If a coworker really needs you, they'll come over to your desk. If there's an emergency at home, you'll get a phone call. You need time to just get work done. TAKE IT.

Also related: Limit your social media usage during work time. Seriously, turn off Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and yes, even TikTok. Let's face it: You don't care that much about the Twitter feud of the day. Or even that meme that everyone is LOLing over. Turn off the noise, and focus on what needs to be done.

6. BE PROACTIVE.

Do you have a deadline that's contingent on the delivery of something else (a teammate's work, a client's documentation, etc.)? If you do, don't just sit there and wait for it. Ask for it.

Asking won't just give you a better sense for where that task falls on your priority list. It'll also save you the stress of not knowing where it is. A general rule of thumb in life should be: The more you can communicate, the better off you'll be.

7. LEARN TO SAY NO.

We all love to help others in a time of need. The problem is, it's so easy to let outside tasks and events creep into our days and eat up the time we thought we had. Clearly, those added tasks can get in the way of the priorities (see number 2).

Think about it: Do you really have time to help with something? Maybe not. So, what do you do? Say, "Sorry, I just can't." Then take a breath, and move on. It's totally fine.

If you really feel compelled to help, ask if it can be done at a time that's convenient for you. It's not easy telling people no, but sometimes you have to.

8. CHECK YOUR EMAIL ON YOUR OWN TERMS.

Just because someone can contact you immediately does not mean you have to respond to them immediately. As long as you set communication expectations and people know how to reach you in an emergency, you can answer most email just a few times a day.

9. FIND YOUR PRODUCTIVITY ZONE.

Think about the times you're most productive, and use them to your advantage. For instance, I know my brain is far stronger between 8:30 and 10 am. So I use that time to power through as much work as possible. Sometimes I'm completely shocked by how much I've accomplished in just a couple of hours, and it's all because I'm at my best at that time.

I also know I'm completely brain-dead starting at 10:01 am. So I sit at my desk and play Solitaire for a few minutes to give my brain a break before diving into my next task.

10. PLAN FOR THE UNPLANNED.

That's right. You KNOW there will be more meetings and curveballs. Set a schedule that will help you to get work done—uninterrupted.

Some of us have the luxury of establishing a schedule that works for us. For instance, in his book *Rework*, Jason Fried recommends no-meeting zones. In that case, everyone would block their calendar from 9 am to 1 pm (or 1 to 5 pm) each day so they have time to focus on deadlines without the burden of meetings. Project management and operations are the only folks exempt from this rule because their jobs rely on conversations and flexibility to meet.

Keeping a group of people productive is a far more difficult balance to manage than just your own schedule. But giving others a bit of flexibility in the workweek to plan for tasks that inevitably creep into a pristine to-do list can prove extremely valuable.

TIME IS TICKING

Hopefully you weren't SO busy that you only skimmed this or never made it to the end. If you're skimming to the end to save time, here's the moral of the story: You can slice a pie 1,000 ways, but you can only feed so many people. Purposefully working through your schedule to organize your tasks will help you understand just how many people you can feed.

Carry on with your day practicing any or all of these tips, and you'll become a true TMM (Time Management Master, duh). As a result, you'll see the stress slide away.