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10 Time Management Rules That'll Make You Feel More in Control of Your Day

By [Frank Addante of Inc.](#)

Part of being CEO and founder of a company is learning to navigate the different tasks, people, and opportunities that are constantly competing for your time. That's the nature of the beast. The discipline lies in being strategic about your schedule to maximize your time and productivity. Below are 10 strategies that have helped me become more productive:

1. Put Everything (and I Mean Everything) on Your Calendar

When to wake up in the morning, when to eat, when you're in the car driving, and so on. Doing this will help you overcome the planning fallacy—the cognitive bias that causes us to underestimate how long it will take to complete a task. The planning fallacy is the perpetrator behind the feeling that you have too much to do and things are spinning out of control—probably because you didn't put everything on your calendar.

2. Use Your Calendar to Build Good Habits

Routine is everything. If you want to introduce new habits and changes in your life, the first step is to make sure they are on your calendar, then you have a fighting chance. For example, if you're having trouble sticking with an exercise routine, put it on your calendar at the same time every day. Then treat it like a mandate, and action will become habit.

3. Book Meetings in Increments That Are Not Standard

Instead of setting up a meeting from 1:30 to 2:00 PM, I'll schedule it from 1:30 to 1:50. This gives me 10 minutes to prepare and mentally switch gears to the next topic at hand, or even to simply walk down the hall to the meeting, or dial the next call. In a study about "switching costs," researchers found that the cost for suddenly switching from one activity to another, without giving the brain time to transition, can cost as much as 40% of someone's productive time.

4. Bundle Similar Meetings Together

Another way to lessen "switching costs" is to bundle similar meetings together. For example, try not to schedule a meeting about financial planning before you do an interview with the press about innovation or some other divergent topic. If you know you are doing a financial forecasting meeting, move your regular one-on-one with your CFO to around the same time. Don't force your brain to jump through hula hoops it doesn't need to.

5. Be on Time and End on Time

Booking meetings in increments that are not non-standard gives me buffer time so that I can achieve another major goal with my schedule: punctuality. When you are late, it is not just an interruption of other people's time, it is also an interruption of your own time, thinking processes, and overall productivity. And remember, if you don't end on time, you likely won't be on time for the next meeting.

6. Walk and Talk

I like to take walking meetings for a few reasons. First, people do not rely on their typical crutches, and it forces my team to bring up what is most top-of-mind and important. Second,

changing up the environment brings up new ideas and inspires innovative thinking. Lastly, regular walking meetings can extend your lifespan; do you really need a better reason than that?

7. Schedule Your Most Important and Challenging Tasks in the Morning

My team recently read the book [*Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*](#) by Roy Baumeister and John Tierney, which discusses how willpower is best understood as a muscle. Over the course of the day, as you make decisions, stand in line, battle traffic, it gets worn down. Because willpower is at its highest in the morning, it's important to engineer your schedule so that you are tackling the most important tasks at the beginning of your day.

8. Establish Clear Meeting Objectives

Before I accept a meeting request, I ask my team to have the purpose and objectives all mapped out and distributed to participants. This helps avoid something we all dread—the useless meeting. I also ask that the materials for the meeting be sent out at least 24 hours in advance, so that the meeting focuses on meeting the objective—not reviewing the materials.

9. Color Code Items on Your Calendar in Accordance With Urgency

Everything on my calendar is color-coded. Orange is urgent, meaning I do not move it. Blue means important, but if we push it one day, the world will not come to an end. Gray means it needs to get done, but it's not time-sensitive. This method really works because, when I look at my calendar, I can see and track my priorities.

10. Make Time for “Whitespace”

Taking time to be alone and for what I call “whitespace” is the lifeblood of the innovator. It is also vital to any leader, because it enables you to be more focused and clear about your goals, and what specifically brings you closest to them. Alone time boosts what scientists call your “meta-cognition,” one of the most powerful abilities the human brain has. Geniuses and visionaries have strong meta-cognition.

I hope these simple rules for time management help you as much as they've helped me. The key takeaway is: Make your schedule a reflection of your primary goals. Then, minute by minute, hour by hour, meeting by meeting, you will gradually achieve your greatest goals and dreams.

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