

Time Management in the Workplace

Booklet 1 – Organise work schedule



Anjark Services' Employee Guide

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Time management

Time management is, in simple terms, the ability of a person to use his or her time effectively or productively, at work.

All employees need to understand have some knowledge of the process of planning and exercising conscious control of the time they spend on specific work activities. By doing so these employees increase their effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity while also lowering their stress and increasing their feelings of security and competency.

The time management process is the application of a set of work skills that all employees, with thought and some simple effort, can master. This set of work skills may differ slightly from job to job, but there are some common, important skills found in all jobs and workplaces. These important skills include:

- Goal setting
- Scheduling
- Prioritizing
- Decision-making
- Multitasking.
- Problem solving
- Strategic thinking
- Delegation.

These three booklets will assist our employees in understanding and developing these skills within the workplace.

Organise Work Schedule

It is essential that workers, as an active and productive employee can discuss and negotiate work goals and plans with senior staff members, supervisors and managers.

All jobs require employees to work as part of a team – from casually working at a takeaway food outlet through to managerial positions, one of certainties of work is that you will be part of a team.

Because of this, people need to know how they should go about planning work to complete their assigned tasks within the time periods allotted to these tasks. The development of skills in time management, problem-solving and collaboration are essential to be a productive employee.

The first stage of managing time and tasks, is to learn how to clarify the tasks that have been allocated and ensuring a clear understanding of what is require, breaking the task into sub-tasks, deciding what order to do those sub-tasks in and how much time is needed for each one. This process leads to a work schedule – a plan of how the task will be completed considering the resources required and the time when the work must be completed.

It is always a good idea to confirm the timeframe of any task and this is often the area where the most tension arises from misunderstandings.

Support for developing work schedules may come from:

- Colleagues
- Mentors and trainers
- Other staff members
- Supervisors.

Work goals

Goals are the outcomes (products or services) that a person or team would like to achieve.

A requirement of working within a business or organisation is that all employees understand the relationship between their individual work goals and plans, and the larger goals and plans of the business or organisations.

Goals

The first phase of an employee developing a work plan is to understand the goals of the employing business or organisation. From these broad organisational goals, the business constructs the goals for its teams. It is at this stage that the team members (employees) then work to construct their own work goals. In this hierarchical

approach, as workers achieve their goals, their team is successful in turn achieving their goals contributing to the broader organisational goals of the business.

Examples: The goal of an administration officer may be to ensure the report and the accompanying letters are prepared for the manager's signature by 2:00pm today. The warehouse foreman's goal may be to ensure that the orders from the North Queensland distributors is load on trucks by 6:00 pm this evening so the goods can be dispatched.

The type of goals each employee may take on each day will depend on the nature of their job.

While many work goals are focused on achieving a set of outcomes by a certain time other goals can be regarded as 'ongoing' or occurring on a routine basis. **Example:** A receptionist may have an ongoing goal of answering the telephone within five rings.

Individual worker's goals will depend on the goals set by the business or organisation.

The 80:20 Rule

The Pareto's Principle proposed by the economist Frederic Pareto, came up with a principle of work known as the 80 – 20 Rule. The principle essentially states that 80% of the time that is spent on work will only be applied to 20% of the tasks that are undertaken on any given day. While the 80% and 20% split may not be exact every single day – the general principle is sound – people spend most of their day working on a few major tasks, while the rest of the task are delayed or rushed.

This 80:20 principle can be applied in several different circumstances – including Time Management. This is important to remember when trying to implement more effective management of work time, setting work priorities and establishing goals.

Activity One

1. Select a job you are familiar with and identify four daily work goals that a person in that job may have.
2. With that done, now construct four long term goals for the same position.

Tasks

The next phase in constructing a work plan is to identify the tasks that are needed to be completed. The types of tasks that are allocated will be directly related to the employee's roles and responsibilities as outlined in the job's position description.

Example: If a person is working as a secretary in a large business firm like Anjark Services, then their daily tasks would include preparing documents such as business letters and reports, managing general email correspondence, processing mail, answering the telephone, and carrying out simple projects assigned by their supervisor. The finance officer would have very different tasks such as analysing financial documents, preparing financial reports, following up on creditor and debtor transactions and responding to account inquiries by clients and suppliers.

The tasks assigned to each worker need to be clearly described – whether these are once only or one of a set of routine tasks. Tasks will vary from organisation to organisation depending on the job position and the size of the organisation.

It is important for each employee to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the tasks for which they are responsible.

The first input into defining the task that need to be completed by an employee is the position description (sometimes known as a job description) that underpins their employment. The position description outlines the tasks the worker is expected to do in their job and what skills he/she is expected to have or to develop.

A second way to clarify the role within the business or organisation is to question the supervisor of the position. Supervisors should know what is expected of the worker and what they are expected to do on a daily, weekly, monthly and even annually basis. Most positions within an organisation have a range of tasks that must be undertaken.

It is essential that the worker knows about the tasks that must be completed (i.e. once a day, once a week, once a month, annually). With this knowledge the worker can then plan how to approach the task and carry out it out. This also enables the worker to place the tasks into the employee's work schedule so that sufficient time can be allocated in advance. Tasks may change from day to day, throughout a week or month subject to the goals of the work teams and organisation.

Changes to work tasks can make planning a work schedule challenging, however by placing space for contingencies in the work schedule can provide some flexibility. This means allowing time in work schedules for events that may occur without specific planning.

Goals define the tasks that are necessary. Tasks are things that need to be done to achieve the business goals.

Example: To achieve a goal of writing a report by 5pm, the worker will need to get a draft of the report, type it into Microsoft Word, proofread the text, format the text, print the document and electronically store in on the business' network. Each of these sub-tasks helps in achieving the overall goal of writing the report.

An employer or supervisor may have some responsibilities that are assigned to the different tasks that are in turn delegated to other employees. These are an important consideration as priority tasks from other authorities may disrupt or slow down the work plans and the employee's ability to complete tasks on time.

Workers need to be aware of any industrial, workplace health and safety or other considerations that may impact on their work plans and tasks.

The goals and tasks that are set for any employee must reflect both the organisation's and their team's plans, accountabilities and responsibilities. It is important that all workers understand what their assigned duties, their team's plans, accountabilities and responsibilities are. When duties and tasks are allocated, supervisors should explain how the delegated work aligns with the rest of the team's responsibilities and the organisation's objectives/goals.

It is imperative that individual workers have a clear understanding of how their work aligns with the rest of their work teams and the organisation's agenda and intentions.

Activity Two

Think of one of the tasks that you will complete daily in your job with Anjark Services. What goal do you think that this is trying to achieve and how does this relate to a possible goal of the organisation?

Plan and Prioritise Workload within Allocated Time

Being Clear About Tasks

Goals and tasks are generally distributed by supervisors either during meetings of the team or as an individual meeting between the worker and the supervisor. Regardless of how this allocation of duties/tasks occurs, during this time the worker has an opportunity to ask questions so that they understand what is required of them. It is not a time to hold back on questioning as it is through questioning that the worker gets to fully understand what is required.

This type of meeting provides an opportunity to raise any issues and talk about any concerns that might arise, e.g. availability of resources, capacity of the worker to do the task, confusion over responsibilities within the team, timelines, etc.

As a member of a work team, each worker should take an active part in organising the team's goals, plans and allocation of tasks. It is important that all members of a team agree on the goals, plans and allocation of tasks so that there is a clear understanding across the team of what is to occur. Workers are encouraged to

always contribute at such team or individual meetings actively and to be clear in your questioning to ensure they understand what is expected of them.

Meeting with a manager or supervisor on a one-to-one basis is a common activity. It is important that these opportunities are also used to clarify what is required of the worker.

Activity Three

You are working in a small administration team at Anjark Services. What would you do if you thought a goal that your work team wanted to set was beyond the current capabilities and skill of the team?

Employees should ensure that they understand the tasks that they are required to do in your job within the business or organisation. It is essential that each employee understands and is knowledgeable about what each task entails. Workers need to clearly understand the tasks they are required to do and what is involved in each task.

Misunderstandings may happen, so it is imperative that each team member and individual worker check that there is a common understanding about the tasks.

Where confusion appears to exist, or where a worker does not understand the assigned task, then a quick discussion with the team's leader or the worker's supervisor must occur so that a common understanding or alternate arrangements can be established.

Planning

Establishing a work schedule involves attempting to find the most manageable means of completing the tasks as efficiently and effectively as possible, given the constraints that exist, the timelines set and the process to be followed in completing the tasks.

There will always be timelines in which the work must be completed so when planning, timelines must be a major consideration. Some of the planning techniques that may be useful in efficiently planning the work includes:

- Prioritising tasks by putting them in order, from most important to least important
- Breaking tasks down into smaller, easy-to-manage sub-tasks
- Using a 'To Do' list.

Prioritising

Most jobs involve completing a wide range of tasks each day across work weeks. Some tasks need to be completed immediately (e.g. answering the telephone or

greeting a visitor at reception). Other tasks that are more routine may be more flexibly scheduled and held off until time and convenience enable the work to be actioned. Attempting to sort out when to do something is called **prioritising**.

Supervisors may tell workers which tasks need to be completed first, or they may rely on the worker's judgement.

With a broad overview of most things that need to be done on a given day, week or month, the worker can now start to develop a way of organising the tasks in such a way that they get done according to the results required.

This daily organisation can be compiled into a daily work schedule. This schedule outlines all the things that need to be completed on that day to achieve the goals and objectives that exist. With a list of what needs to be done, a worker can then set about prioritising these so that the work is done in the most effective and efficient way possible.

'To Do' Lists

A To Do list essentially lists the tasks that are needed to be completed. It enables a worker to quickly scan and understand everything that needs to be done that day and in the priority order.

By prioritising tasks, a worker can ensure that they are doing the most important tasks first and most importantly that everything gets done, rather than forgetting some of the items that appear on the list.

To Do lists may appear to be a very simple addition to a worker's time management strategies, however it is a powerful process. These lists are powerful in that they allow the worker to take charge of their day through effective organisation, a reduction in stress and ensuring only critical items are dealt with first – the rest can wait until time is available.

Preparing a 'To Do' List

The process of preparing such a list begins with the worker noting the tasks that they need to carry out. If a task is a big one – like a project – it is best to write down each of the sub-tasks so these may be addressed sequentially and not forgotten. Breaking a large task into smaller more manageable sub-tasks makes the whole process seem more manageable.

Once everything that is needed to be achieved is listed, tasks are assigned different priorities based on their importance. If a worker finds that they are assigning a high priority to everything, they need to go back through the list and re-examine what is on the list as it is unlikely that everything has the highest priority.

With this plan to move forward, all tasks have been assigned specific priorities.

Using the 'To Do' Lists

The way to apply a To Do list will vary depending on the specific circumstances of the workplace, the tasks and even the workers involved.

Some people may like to complete an entire To Do list every day or week, while others may prefer to carry over tasks that have little importance from month to month until there is time to work on them.

Remember to always review priority levels of tasks on a 'to do' list on a regular basis to make sure the level of priority for a specific task has not changed.

Action Plans

Action planning is the process that follows identifying what needs to be done and its priority, i.e. a To Do list. This form of planning focuses on taking long-term goals and developing a series of tasks that must be carried out to achieve that goal.

Example: The long-term goal is to establish a new promotion program for the business; there are however a range of shorter-term tasks that need to be completed in a set sequence to reach the goal.

An action plan is a To Do list of tasks to achieve a single goal. It forces individual and teams to focus on specific tasks that are required to be successfully completed to achieve the goal.

The setting of priorities is of importance in the action plan. Critical analysis of the elements in the planning stage allows the workers to identify what is of crucial importance, i.e. what needs to be done, the level it needs to achieve and when it must be finished.

Remember, that the setting of task priorities means trying to work out what needs to be done now, what can wait and what does not need to be done at all. Priority setting requires the worker to have a clear understanding of the work to be carried out and to know what is essential to complete the work tasks, e.g. the resources, worker action, etc. By being on top of this at the planning stage, the 'busy but useless work' can be removed and a clear focus on the '80/20' principle will drive the work.

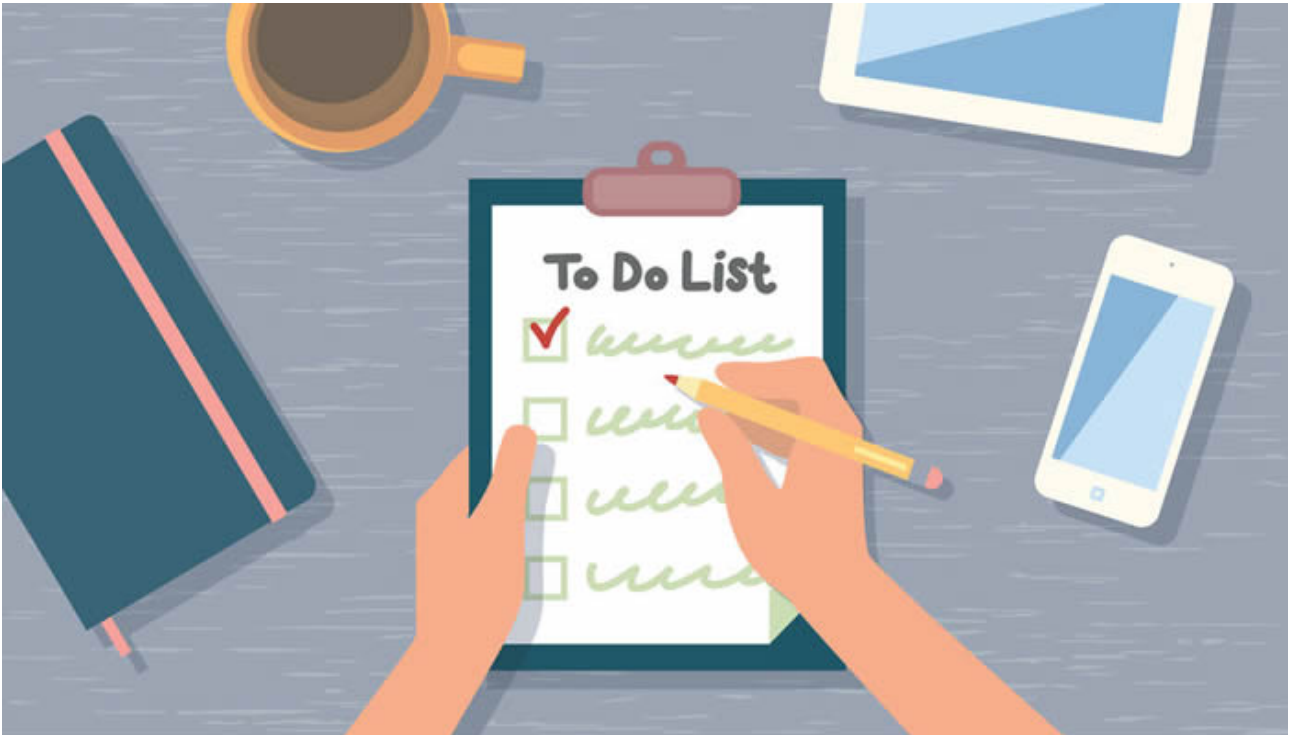
By setting appropriate priorities workers can establish the best way of assigning appropriate timeframes on the scope of work, i.e. times required for sub-tasks, etc. The important tasks with high priority are those where the effort needs to be initially and as these are completed or near completion, then lower priority work may be assigned from there.

One of the challenges faced by workers in the workplace is that it appears everyone else wants everything done as soon as possible and they consider their work more important than other people's. It is not true; the worker needs to assign priorities to

tasks in their planning and if they are undecided about a particular tasks, they should seek advice from their supervisor.

With experience, most workers can identify the correct priority of task (especially if they have asked the right questions at the start of the work or the supervisor has been comprehensive in their briefings and instructions).

When you are dealing with tasks, assign each task a numeral or letter priority code, i.e. a, B, C... or 1, 2, 3... Work then starts of the top priority task then moves on to next task in priority sequence working down the list of priorities.



The action planning process requires a worker to understand the business's or organisation's work scheduling, how that body manages its workflows and the routine processes that must be followed. There are common problems that arise in these situations:

- Not assigning sufficient time when estimating how long something will take.
- Setting completion times but not reaching these deadlines.
- Not planning for contingencies and then unable to respond effectively when problems arise.
- Exceeding budgets due to overlooking some elements and extending timelines with resultant additional wages.

To reduce the possibility of these four problems:

1. Take time to clearly define the tasks that need to be carried out, i.e. 'What is it that must be done, not what I think needs to be done!'

2. Establish a timeline for the work to be done with seeking input from team members, supervisors or persons with specialist knowledge. In complex tasks and situations, make the task a team activity. Many minds and different energy are significant advantages in problem solving.
3. Deconstruct the task into a set of sub-tasks – these are easier to achieve. Tasks can be so large that it is difficult to know exactly what is required and where to start. By breaking into sub-tasks that are more defined and easier to achieve and support the workers in their sense of progressive success while working on the task.
4. If the task is unfamiliar to the workers, they should seek specialist advice (i.e. someone who has experience in that area of work or has completed the task several times before).
5. If something goes wrong (and it will occasionally) workers should use the failure event as a learning opportunity. Taking time to consider what went wrong. How it can be avoided in the future and what is needed to repair the situation is far better, than giving up or running around the workplace shouting 'The sky is falling!'
6. Never hide problems or difficulties! It is easier to resolve issues if everyone understands what went wrong. Teams do get it wrong occasionally and good teams own up to it, identify the problem, share that knowledge and resolve the issues.
7. The best learning approach for getting action plans and scheduling right is simply experience. The more that workers establish timelines, action plans and work schedules, the more likely that their estimations are correct. Use the mistakes as an opportunity to learn.
8. Workers need to think about their own work habits. Some people work best in the morning – therefore they should set important tasks in the morning.

Setting Timelines

A timeline is simply a tool for assigning time in which a certain work task will be completed. These help workers and supervisors to keep track of what is happening in a project or major task.

Sometimes a timeline is a formal requirement of a project or action plan; other times, it may be used as simply a useful tool for the individual worker or team to use to gauge their progress in the project.

There are computer software applications that can be used to schedule work tasks and establish timelines for projects. In some instances a simple diary calendar or wall chart will be sufficient but at other times in more complex situations project management software may be of use.

At a personal level or organisation, there are many personal management applications available often integrated into email applications, e.g. Microsoft Outlook. These allow the person to integrate their communications with an electronic diary to manage appointments, issue reminders about tasks, appointments and deadlines or to prioritise some activities over others.

Summary

An employee's work goals and plans should be negotiated and agreed upon with team members and/or the supervisor so that the employee has a clear understanding of what is required and by when.

There is a range of individuals that a worker can seek assistance of when they are uncertain of their work requirements. These include:

- Colleagues
- Other staff members in similar jobs
- Mentors and trainers
- Supervisors and managers

Each individual employee in an organisation directly contributes to the organisation's and work team's plans, responsibilities and accountabilities. Their jobs are essential to the success of the organisation and so their individual work goals must be clear and aligned with the organisation.

When constructing a plan for work, employees must ensure that it is accurate and a reflection of what is required in the workplace.