



# 10 Time Management Tips

**A how-to guide on efficiently managing your time through effective delegating, calendar management and using productivity tools**

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# 10 Time Management Tips:

## *A how-to guide on efficiently managing your time through effective delegating, calendar management and using productivity tools*

In this era of downsizing and the quest for efficiency, businesses of all sizes are asking employees to take on extra tasks to boost productivity. Has your job turned into one of those “stretch jobs”? If so, you may be looking for a better way to get more done in less time, reduce stress and stop burning the midnight oil.

While you can't create more hours in your day, you can learn how to use them wisely. That's where *10 Time Management Tips* can help. It's your guide to working smarter, not longer every day.

In *10 Time Management Tips* you'll read about calendar management, keyboard shortcuts, running productive meetings, setting up agenda templates and using tech tools for project management. And you can challenge yourself by taking our quizzes on two key time management issues: “Are you a micromanager?” and “Are you ready and willing to delegate?” Let *10 Time Management Tips* show you how to prioritize your tasks and stop working in a crisis mode all the time.

## 1. Which time management system works best?

When your job is to keep things from falling through the cracks, a good time management system can serve as a tightly woven net. But which time management method works best? The one that works for *you*.

Sue Shellenbarger, a columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*, recently took the most widely used systems for a test drive, trying each one for a week. Here's what she learned:

**1. Getting Things Done (davidco.com):** “GTD” aims to corral all the projects and tasks floating around in your head into an organizing system that you update weekly. The system (in theory) enables you to quickly identify the next step to keep all your projects moving forward.

*How to start:* Do a weekly “mind sweep” by writing down everything you should be doing, want to do or dream of doing.

Next, create new files, action lists, calendar items or reminders based on next steps. Your daily calendar is reserved for the most urgent items. Everything else is displayed on a “workflow map.”

*Benefits:* It clumps together your tasks by context, making it easy to, say, tackle phone calls all at once. Shellenbarger says that GTD also forced her to better manage paper flow.

*Downside:* The system requires time to master.

**2. The Pomodoro Technique ([pomodorotechnique.com](http://pomodorotechnique.com)):** You tackle tasks in 25-minute increments, with the help of a kitchen timer.

*How to start:* Begin each day with a log of things to do, then tackle each one in 25-minute intervals called “Pomodoros.” When a Pomodoro is over, mark an X on the log next to the item, and then take a three- to five-minute break. If you feel tempted to break a Pomodoro, put an apostrophe over the X on the log.

*Benefits:* Shellenbarger became more aware of how often she interrupted herself, and the regular breaks improved her mental agility.

*Downside:* The system demands interruption-free time blocks, which may prove difficult for many.

**3. FranklinCovey’s Focus ([franklincovey.com](http://franklincovey.com)):** Focus aims to break users’ “urgency addiction,” the habit of going from one unimportant-but-pressing task to the next.

*How to start:* Spend a half-hour each week thinking through your values, identifying goals and blocking out time to pursue them.

Enter daily tasks on your calendar, prioritizing them based on urgent and important, important but not urgent, urgent but not important, or not urgent or important.

*Benefits:* Shellenbarger says she felt calmer by week’s end and more comfortable with letting small stuff slide.

*Downside:* Like GTD, Focus requires an up-front investment of mental effort.

**Lesson:** Try different approaches to wrangling your time, and adopt the practices and rituals you can stick with. And realize that, ultimately, the key to getting more important stuff done is to do less of everything else.

## 2. Reclaim your calendar ... and your life

Steve Robbins, famous for advice on maximizing your creativity and whipping your email into submission, now is integrating time management and innovation into a coherent system for getting things done.

From his new guide to working less and accomplishing more:

**Live on purpose.** Figure out what's really important to you, and then set your priorities through life maps with your goals plotted out. Expose your blind spot so you won't have any nasty surprises sneak up on you.

**Make technology your slave, not the other way around.** Gadgets should give you freedom. "When technology diverts you while pretending to help you, that's the worst," Robbins says. Turn off devices so they can't hijack your agenda, and set a "designated interruption time."

**Don't confuse "neat" with "organized."** Recent research shows you can spend too much time sorting and filing—even if someone is doing it for you.

Rather, "everything in its place" may well mean one of several dozen piles around your office, as long as you know which pile to attack when you need something. Don't waste time keeping the place pristine.

**Prioritize.** The 80/20 rule does not apply only to your customers; it also should govern your workload. Stop trying to do things perfectly. Focus instead on better preparation and speedier decision-making for the fifth of your work that counts most.

If you do add top priorities, take away low priorities. Make to-do lists that let you delegate, and create resource books for reference as you add new skills.

## 3 ways to accomplish more in your life

Robbins has developed a system that can help you maintain concentration and do more in less time. Divide your life into "focus," "admin" and "spirit" days.

**1. Focus days** require a strong emphasis on your core work, including strategy sessions, reviews of research and employee evaluations.

Stay focused on focus days. Even though you'll have more concentrated time for critical projects, you still have to pay attention. Dedicate separate time for each topic. Ignore everything else—even if that means turning off the BlackBerry for two hours.

**2. Admin days** usually have lots of different content but similar, routine kinds of tasks, such as signing papers, returning phone calls and running errands.

Admin days require lots of picking things up and putting them down. They also involve organizing and setting your calendar. They rarely require deep thought. Group tasks so that paperwork is together, as are errands and appointments. Clue in your support staff about admin days so they will be ready.

**3. Spirit days** nurture the soul. Set them aside for friends and family, reading and reflection. They used to call these days “the weekend.”

### *Schedule slack time*

Besides spirit days, you also need plain old slack time. Generally, it will be soaked up with small crises and spillover on projects. But schedule it strictly for slack. Don’t think of specific things to slot in, like your kids’ games or your routine fitness program. Those need to be scheduled separately.

If you feel it’s unrealistic to set aside a whole day for one type of task, start with half-days. But it’s better to begin with whole admin days, and as you find you’re getting done sooner, add half-days of focus time—professional networking leaps to mind.

— Adapted from *Get-It-Done Guy’s 9 Steps to Work Less and Do More*, Stever Robbins, St. Martin’s Griffin

## 3. Using Outlook as project planner

*by Melissa P. Esquibel, Microsoft® Certified Trainer*

Most people don’t have specific software just for managing their projects. So they use what they can access on their desktops. One great tool for this purpose is Microsoft Outlook.

### **1. Brainstorm tasks**

Starting in any one of seven task views, such as Simple, Detailed or by Category, you will see a *Click here to add a new Task* field at the top. You do not have to know the duration or even the order of each task: Just start typing and brainstorm your task list. Let’s use an event as an example, with a simplified set of tasks.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Quiz: Are you a micromanager?

*As a manager, you must remain involved in your employees' activities. But where does involvement stop and micromanaging begin? Sticking your nose too deeply into an employee's work process can be counterproductive and waste time. Learn to control the process, not the people.*

*Let's say you overheard an employee refer to you as a micromanager. To find out if it's true, answer the following questions using this scale:*

**4 = Very often    3 = Often    2 = Sometimes    1 = Seldom    0 = Never**

### HOW OFTEN DO YOU ...

- \_\_\_ 1. Give specific directions about how you want a task completed?
- \_\_\_ 2. Wonder what employees are doing and whether their time could be spent better?
- \_\_\_ 3. Reject an employee's suggestion because it isn't how you would perform the task?
- \_\_\_ 4. Get annoyed when a normally capable employee makes a simple error?
- \_\_\_ 5. Worry about whether a key task will be done right or on time?
- \_\_\_ 6. Sneak a peek when your employee isn't around to check a project's progress?
- \_\_\_ 7. Delegate work in increments rather than explain the entire project at once?
- \_\_\_ 8. Resent or refuse to answer questions about "why" a task needs to be done?
- \_\_\_ 9. Find employees coming to you with questions they should know the answers to?
- \_\_\_ 10. Talk most of the time during strategy meetings or brainstorming sessions?

### SCORING

**30 to 40: Your employee is right: You're a micromanager.** You may be focusing too much on how employees perform the work, not the outcome. Instead of always explaining how something should be done, explain what you're trying to achieve. After all, your employee may know a faster, better way.

**20 to 29: Shift your focus to results.** You're not a "dyed-in-the-wool" micromanager, but you need to loosen the reins a bit. Give employees more space to make decisions.

**10 to 19: It's not your fault.** If you've answered the questions honestly, you're not micromanaging your employees, but you still have a problem. They view your critiques negatively, so you need to work on communicating your expectations and feedback more effectively.

**0 to 9: He must have been talking about someone else.** The complaint is probably an isolated remark.

(Continued from page 5)

## 2. Set start/end dates

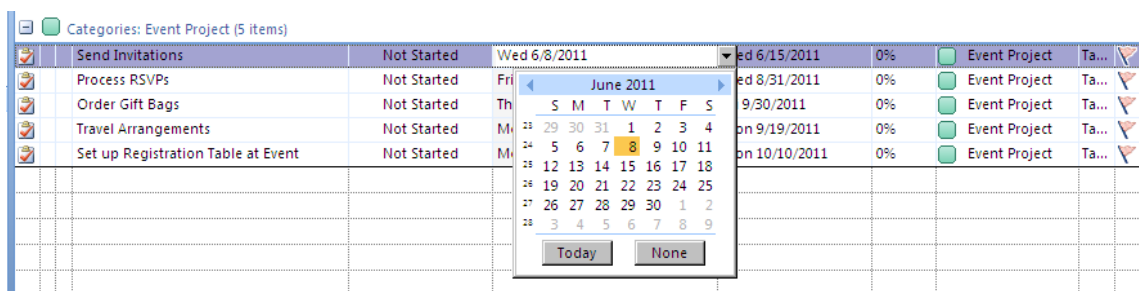
You have all your tasks, so start with the last task and work backward to determine when the preceding tasks would have to be completed before working on the current one. It might help to do the math in, say, Excel. For example, if the event will take place on 10/10/11, you can type in a simple formula to determine when travel reservations should be completed, say, 21 days. So, the travel arrangements would have to be complete on 9/19/11.

You might want to give yourself a week to get this done. To arrive at the start date for the task, begin with the end date of 9/19/11 and subtract seven to get 9/12/11. Do this until you have determined the start and end dates of all tasks. Use the date picker to do this right in the view.

## 3. Categorize tasks

Check the Task Timeline view to see if the order of things makes sense. Once you are satisfied with the timeline, assign a category. This will keep all the tasks together associated with a single project. That way, in the Category view of tasks, you can view all of your tasks as a chronological task list.

You also can filter other views by Category, to see only the tasks associated with this project. However, don't overlook the value of looking at multiple categories in the timeline view to spot potential conflicts.



## 4. Add task details

The next step is to take a look inside each task item. You can insert more Outlook items, file attachments, diagrams and other illustrations, as well as Quick Parts (2007-2010), hyperlinks and contact cards. You also can set your reminders to stay on top of things. You might find it useful to record the preceding and succeeding task dependencies, so you can remember to change the dates should delays occur.



Repeat success by dragging all the completed tasks for a project into a folder. Use them again with different dates.

## 4. Managing interruptions: a key time-saver

Interruptions are a fact of every manager's daily life. They come with the turf. The ability to manage them well is a hallmark of your time-management competence.

Although you want to budget time for the inevitable interruption, you want to hold that to a minimum. To discourage unnecessary disruptions, follow these tips:

- **Don't allow your open-door policy to be abused.** By and large, the benefits of having an open-door policy outweigh the disadvantages. Easy access to the boss tends to pay off in higher productivity and morale. Workers who feel free to talk and gripe to the boss are more relaxed and more willing to work hard.

But an open-door policy can be easily abused and lead to serious loss of time and concentration. If you're not sure how much time your open-door policy consumes, keep a log of how many drop-in visitors interrupt you every day for a week. Write down who came in and how long they stayed. Chances are you'll find that the famous 80/20 rule holds here, too: 20% of your visitors take up 80% of your time.

- **Let people know when you really can't be interrupted.** Open-door policy or not, there are times when people should not feel free to drop in and interrupt you. It's up to you to tell them just when those times are. You can simply say, "I'm busy now, but please tell me what the problem is and we can set up a time to discuss it this afternoon."

- **Discourage upward delegation.** It's unfair for staffers to pass work up to you if they can just as easily handle it themselves. The same goes for low-level decisions they could make on their own.

- **Encourage workers to make decisions for themselves.** How do you do that? By praising initiative when you see it. When staffers see that they are free to act autonomously, they will feel less need to come to you.

- **Put a curb on venting time.** Tell your staff you've set aside one hour a week (or every two weeks) to listen to them vent, but that you're ready to handle any serious problem on an immediate basis. Define "serious," and make sure employees understand your definition.

- **Arrange your office strategically.** Stand outside your door and look in. If Jane was planning to interrupt you, would she find a comfy, easily accessible chair ready and waiting? If so, move the chair to a less inviting space. Or, would Jane be able to catch your attention while you're seated at your desk? If so, reposition your desk so that you're not facing the door.

Also, guard against a convivial atmosphere that invites drop-ins. Some managers, for example, keep a coffee machine in their office—that may turn the room into a corporate social center.

■ **Stand up when an unannounced visitor enters.** Your body language will signal that you're busy and don't have much time. Don't invite the person to sit down. You can be courteous yet firm in asking visitors to state their business right away.

■ **Learn to dismiss irrelevant interruptions.** If visitors can't get their problems across in two or three sentences, they probably aren't that urgent and will hold till later. Tell your staff that brevity is your policy.

■ **Use silence as a weapon.** Once business has been transacted, clam up. Chitchat wastes time two ways—at the beginning of a visit and at the end. Cut it off at the beginning, again by asking, "What's on your mind?" Be friendly but not effusive. Use silence to close down small talk at the end.

■ **Show visitors out.** Some people won't take a hint. If your visitor shows no sign of leaving, a physical gesture on your part may be the best tactic. Start walking your visitor toward the door.

### *Don't let self-interruptions derail you*

How many hours do you think workers spend on average at the office every week? Would you believe 60 hours? And some employees actually brag about working 100-hour weeks.

These people believe that the longer they work, the more impressive they look. But the true superheroes are those who work reasonable hours and manage their workloads like pros; get away from the office to recharge, then come back energized and creative; and don't make careless mistakes because they're tired and overworked.

The first step to managing your workload is handling self-interruptions. Here's how:

- **Schedule time to work on top-priority projects—uninterrupted.** Tell co-workers about your "do not disturb" time and when you'll be available again. Ask them not to request "just a minute" of your time during those hours.

- **Address small irritants head on instead of letting them get under your skin.** For example, turn off the "ping!" that alerts you to new email. Ask a nearby co-worker to stop putting his calls on speakerphone.

- **Keep "conversation enders" at the ready.** It's important to know how to bring a rambling conversation to an end. Not everyone will feel a sense of urgency about work

when you do. *Example:* “I’d love to hear more, but this project is due in 20 minutes. Can we talk tomorrow?”

- **Don’t interrupt yourself.** Productivity suffers when you think, “Oh, before I forget, I need to tell Bob ...,” and dash off to find him. Or, “I’d better do X before I forget.”

*Tip:* Write down a task or thought that distracts you, so you can revisit it later. Once you’ve written it down, put it out of your head. Tell yourself: “This isn’t my priority right now. Thinking about it isn’t productive.”

- **Get a head start.** Come into work 45 minutes earlier than normal, three times a week. With a quiet office and no one to interrupt you, you’ll plow through your work.

*Bonus tip:* Ask yourself, “Am I able to say ‘no’ to the unimportant tasks and ‘yes’ to the important ones?” Post this sign in your office: “What’s the most important thing to do right now?” First, do what’s both urgent and important. Then spend as much time as possible doing important tasks that aren’t so urgent.

## 5. Five ways to get your calendar under control

by Scott Eblin, [Next Level](#) leadership blog

It seems like I talk with clients about the challenge of taming their calendars at least two or three times a week. In the age of interconnected scheduling systems like Outlook and the continuous push to get more done with less in any given day, more and more leaders feel like Sisyphus rolling that big rock up the never-ending hill.

What the heck can you do to get your calendar back under control and have time to think, reflect, relax, connect, and have some fun and a life outside of work? I’ve been brainstorming that question with my clients lately.

Here are five strategies we’ve come up with that make a difference:

1. **Keep your most important objectives in mind:** If you’re really clear and honest with yourself, you likely have three or four big objectives that represent about 80% of what success looks like for you. Keep that list in front of you and make sure you’re not spending a lot of time on things that don’t further those objectives.

2. **Use the help that's available:** If you have a good assistant, help them help you. Have regular conversations with your assistant about your goals so they can help prioritize requests for your time. Ask them to schedule and protect regular blocks of administrative time for you to think and catch up. Give your assistant permission to say "No" on your behalf.
3. **Negotiate on requests for your time:** For example, if your boss asks you to attend a two-day conference to wave the company flag, look for the highest-impact half-day on the agenda and negotiate to just attend that portion. Get clear with the requestor on specific desired takeaways from your participation. If there are no specific benefits, maybe you don't have to be there at all.
4. **Beware of standing meetings:** Don't fill up your calendar with standing meetings that you attend because you're not doing anything else. Get in the habit of asking yourself, "Is this the highest and best use of my time?" If you've already attended three status meetings on a project in one week, how much marginal value is there in attending a fourth?
5. **Bundle meetings by location:** The time it takes to travel to and from meetings is an often overlooked and insidious time suck. Don't waste time traveling back and forth to the same place multiple times a week. Reduce your cumulative travel time by bundling your meetings together by location.

## 6. Delegating: a 'must' on your to-do list

Delegating is management gospel. Unfortunately, some managers pay lip service to delegating: They do the job themselves because they think they can do it so much better and don't have the time to explain how to do it to a subordinate.

This rationalization puts delegating skills right at the heart of any time management program: If you can't or won't delegate, you are managing your time badly. It's as simple as that—and as difficult.

Letting go is hard. Some managers who moved up through the ranks regard their previous jobs as they would their children. Yet you will never gain control of your day unless you invest time in training somebody else to do a job, even if it's done only 70% as well as you can do it.

Managers who delegate can double, even triple, their productivity by utilizing other people's talents—a key definition of the managerial function.

Poor delegators, by contrast, are constantly on the run, always late and behind schedule, with barely time to grab lunch.

## Quiz: Are you ready and willing to delegate?

*Check your readiness to delegate tasks by answering the following questions:*

	Yes	No
• Do you demand perfection from yourself and others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• If you do, are you proud of it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you always keep up with your daily "to do" list of priorities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Are you always the last one to leave the office, or at least among the last?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Are you a detail person? Someone who demands to know more than one needs to know?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Are you under constant deadline pressure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you hesitate to accept ideas that others present?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you keep a hand in the last job you had before you were promoted to management?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you give overly detailed instructions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you hold more than one staff meeting a week?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Are you afraid that one of your subordinates will show you up in front of the boss?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Should top managers work harder than middle managers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Is your in-basket constantly overflowing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you take work home every night?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you have more followers than initiators on your staff?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*More than five "yes" replies indicate that you should take a second look at how well and how effectively you delegate.*

## 7. 8 steps to a more productive meeting

Attorney Eileen Johnson recalls sitting in a nonprofit's board meeting where the vice chair was on his BlackBerry, the treasurer was reading *The Wall Street Journal* and another board member was knitting.

These are over-the-top examples of what goes on during unproductive meetings. Between vague agendas and never-ending PowerPoints, meetings have become a waste of time for many in the business world.

Here's how some "experts" structure their huddles to make them productive and run smoothly:

- 1. Never schedule a meeting beyond 90 minutes.** Bob Pozen, a senior lecturer at Harvard Business School, tells the *Harvard Business Review (HBR)* that at 90 minutes, "people turn off" and "the diminishing returns are staggering."
- 2. Deliver meeting material the day before by email,** Pozen says. That way, you won't waste precious minutes reviewing material as a group.
- 3. Require a one-page executive summary for all materials,** Pozen says. The expectation is that all attendees must read the summary before the meeting.
- 4. Let meeting participants agree on deliverables** and set their own timetables, at the end of the meeting. "Then they will have an ownership interest in the follow-up, rather than just going along with my directions," he tells *HBR*.
- 5. Post the mission statement in the room** if you're holding a board meeting, advises Johnson. Pick a mission-related topic to talk about first. Or hold the meeting in a location that's central to the board's mission.
- 6. Gather opinions with a round-robin approach,** starting with the junior members, Johnson tells Association Bisnow. No "dittos" allowed.
- 7. Appoint someone to play devil's advocate,** says Johnson, to make sure problems are brought up and hard questions asked.
- 8. Do 80% of the work before the meeting.** At Intel Corp., meeting holders must circulate a draft agenda to gather suggestions and revisions in advance. The final one-pager includes the meeting's purpose and goals, subtopics with time frames for each, a list of attendees and what each one should bring to the table.

“We know from experience that 80% of the hard work gets done before the meeting even begins,” Michael Fors, Intel’s corporate employee-development manager, tells *Harvard Business Communication*.

“We’re all responsible for using our time effectively, and we’re aware of the opportunity costs,” Fors says.

## 8. Frazzled? Try managing *projects*, not *time*

Admit it: You’re too busy for all that time management jazz. You prioritize in your head—who has time to make silly lists? And you’ve tried to block out appointments, but emergencies always throw everything awry.

The solution? Try managing *projects* instead of *time*. That way, you won’t need to check your watch every few hours or grow frazzled trying to jam too much into your day.

Here’s how to gain efficiency through project management:

✓ **Match task with the person.** Break a project into its component parts—the specific jobs that you can delegate. Then assign these tasks to the appropriate people with deadlines (day *and* time) for them to complete each stage. Explain what you want done in writing, and include a numbered list of to-do steps to increase clarity. Distribute a master list of everyone’s role to the whole unit so workers can share information easily.

✓ **Give snappy introductions.** When you’re asked to introduce a guest speaker to a group, distribute the person’s full written bio in advance. That way, you can limit your intro to two or three sentences and direct the audience to the handout for more on the speaker’s background.

✓ **Cluster related jobs.** Maximize every trip from your office by arranging groups of meetings, inspections and errands near your destination.

Also, combine similar activities. If you’re visiting field offices to generate buy-in for your pet project, line up back-to-back meetings where you can sell the troops without distractions. If you schedule unrelated tasks smack in the midst of your “road show,” you force yourself to shift gears abruptly.

✓ **Make “just-in-time” decisions.** Smart managers choose the proper moment to gather and review the data they need to draw the right conclusion. If you rush to make a decision—only to revisit the issue repeatedly in the weeks ahead—you waste time.

As a rule, only make decisions once. If circumstances change or new information surfaces, then reassess. But otherwise, don't dally or rely on committees to hash out something that you can resolve faster on your own.

## 9. Create a meeting-agenda template fast

The monthly department meeting is next week, and you've already heard from four people who want to appear on the agenda. You expect a few more to chime in. It's your job to create an agenda that affords adequate time for each item, as well as to make sure the meeting runs smoothly and ends on time.

Your best approach? Build an adjustable meeting-agenda template in Excel, recommends Annette Marquis, co-owner of TRIAD Consulting.

This simple worksheet automatically manages start and end times, she says. When you add a speaker at the last minute, time allotments for other items adjust automatically.

Here's how to build one:

- Create your title and headings (location, date, etc.) for the top of your template.
- Enter column headings, beginning with "Start," "End" and "Time" (or "Length"). You might also wish to add columns titled "Item" and "Presenter." Your worksheet should now look like the example below.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	<b>Meeting Agenda</b>				
2		<b>Title:</b>			
3		<b>Location:</b>			
4		<b>Date:</b>			
5					
6					
7	<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Contact</b>
8					
9					
10					

- Select the Start, End and Time cells in the worksheet's first row (cells A8, B8 and C8 in the example above).
- Click Cells on the Format menu.
- Click Time in the Category list on the Number tab.



- Click 1:30 p.m. in the Time list, and click OK, so the cells will display time entries.
- Click the first cell in the End column and enter this formula:  
=IF(ISBLANK(C8),"",A8+C8). This formula will calculate end times for each agenda item, based on how long each item will take.
- Click the cell in the second row of the Start column, and enter this formula:  
=IF(ISBLANK(B8),"",B8)
- Copy (or fill) the formula in cell B8 to cell B9.

Before adding formulas to subsequent rows, test the worksheet. Enter a start time in the first cell under “Start.” Then, enter a time value under “Time.”

*Example:* If the meeting start time is 2 p.m., and the first agenda item will take 20 minutes, enter 2:00 p.m. and 0:20. You should see 2:20 p.m. appear in the “End” cell of the first row and in the “Start” cell of the second row.

## 10. Time management done right

More important than getting everything done is getting *the right* things done. How do you figure out which priorities are most worthy of attention?

A structured to-do list is the solution offered by Peter Bregman, *Harvard Business Review* blogger and author of *18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction and Get Things Done*.

Start with your top five priorities for the year, such as “Do great work for current directors,” “Build repertoire of technical skills” or “Have fun and take care of myself.” Those things will become the organizing map for your day.

Set up a to-do list made up of blocks where each of those priorities becomes a headline. Add a final category titled “The Other 5%.”

Now, fill in your to-dos so that each item has a home within your six or so categories. The benefits:

✓ **Helps you visualize your priorities.** “This structure helps carve up my day into manageable, digestible chunks,” writes Bregman. “And ensures I spend my time where I should. Saying I want to focus on something is meaningless unless I actually spend my time there.”

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✓ **Allows you to rebalance your time.** You may find that one category contains many to-dos, while another is empty. That's OK for a short time. But if the trend continues, it's time to refocus on an area where you're lagging.

✓ **Sharpens your sense of what-not-to-dos.** If you notice that the list of "Other 5%" tasks are dominating your list, it's time for action. Perhaps it's time to delay some tasks.

— Adapted from *18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction and Get Things Done*, Peter Bregman.

### Work faster, smarter: 10 keyboard shortcuts

Whether it's a speedy way to create a bar chart or a trick for switching from one window to the next, keyboard shortcuts can help even power users knock out work faster. Here are a few of our favorites:

1. **Create a simple bar chart within a set of data** in Excel by pressing F11 in any cell.
2. **Switch from one window to the next** with Alt-Tab.
3. **Use F4 to repeat your last action.** It's definitely a time-saver in Microsoft Word. Say you're changing the font in certain areas of a document. Once you change the first section, you can highlight the next section and simply use your F4 command to copy the changes.
4. **Move to another page quickly** with the F5 key, which brings up the Go To box.
5. **Take advantage of the shortcut power of macros.** *Example:* You like only one space after the end of a sentence, but many documents come to you with two spaces. Create a macro to take care of that.
6. **Control the appearance of text.** *Examples:* Control + [ to decrease font size one point at a time, and Control + ] to increase font size one point at a time.
7. **File away emails**, once you've read them, by pressing Shift + Enter + V to pull up your Folders. Type in the first few letters of a folder name to call it up, then hit Enter.
8. **Make up your own shortcuts** with ShortKeys Lite. (Other similar software: AutoHotkey and Keyboard Express.)  
Say you have to enter the same paragraph or contract section in many documents. By assigning a shortcut key to them, you can quickly move from one document to another.
9. **Lock your keyboard** with Windows Key + L; minimize your screen with Windows Key + M.
10. **Generate white space between paragraphs** (12 pt. of spacing) in Word and Outlook by pressing Ctrl + Shift + 0 (zero).

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*Learn how to conduct positive, valuable assessments that lead to maximizing staff performance and helping your employees achieve their professional goals and your organization's objectives. Use Business Management Daily's practical advice for writing employee reviews and conducting performance evaluations. Don't forget to reference our sample performance review and employee evaluation forms for your own staff assessments.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/EffectivePerformanceReview](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/EffectivePerformanceReview)

**Workplace Conflict Resolution:** 10 ways to manage employee conflict and improve office communication, the workplace environment and team productivity

*Learn how to manage employee conflict and improve office communication and team productivity. Disputes between employees are inevitable...left unresolved, they can disrupt your department's productivity, sap morale and even cause some good employees to quit. Learn 6 steps for managing "difficult" employees, what to do when employees resent another's promotion, learn when and how to step in to referee disputes, and much more.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/WorkplaceConflictResolution](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/WorkplaceConflictResolution)

**Maternity Leave Laws: 7 guidelines** on pregnancy discrimination law, state maternity regulations, pregnancy disability leave, plus a sample maternity leave policy

*It's important to know what you must do—and what you can't do (or say)—under federal anti-discrimination and maternity leave laws. And it's vital to double-check state maternity leave statutes, which may provide more liberal leave benefits. While no federal law requires you to provide paid maternity leave, most employers must comply with the pregnancy discrimination law and FMLA maternity leave regulations. Here are 7 guidelines on how best to comply with maternity leave laws, plus a sample leave policy you can adapt for your own organization.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/MaternityLeaveLaws](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/MaternityLeaveLaws)

**The Office Organizer: 10 tips on file organizing,** clutter control, document management, business shredding policy, record retention guidelines and how to organize office emails

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[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/OfficeOrganizer](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/OfficeOrganizer)

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*Learn new team management tips and team-building activities to boost team performance, collaboration and morale. Take our leadership assessment exercise to gauge your own performance as a team manager. See how businesses of all sizes are getting creative with team-building icebreakers and activities. Fight off team complacency with 5 strategies for making team-building exercises part of your daily routine.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/LeadershipTeamManagement](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/LeadershipTeamManagement)

**Employment Background Check Guidelines**: **Complying with the Fair Credit Reporting Act**, conducting credit background checks and running a criminal check to avoid negligent-hiring lawsuits

*Employment Background Check Guidelines shows employers and HR professionals how to properly conduct reference/background checks, select third-party background firms and why screening candidates online on social networking sites is legally risky business. Don't allow your organization to risk being held liable for "negligent hiring" or "failure to warn" should an employee turn violent on the job.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/BackgroundCheckGuidelines](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/BackgroundCheckGuidelines)

**Salary Negotiating 101**: **7 secrets to boosting career earnings**, negotiating a raise and striking the best deal in a job offer negotiation

*Think you deserve a raise, but are afraid to walk into your boss's office and ask? Don't let ineffective negotiation skills hold you back. Employees at all levels can boost their career earnings by following the rules on negotiating a raise, hashing out the best pay package in a job offer negotiation and knowing their market value.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/SalaryNegotiating101](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/SalaryNegotiating101)

**FMLA Intermittent Leave**: **5 guidelines to managing intermittent leave** and curbing leave abuse under the new FMLA regulations

*One of the biggest employer complaints about the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the productivity problems caused by employees' use—and abuse—of FMLA intermittent leave. The problem: Employees with chronic health problems often take FMLA leave in short increments of an hour or less. The Department of Labor recently took steps to help minimize workplace disruptions due to unscheduled FMLA absences by saying that, in most cases, employees who take FMLA intermittent leave must follow their employers' call-in procedures for reporting an absence. Amend your organization's policies, update your employee handbook and revisit how you track FMLA intermittent leave with these 5 guidelines.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/FMLAIntermittentLeave](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/FMLAIntermittentLeave)

## **Overtime Labor Law: 6 compliance tips to avoid overtime lawsuits, wage-and-hour Labor audits and FLSA exemption mistakes**

***Employers, beware:** The Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division reports that wage-and-hour labor litigation continues to increase exponentially. Federal class actions brought under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) outnumber all other types of private class actions in employment-related cases. Use this special report, **Overtime Labor Law: 6 compliance tips to avoid overtime lawsuits, wage-and-hour Labor audits and FLSA exemption mistakes**, to review your overtime pay policy and double-check your FLSA exempt employees' status. Expecting a visit from a DOL auditor? Get prepared by taking the self-audit at the end of this report.*

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## **Office Communication Toolkit: 10 tips for managers on active listening skills, motivating employees, workplace productivity, employee retention strategies and change management techniques**

***A manager's job is 100 times easier** and more rewarding when his or her employees are performing like a well-oiled machine. But when that machine runs slowly or breaks down entirely, a manager's job becomes exponentially harder. The best managers are the best listeners ... listen to our 10 tips and maximize office communication skills and bolster workplace productivity.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/OfficeCommunicationToolkit](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/OfficeCommunicationToolkit)

## **Workplace Violence Prevention Toolkit: HR advice, guidelines and policies to keep your workplace safe**

***Unfortunately, in the wake of a spate of workplace shootings**, HR professionals and managers nationwide must consider the horrific possibility of violence erupting at their own facilities and events. To help employers prevent tragedy, this toolkit offers business advice, guidelines and policies aimed at keeping workplaces safe from employee violence. Learn prevention strategies, tips on identifying potentially violent workers, managerial advice on maintaining a safe workplace. It includes two sample anti-violence policies, adaptable for use in any company, plus checklists to use in case violence erupts.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/WorkplaceViolencePrevention](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/WorkplaceViolencePrevention)

## **14 Tips on Business Etiquette: Setting a professional tone with co-workers, clients and customers**

***For organizations and employees alike**, recognizing the critical link between business protocol and profit is key to your success. Learn how to confidently interact with colleagues in ways that make you and your whole organization shine. Discover best practices on making proper introductions; cubicle etiquette; "casual dress" rules; handshake protocol; guest etiquette; workplace behavior faux pas; business dining etiquette, office wedding invites and other co-worker special occasions; business letter and email protocol—and even how your office decorations may affect your professional image.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/BusinessEtiquette101](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/BusinessEtiquette101)

## **12 Ways to Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program: Low-cost employee incentives, recognition programs and employee rewards**

*If you've had to cut pay and staff and now expect more from those who remain, it's vital to revamp your employee recognition and rewards program. Employers can double their rewards and recognition efforts in innovative, cost-efficient ways with employee-of-the-month awards, employee incentive pay, employee appreciation luncheons, more time off, shopping sprees, wellness incentive contests, plus employee rewards customized to motivate Millennials, Gen Xers, Baby Boomers and the Matures. Now is the time to get clever with your employee recognition programs. This report shows you how with great ideas offered up from our [HR Specialist](#) readers.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/EmployeeBenefitsProgram](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/EmployeeBenefitsProgram)

## **The Case in Point Yearbook: Real-Life Employment Law Advice ... from Mindy Chapman's Case in Point blog**

*Mindy Chapman, Esq., has been providing sound employment law advice in her Case in Point blog since 2007. In her trademark entertaining style, she dissects an important employment law court ruling and provides essential employment law advice via three "Lessons Learned." Topics include: ADA guidelines, age discrimination cases, sexual harassment laws, EEOC cases, FMLA requirements and more.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/CIPYearbook](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/CIPYearbook)

## **Microsoft Email: Outlook Tips & Training: How to improve productivity by effectively employing under-used features already at your fingertips**

*We all use Outlook. It's easy. You can answer email, keep your appointments and your calendar, and save your files in various folders. But are you using it to manage your entire workflow? You can. Melissa P. Esquibel combines her 25+ years of experience in information technology with a background in training, technical writing and business risk analysis to move beyond email and help you understand Outlook's amazing workflow benefits. You'll discover how to get more out of Outlook than you ever dreamed possible with this hands-on road map to Outlook that can send your productivity skyrocketing.*

[www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/MicrosoftEmailOutlook](http://www.BusinessManagementDaily.com/MicrosoftEmailOutlook)



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