

How to Squeeze the Most Out of Your Time by Brian Tracy

How do you start your day? Years ago I started planning mine by writing everything down I would have to do, the night before. I found that drawing up your list the night before prompts your subconscious to work on your plans and goals while you sleep. When you wake up, you feel ready to tackle your challenges. When prioritizing and planning your time, consider the following points:

•Key Questions

What is the highest value-added action I can do? What can I, and only I, do that I've done well before to make a difference? Why am I on the payroll?

The answers to these questions help identify all that needs to be done and in what order. That, in turn, will bolster personal productivity.

•Values

Decide what's important to you, and in what order. Make sure your values don't conflict with work. Energy spent worrying diminishes your abilities.

•Consequences

Every action has consequences, good and bad. Consider what rewards you'd reap by completing a task. Then, compare those rewards with the consequences of putting it aside. This process makes it easier to see which goals have a higher value.

•The Pareto Principle

Vilfredo Pareto, a 19th-century engineer, argued that 20% of what you do accounts for 80% of the value. When considering the importance of a task, ask yourself whether it's among the 20% that creates the most value.

•Urgency vs. Importance

An unexpected phone call or a drop-in visitor may be urgent, but the consequences of dealing with either may not be important in the long run. The urgent is other-oriented; it's caused by someone else. Important things are self-directed and have the greatest value for you.

•The Limiting Step

Standing between you and what you want to achieve is the limiting step. That's the bottleneck that determines how quickly you can reach your goal. It's important to identify that step and focus single-mindedly on getting that one thing done.

•A Written Plan

Lists of goals, tasks and objectives are of no help unless they're written. Putting your plans on paper makes a seemingly elusive goal more concrete. There's a connection that takes place between the brain and the hand. When you don't write it down, it's fuzzy, but as you write it and revise it, it becomes clear.

•Visualization

See yourself doing what you need to get done. Visualization trains the subconscious to focus on completing tasks. Say, for example, that you want to begin each morning by exercising. Visualizing yourself doing sit-ups and push-ups the night before conditions the mind to do those the next day. When you prime your mind, it wakes you up even before the alarm clock goes off.

Remember, you are a winner and preparation goes a long way in helping you achieve all your goals.