Discover the dozens of little things you can easily do to use your time more productively—starting today.

Presented by Marja Lee Freeman
INTRODUCTION

Let’s state the obvious—time is universal and unstoppable—and you don’t have either enough of it or the right kind of it.

It’s a cold, hard fact that there are no more than 24 hours in a day—no matter how hard you use them. You can’t waste an hour or two, and then add time on at the end or the next day. Hours expire; they aren’t renewable. And other than oxygen and water, what commodity could be more precious to how you live your life?

So do you feel contented or frantic? Are you always pushing ahead to discover new opportunities, or are you always falling behind the pressure of lost time? Have you ever felt guilty about how you use your time?

Time is neither your friend nor your enemy—it’s only what you make it. The secret is in how you use your time—or how you choose to use it, that is.

My goal is to strip it down to a few easy things that I know—from experience—will work for you.

So let’s set some Learning Objectives.

At the conclusion of these five modules, you will have learned how to:

- Allocate your time more effectively
- Identify and overcome bad time habits
- Be more efficient in your time choices
- Embrace technology’s time opportunities
- Learn and practice a two-minute drill

Do one a day. Review as needed. Apply as quickly as you are able. Enjoy the time you will gain for your life.

PART 1: Accept the Facts of Time

As we begin looking at ways you can relieve your time challenges, think carefully about how you really spend the 24 hours of your weekday time—that’s Monday through Friday—on average, right now …

We’ll focus on the five days of the typical workweek and won’t try to include weekends—they’re much too variable. Weekdays usually have a sequence and rhythm that have to accommodate work, home and other interests, so that’s where we’ll concentrate.

We’ll begin by setting your time baseline—a platform from which you can start to build better time habits and practices. To do that, we’ll …

- Chart your 24-hour day
- Look at habits
- Think about priorities—or not
- Learn to use our tech tools better
- Find new time from old sources

So how do you spend the 24 hours you’ve been given each day?

I can’t tell you what allocation of hours in the day is right for you—you have to figure that out. It’s safe to say, though, that if you have heavy concentrations of time in one or two areas (Working and Chores, for example), you’re a candidate for serious burnout.

Look at this sample breakdown—it won’t fit everyone, but it does represent a balanced “average” 24-hour day for most adults.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Leisure</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and/or Friend Activities</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td>7 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Activity</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>1½ hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chores</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Care</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>½ hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If your time chart doesn’t look close to this one, note the areas where there are major differences. Even if you spend a lot more time in a “good” area—Physical Activity or Friends and Family, for example—those are still imbalances that take time away from something else. Do you spend so much time at the gym or rec center that you don’t get your laundry done? Are you losing sleep because you spend too much time on Facebook® or other Web sites?
Here are three keys to getting the most out of the time you have …

1. Variety
2. Balance
3. Focus

PART 2: Mind Your Minutes

Many time management plans are just too overwhelming—they call for elaborate planning, time charting, office rearrangement, family cooperation and priority setting. Now these are all good things to do, but really—isn’t it unrealistic for most of our hectic lives?

If you had the time to do all of that long-range planning and prioritizing, you probably would. But I’m guessing that you can’t even look at tomorrow with a whole lot of certainty—let alone the next week, month, year, five years or lifetime! It’s just not realistic.

We can break it down to a simpler concept—**minding your minutes**. Where can you find even a few minutes a day that you can capture, reclaim and put to better use?

Experts say it takes 21 to 30 days to either break an old habit or instill a new one. I say that you can make some changes immediately that can add valuable time to the more important parts of your day.

**Are you always late?**

Are you habitually rushed to get out the door, and are you usually late to meetings, events and appointments? Have your co-workers come to expect you to be late for meetings and appointments? Has your lateness become an office joke?

**Do you become easily distracted?**

Are you the curious type? Are you outgoing and social? There’s nothing wrong with these qualities, but they can lead you into some serious time traps. How many things distract you in the course of trying to get from one place to another?

Avoiding distractions isn’t easy. The traps are many, varied and seductive, and how you recognize and avoid these traps depends upon your individual learning style …

- If you’re a visual learner, you need to keep your eyes focused on your task or destination and not look around at all of the interesting sights along the way
- Or, if you’re an auditory learner, you know you can be trapped by the most interesting sounds—music, conversation, emergency sirens—and each is a powerful magnet that is calling your name
- Now, you kinesthetic learners will fall into a trap every time you walk by a jammed copier, a file cabinet that needs to be moved or anything that could be improved by you putting your hands on it. You are an activist and love to be doing things—so much so that you’ll chase just about any distraction to create the impression that you’re helping. In fact, though, you’re just avoiding what you’re supposed to be doing.

**Do you invite interruptions?**

Who interrupts you? Wait, wait, wait—don’t tell me about your boss barging in; or your co-worker wandering in to dump a load of gripes and personal problems on you; or even your spouse calling with the grocery list or the kids’ sports schedules.

They don’t interrupt you—you let yourself be interrupted. Sure, they may be an active ingredient, but they can succeed only when you let them.

The trick to success here is in learning to shorten the interruption more than trying to prevent it. Don’t fight the inevitable; recognize that interruptions will occur, and that you probably can’t lock your door, work alone in an underground cave or post toxic waste signs around your cubicle. There are, however, three simple techniques you can use to help make sure you’re minding your minutes effectively by minimizing those interruptions:

- First is to **set your limit**
- Second is to **reduce their comfort**
- Third is to **leave the scene**

Bottom line, you won’t ever be able to eliminate interruptions; the best you can hope for is to minimize them. You may not need each of these techniques—but in some cases you may need all of them! Try them out and become creative in the ways you express them and use them. After a few times, you’ll become comfortable at protecting your time, and the minutes you save will reward you in higher productivity and accomplishment.
PART 3: Deal With It and Be Done With It

Are you letting yourself be victimized by the “tyranny of the urgent”? Here’s a case where you may not be able to escape it, so you’d better learn how to embrace it to your own best advantage.

Stephen Covey set a high standard for life balance and priority management in his landmark book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, and it was elaborated further in the later time management book based on Habit #3, *First Things First*.

Covey and his collaborators tell us to use their famous Time Management Matrix to: *Plan, prioritize and execute your week’s tasks based on importance rather than urgency*.

To make sure we’re all familiar with these concepts, let’s briefly review the matrix.

- **QUADRANT 1**—Important/Urgent. Emergencies, crises and project deadlines all fit the category of being both important and urgent. They usually occur as created by external forces beyond our control, and they have to be dealt with immediately.

- **QUADRANT 2**—Important/Not Urgent. This is the sweet spot—where you proactively plan, prepare and perform most productively. This is the highest plane for this model of time management because it’s where you exercise control and both decide what is important and then create the time to act on it without being sidetracked by urgencies.

- **QUADRANT 3**—Not Important/Urgent. Here we run into those interruptions and pesky phone calls that force themselves on us when we least expect or want them. Herein lies a problem—and an opportunity I’ll describe in a moment.

- **QUADRANT 4**—Not Important/Not Urgent. Busywork, procrastination, avoidance, escapism—call it what you want; it’s just time that gets allocated to no specific purpose. And that’s not all bad.

Nobody has ever suggested that these quadrants are exclusive, or should be. They are each part of a normal life cycle, and we naturally spend time in each. Many time management experts over the ensuing years have taken pieces of these concepts and tailored them to their own philosophies. Many are widely used. Many are too complex.

And there’s one, in particular, that I believe no longer applies. It’s the principle that comes out of Quadrant 2 planning—*set aside specific times each day to read e-mail, respond to e-mail, listen to voice mail messages, return phone calls and open and deal with your physical mail*. Really? Today?

That concept was developed in the late 1980s. People used paper planners and pocket calendars. E-mail was just emerging. Cell phones were still a novelty. Life, and its pace, is different now. We’ll talk about how to better use our extraordinary technology in Part 4. For now, though, it’s the concept that’s important. My recommendation in the face of a fast-paced communication environment is to *deal with it* immediately so that you can be *done with it* and move on more productively. Let’s break it down by each of the most invasive categories …

**E-mail**—How many e-mails do you get a day? Dozens? Hundreds? More? Think of what your inbox would look like if you waited until a specific time each day to open, read and respond to the flood of e-mails you get.

**Text and instant messages**—Here they come! We have been conditioned to type with our thumbs. We have become accustomed to the unique and popular shorthand of the virtual messaging culture. So the question really is whether to try to ignore this quickly growing communication tool—and lose a competitive edge; or to resist using it—and risk missing important messages; or to embrace it and learn to use it to your advantage.

**Phone calls**—If you get a lot of phone calls during the day, you have the option to simply let messages go to voice mail and then listen to them at a more convenient time. But—when will you find that convenient time?

Do you know that you fit all of your necessary conversations into the last hour or half hour of the day? I doubt it. If you force yourself into a narrow window to communicate with a list of people, who’s forcing them into that same window? So you’ll wind up leaving messages that respond to the messages you received, which means you’ll get return messages—and not much will be accomplished other than playing phone tag. Sorry to say it, but you’re not impressing anyone with your clever voice mail message, and, in fact, you may be annoying someone—a customer, perhaps—with your unavailability and your cavalier excuses.

The few seconds or minutes it took right then to “deal with it” are a one-time investment, and you can go forward from there without dragging that baggage along with you because you’re “done with it.”
PART 4:
Gain Time With Technology

Technology has erased traditional barriers of time and distance. Consider just two daily activity areas where, by using the technology that’s readily available, you can use your time to its greatest effectiveness:

Travel—Whether it’s just commuting, or driving between client calls, or taking extended trips to meetings and conventions, it’s time away from your desk or work area. Before cell phones and portable computers, it was restricted time—not wasted, just isolated.

Meetings—Be in the habit of taking your loaded laptop or tablet with you. Check to make sure you have Wi-Fi access in the meeting space. If not, pre-load your device with everything you could possibly need in the meeting. When you do, you’ll never be caught unprepared or unable to come up with key facts, reports, information or ideas. Yes, that level of preparation will take some time before the meeting or event, but think of the time it will save you during and afterward.

There are three time-saving tools that deserve special note …

1. First, texting because it’s so fast—it’s an instant personal touch

Here again, it can be both a blessing and a curse. It’s irresistible because it’s so quick and so much fun to be able to have a nearly instantaneous personal conversation with someone without having to be in their presence.

Is it a time-saver or time-waster? That depends upon the individual, of course, but, when used appropriately, instant messaging is a significant tool in helping you deal with things quickly and then be done with them. It can create significant amounts of time for you during your day.

2. Then there’s voice and video messaging: Skype™, FaceTime® and other video/voice apps have given us the ability to both see and hear each other regardless of time and distance. Being out of town is no longer an acceptable excuse for missing a meeting. Using a Webcam, you can still give your reports, ask your questions and discuss issues face to face.

3. And then there’s e-mail: It’s slower, but has so much more capacity for long-form communication

Now let’s think about your e-mail. With your smartphone and/or tablet, it’s handheld and goes everywhere you go. It’s so common it’s nearly passé. In our techno-world, e-mail has become the new snail mail.

But e-mail is still pervasive, and its sheer volume poses problems. I know a few people—but not many yet—who almost instantly delete any e-mail they respond to. That keeps their inbox clean and fresh, and it means they don’t have to wade through a long list to review what they want and need every time they open Outlook® or whatever mail program they’re using. Now I can hear the protests already—”But I might need that later. Shouldn’t I have an e-mail filing system?” That usually comes from someone who’s not sure about something they sent and wants to protect the message trail to prove they’re right.

Well, consider this:

- A copy of your e-mail gets stored in your Sent items, and you can search those files for key words and phrases if you really need them
- Your mail program will have a Deleted items folder, and that typically holds everything you’ve deleted until it’s either emptied or archived
- The original sender will have a copy, and chances are that the entire stream of conversation will be contained in their reply
- And, if you’re operating off of a company server, all of your e-mail files will be saved and backed up—forever!

So what’s the problem? You have several built-in filing systems. Why create another? And why would you want to look at a long list of saved e-mails in your inbox when it would just be a reminder of unfinished tasks? Save yourself some time, stress and screen space and just delete those e-mails that you’ve dealt with and are done with.

And come on—use the “Opt-out” and “Unsubscribe” opportunities that all e-mail and Web marketers are obligated to provide.

You know you get tons of newsletters, promotion notices, offers and subscriptions all posing as legitimate communication. Just because they send it doesn’t mean you have to sort it, read it and save it.
Get off those subscription and solicitation lists. They take your valuable time—you’ll probably gain more than two minutes an hour just because you won’t have to look at them to decide you don’t want them.

If you’re not convinced that you can use technology as a time manager, here’s a key advantage—you can turn it off.

Nobody can—or should—stay wired and tuned in all of the time. Your devices need their batteries recharged—and so do you. We each need some quiet, some respite, some relaxing time. Take advantage of the fact that every communication, access and entertainment device out there can be turned off. You’ll appreciate it even more when you turn it back on.

**PART 5:**
**Master the Two-minute Drill**

Whether or not you’re a football fan, I’m sure you’ve heard of the “two-minute drill.” That’s the time at the end of the game when the team’s back is against the wall, they’re behind in the score, they don’t have any timeouts, and there’s only two minutes left in the game. They have to either catch up and score quickly, or they have to defend their lead against a furious attempt to score by their opponents.

This is such a critical time for sports teams that they spend countless hours practicing how to execute their game plan during those two little minutes. They know the clock will run out on them if they don’t.

What about you? What does your two-minute game plan look like? Does two minutes sound like an insignificant amount of time—not enough to worry about in your hectic schedule of 10- to 11-hour days? Are you always scrambling to finish reports by the deadlines? Do you put off doing essential things until you have no choice? Are projects either late or unfinished because you don’t have a game plan for finishing?

Two minutes is a lot of time—especially when you consider that two minutes out of each hour adds up to 48 minutes a day—over three-quarters of an hour that you can use to your own advantage.

So let’s put it all together and look at some of the ways you can practice the two-minute drill in your day. We’ll go back to the time chart I had you fill out in Part 1 of this program, and we’re going to add some tips on how to either **SAVE** more time or **SPEND** more time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working</th>
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<td>Personal Leisure</td>
<td>SPEND More Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and/or Friend Activities</td>
<td>SPEND More Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td>SPEND More Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Activity</td>
<td>SPEND More Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eating</th>
<th>SAVE or SPEND More Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chores</td>
<td>SAVE More Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Care</td>
<td>SAVE More Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>SAVE More Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It’s a simple idea, really—**SAVE** some time in those areas that aren’t as interesting, productive or fun in order to **SPEND** more time in those areas where you get the greatest enjoyment and meaning in your life.

So there you have it—five tactics that can help you understand where you spend your time and why. Remember, identifying and overcoming bad time habits and embracing opportunities will help you gain more control over your daily time challenges.

Thanks for participating in *Time Management Tune-up.*

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