



HOODSWEENEY

# TIME MANAGEMENT

Elliot Hayes



Prioritise people and time-box tasks to win back time for the things you want to do, says time management expert.

It might sound Orwellian but in a time management sense, some people are worth more than others.

Specialist time management consultant, Elliot Hayes of [findtime.com.au](http://findtime.com.au), says that while most people try to approach their time management strategy assuming that all people have an equal claim on their time and attention, it pays to be more discriminating.

While, initially established 10 years ago to provide productivity training and technology management, *findtime.com.au* is increasingly about helping people to become more focused and effective at home and at work.

“Many are locked in reaction mode, responding to email, phone calls or people walking into the office. I help them to shift their focus to proactivity. The biggest thing is to ask: is what I’m doing right now, worth my time?”

“The assumption made is that everyone is equal in a time sense but really, giving people equal time is a problem and you need to let go of that idea. You need to prioritise and work out who and what are the most important claims on your time,” Mr Hayes said.

The trick, says Mr Hayes, is to start by prioritising and approaching tasks (and interactions) mindfully. Mr Hayes also teaches people to breathe from the diaphragm and concentrate on being present in the moment. Then reward yourself with something — a coffee or a magazine for example.

The “reward” is a particularly important concept for practice managers who face many simultaneous competing claims on their time and receive limited public recognition for their efforts, he believes.

People in such support positions — and mothers are a classic case in point — tend to feel guilty about scheduling time for themselves, Mr Hayes said. They often forget that scheduling some “down time” is critical to their longer term ability to be effective in the role.

Hood Sweeney’s 2014 survey of practice managers at the Australian Association of Practice Managers National Conference found that “A significant proportion of practice managers (22 per cent) disagreed that they had a good work-life balance while 9 per cent strongly disagreed that they were effectively juggling their working and private lives”. Time management teaches people how to ensure they devote less time to the urgent but not important activities (see Figure 1) and the not urgent, not important tasks that seem to take up so much time. This makes room for the not urgent but important planning-type activities for which there often seems little time.

Time-boxing tasks and giving them your full attention — even for five or 10 minutes — has a dramatic effect on productivity, Mr Hayes said. He advises clients to use tools such as [www.e.ggtimer.com/](http://www.e.ggtimer.com/) to enable them to focus.

Then allocate small blocks of time to refresh. The idea is to start small, he said. While many people can’t find time for a massage, they might find five minutes to have a coffee.

“People are amazed at how long five minutes is when it is uninterrupted. Often they are busy interrupting themselves when they are working and it is a delusion that they have spent that time on the task,” Mr Hayes said.

The time-boxing technique is particularly useful in tackling tasks you have been avoiding. One client even used the timer to provide 10 minutes of uninterrupted time to clean her desk. It could also be used to give bursts of concentrated attention to playing with children, for example.

“It’s generally recognised that five minutes of mindful, concentrated time spent on an activity is worth 15 minutes of interrupted time.”

Being focused on an important task for a given period several times a day can give you back time, he said.

Mr Hayes also gives people a range of technological time-saving devices, including a range of email shortcuts and filtering devices that enable them to become less reactive to timewasting intrusions.

*findtime.com.au* provides corporate in-house training for groups and a range of web-based training options such as public workshops and webinars. The membership program provides strategies to help people work more effectively, not harder: [www.findtime.com.au/the-productivity-membership-program/](http://www.findtime.com.au/the-productivity-membership-program/)

While the course uses techniques such as mindfulness and breathing, it’s a practical approach to time management rather than a philosophical or psychological one.

“It’s an outside-in approach, providing physical techniques to manage time more effectively,” Mr Hayes said.

