

Time is on my side, yes, it is – tricks for time-pressured young professionals

By David Parmenter

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My religious education teacher promised me that when I reached fifty, I would be working a four-day week. The Americans had just landed on the moon, with less computer capacity than your smartwatch. My teacher was certain that the technological advances would be used so ably and willingly by us that it was inconceivable that we would not have an extra day of recreation. Has this happened?

Certainly not. Many of us today have frustrating long commutes, are constantly sleep-deprived, and are addicted to responding to Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat,

Instagram as well as bingeing on a box set or two. To make matters worse now, once in the office, we are subjected to far too many meetings, scheduled across the day that go nowhere quickly. Everyday pressures of modern life lead us toward the belief that we cannot cope as there is not enough time in the day.

When I was in my thirties, the king of time management was Stephen Covey. He wrote the book "*First thing's first*", and developed an international training programme that hundreds of thousands of people attended, around the world, including myself.

What I have discovered, is that with the passing of Stephen Covey, a whole generation of people have not been exposed to time management principles, which has led to an epidemic of time-poor practices. I discovered this when I wrote an article for 'Accountants in Business' on time management. It created far more feedback than all my other articles put together. My webinar on the topic had over 250 registrations and these were the responses to the polls.

Results from a recent study

On average how much time is spent on emails?
50% were spending over 2 hours a day (123 popn)

Over a week how much time is spent in meetings?
Nearly 50% over 10 hours (113 popn)

To what extent do you work from home? (110 popn)
60% working at least one day a fortnight
Just over 20% two or more days a week

I would like to make it clear that I am not a paradigm of time management, far from it. However, through exposure to talented managers, meetings with consultants and reading many works by great management thinkers, I have collected a potpourri of solutions that will revolutionise readers' time management to varying degrees.

1 The Good News- You Have More Time Than You Think

On YouTube, Laura Vanderkam, a time management expert, pointed out that we have more time than we think — 168 hours each week. Let's say we have joined the growing new-age "sleep movement" and sleep 49–56 hours a week, and we work between 40–55 hours a week. That leaves 64–72 hours a week spare.

There are 168 hours in a week	168	168
If we sleep 8 hours a day / 7 hours a day	-56	-49
If work 40 hours a week/ 55 hours a week	-40	-55
Left with a lot of hours	72	64

This explains how my younger sister visits her horse before and after teaching at a school, runs a household and plays in a semi-professional orchestra, leaving her enough time to go swimming in the sea in the summer months, catching up

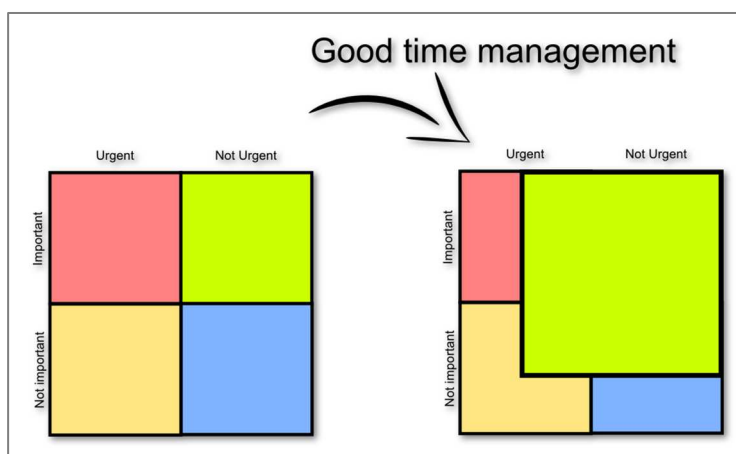
with friends while listening to Irish music and seeing foreign films with her younger son.

We have all have had those times of peak performance where we managed a workload, we considered was the impossible. I want to explain how this happened and remind you, by applying these tools, that you can do it again.

2 First Things First

The father of time management could be Stephen Covey. In his book "*First thing's first*", he observed that great leaders appear less stressed and seemed to have more time on their hands. He adopted the Eisenhower matrix which helps to sort tasks based on the principals of urgency and importance. When assigned to each task, those two factors place the task to the relevant quadrant of the matrix. Covey pointed out that far too often we are firefighting in the "urgent and not important" quadrant. We should, instead, allow such fires to burn themselves out, redirecting our time to the "non-urgent and important" quadrant. The idea being you spend more time in the important but not urgent tasks

He was adamant that the key was "not to prioritise what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities."



As you can see in the diagram, we should spend more time in the "non-urgent and important" quadrant.

Joel Spolsky, co-founder of Trello and CEO of Stack Overflow, developed the Rule of 5. The concept is that no person should ever have more than five tasks on their to-do list at any given time. Whilst your list may hold more tasks, it might be useful to highlight your five tasks.



A philosophy professor is lecturing to his students. He brings out an empty jar and small rocks. Filling the jar with the rocks, he asks if it is full. "Yes", they reply. Then he lifts a container of small pebbles and pours them in. "Is it full?". "Yes", they reply. Then he lifts a container of sand and pours it in round the rocks and pebbles. "Is it full?". "Yes definitely", they reply. Then he pours in a cup of coffee in to the container and it fills up all the spare space.

He explained, "Rocks are the important things in your life — you must give them priority each day otherwise you can't fit them in. Small pebbles — are the next important things. The sand (your emails, routine meetings, daily chores) — are the least important activities and should be made to fit around the more important tasks".

"So why the coffee?" a student asks. "To remind you that you should always make time, every day, for a coffee with either a work colleague, a client or a friend," replied the professor

The rocks are, of course, the important but not urgent tasks that Covey was pointing us to.

