



Time Management in the Digital Age

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The Challenge

- Work has no clear stopping point
- Work can be done anywhere
- Email means anyone can contact you, regardless of relevance
- Almost limitless distractions



1. Individual Time Management



Urgent vs. Important

Important	Serving an existing client Meeting a job application deadline	Developing a new client relationship Learning a new topic/skill Exercise Rest
Not important	Submitting a speaker's bio Replying to an email thread	Accepting a coffee chat Most social media
	Urgent	Not urgent

"The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" - Stephen Covey



Prioritise the Important

- Personal Mission Statement
 - Be brief. What it omits is as important as what it contains
 - Want to do (internal compass) vs. have to do (external clock)
- Start with your “Wildly Important Goal”
- Discipline to resist urgency addition¹
 - Low-hanging fruit will naturally get picked later



The Importance of Saying No

- Time leadership
- Good is the enemy of great
 - Reject good things that aren't in your Mission Statement
 - Easy to say No if you have a bigger Yes inside. "No more yes. Either hell yeah! or no" / Spice Girl strategy
 - To do things no-one else is doing, you have to not do things everyone else is doing. Saying Yes is saying No to yourself
 - Advance commitments: the "next Tuesday" rule
 - Hyperbolic discounting of future benefits *and* commitments
- How do natives catch monkeys?
 - "I have to" vs. "I choose to"



How To Say No

- Don't feel guilty
 - Many requests are speculative
 - Yes might not be the best answer for them
- Offer an alternative
 - A person
 - Other resources (preferred)
- Refer to a policy
- Keep response short and sweet
 - Over-responding implies not confident about reason
 - Reasons can be challenged (esp. your weakest argument)



Dealing with Email: Computer

- Process email upon receipt (deters checking)
- Have sub-folders:
 - Today
 - This Week
 - Mailing Lists (File – Manage Rules and Alerts to move messages with “Unsubscribe”)
- Work Offline and “batch-process” email
- Use *Freedom* to block internet
 - Pomodoro Technique: work for 25 minutes, take a 5 minute break
 - Use *Pocket* / Post-Its to save distractions for later



Dealing with Email: Mobile Devices

- Mindfulness affects neuroplasticity of the brain
 - Strengthen your mental muscle
 - Multi-tasking reduces your ability to switch tasks, filter out irrelevant information
- Checking email is like gambling
- Habit of checking smartphone
 - Cue (email chime / smartphone buzz / break)
 - Routine (check email)
 - Reward (satisfy craving for distraction)
 - Charles Duhigg – *The Power of Habit*
- How do eskimos catch wolves?



Dealing with Email: Mobile Devices (cont'd)

- Solutions

- Turn off new email notification or remove email from phone
 - Also remove certain apps
 - Reverse pilot
- *Moment* and *Checky* monitor phone use; *Forest* and *Screen Time* limit it
- How did Dan Ariely encourage saving?¹
 - Scorecard for number of pickups or hours spent
 - Scorecard for how much actual work you did (leading indicator)



2. Group Time Management



A Community Effort

- Time management is extremely difficult; hard to change behaviour by ourselves
- Hold others accountable
 - “Catch people doing something right”
(Kenneth Blanchard – *The One Minute Manager*)
 - Have tough conversations: “one minute reprimands”
- Everyone has an excuse to check their phone. What makes your excuse better than others’?
- When working, surround yourself with other working people. Create “hubs”
 - E.g. work in library



Sending Email

- Don't be part of the problem
 - Internalise the response cost that the email will impose, e.g. an answer you can look up yourself
- Your email will generate follow-up email and force *you* to respond
 - When out of the office, I get far less email
 - When replying, aim to hit a winner, not just get ball back over net



Incomplete Emails

- I'd really like to meet you over a coffee on a number of levels but if you're short of time maybe a brief call in the first instance?
- As you're 'out of town' ... I just need to know; if, for the right opportunity, you'd be available to speak at an event in London on the 8th November? If no that answers my question and removes the urgency from me contacting you. If 'yes' I can provide you with some brief information, if you're interested?
 - Subject: "A quick 'yes' or 'no'?"



Sending Complete Emails

- Rules and alerts, defer delivery by 2 mins
 - Avoids sending a second email if you've forgotten something
 - Avoids sending emails in anger
- Use "High Importance" sparingly



Imprecise Emails

- It's not the recipient's responsibility to respond, but the sender's responsibility to make the email easy to reply to
- Be specific
 - "I was wondering if you had a spare moment to chat about a high profile event that I am organising in January"
(Subject: Some Advice)
 - "They have asked me to perform credit research on a number of projects and was wondering whether you had any advice"
 - "I am an incoming student. What advice would you give me to follow during my time at LBS?"



Throwaway Emails

-----Original Message-----

From: XX

Sent: 11 September 2017 14:18

To: Alex Edmans <aedmans@london.edu>

Subject: Checking in|

Hi Alex,

How are you doing? How were your travels and adventures over the summer?

Kind regards,

XX

Sent from my iPhone



Throwaway Emails (cont'd)

- A useless response (weak tennis return):

Hi XX,

Good to hear from you. My summer was great, thanks!
How was yours?

Regards, Alex



Throwaway Emails (cont'd)

Hi XX,

Nice to hear from you, and it was great to see you at XX.

I really appreciate your interest in my adventures, and know that the intent behind your email was kind. So I am sorry to give this response but I hope that it is valuable and constructive to you as your mentor. Your email probably took 30 seconds to send, but - particularly because of its open-ended nature - would take me half an hour to reply if I was to do so properly (and, I believe that one should always reply to email properly and not do anything by half measures or sloppily). The attached are some articles that I found useful in my own use of email, because I myself need to be more circumspect about what email I send. I hope that this comes across in the constructive spirit intended.



Throwaway Emails (cont'd)

Also consider the frustratingly common practice of forwarding an e-mail to one or more colleagues, labeled with a short open-ended interrogative, such as: “Thoughts?” These e-mails take the sender only a handful of seconds to write but can command many minutes (if not hours, in some cases) of time and attention from their recipients to work toward a coherent response. A little more care in crafting the message by the sender could reduce the overall time spent by all parties by a significant fraction. So why are these easily avoidable and time-sucking e-mails so common? From the sender’s perspective, *they’re easier*. It’s a way to clear something out of their inbox—at least, temporarily—with a minimum amount of energy invested.



Throwaway Emails (cont'd)

Before email, if you wanted to write to someone, you had to invest some effort in it. You'd sit down with pen and paper, or at a typewriter, and carefully compose a message. There wasn't anything about the medium that lent itself to dashing off quick notes without giving them much thought, partly because of the ritual involved, and the time it took to write a note, find and address an envelope, add postage, and take the letter to a mailbox. Because the very act of writing a note or letter to someone took this many steps, and was spread out over time, we didn't go to the trouble unless we had something important to say.

Because of email's immediacy, most of us give little thought to typing up any little thing that pops in our heads and hitting the send button. And email doesn't cost anything. The sheer ease of sending emails has led to a change in manners, a tendency to be less polite about what we ask of others.



Meetings and Conference Calls

- Like email, very easy to organise with technology
- More intrusive than email
 - Must attend the meeting
 - Unproductive before the meeting
- Agenda
 - Helps focus the meeting
 - Helps avoid unnecessary meetings if agenda can be addressed another way (e.g. alignment call)
 - “Are you free for a brief call today at some point?”
 - “Chat about potential synergies”
 - Next steps at end