Reduce Stress by Managing Your Time

by Connie Burtcheard

While you can't actually add more hours in a day, you can get more work into the same number of hours each day. Long term effect is having more time. You just need to work on managing your time.

Break Projects down into smaller tasks. Instead of looking at the project as one huge job, and being overwhelmed by it, break it up into smaller projects and set deadlines for each phase. Setting deadlines, even when you're working on a project alone, gives you a goal to work toward.

Create a central place for resources. Getting organized will help any situation. You might be jotting down ideas on sticky notes, various note pads, dinner napkins, and everything else that was nearby when you had a thought. If only you could find them now. You spent time pulling together articles and reference materials, but have no idea where they are now. You walk into your office only to be greeted by mountains of incomplete work. Before you can even get started, you're already overwhelmed. Get organized so you can find everything when you need it and have a clear mind to get it done. You'll spend less time looking for what you need – and so will your peers.

Never touch the same piece of paper twice. Don't waste time moving paper from one pile to another. If you pick it up, deal with it. Take whatever action is necessary to get the piece of paper off of your desk. That may be as simple as filing it, or may require research. Whatever needs to be done, do it.

Create a quiet hour. Set aside an hour each day. During this hour, you accept no phone calls, do not open your email, and do not allow any visitor interruptions. If necessary, put a Do Not Disturb sign outside of your workspace. During this hour, focus on priority projects. You will find that your work efficiency will improve and your projects will have fewer holes in them. Your workflow stops each time you are interrupted. When you return to the project, you may remember some of your thoughts, but not all of them.

Do not answer your phone. Instead of being a slave to your phone and email, designate certain times of the day to respond to e-mail and voice mail. Set aside an hour before lunch and an hour before the end of the day to return phone calls and email. In addition to stopping the interruptions, you will be prepared to address the issues and focus on the callers/mailers needs.

Keep a master to-do list handy so you can add things as they pop up instead of interrupting what you are doing. Each time you review your to-do list, set the priorities and attack the highest priority first.

Turn off interference. When getting input and direction on a project, turn off the radio, cell phone and any other outside noise so you can REALLY listen.

Make eye contact. Make it a point to look into the eyes of the person with whom you're talking. This will keep your mind from wandering.

Set a timer. If it is difficult to focus on one thing at a time, start small by tending to a task for only 15 or 30 minutes before moving onto something else.

Build in energy breaks. Taking a walk or stretching may give you a boost of energy so you can return to a task focused and with renewed efficiency.

We all have ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) to a certain degree but the key to successful time management is staying focused. Be creative at ways to eliminate interruptions that are breaking your concentration on the task at hand. You will become more productive, efficient and less stressed.