



## Personal Organisation & Time Management

In these videos we covered 4 aspects of self-organisation and time management:

- Desk and office
- Work Management
- Self organisation
- Time management

### Desk and office

#### Desk

Let's look at your desk first.

Your conscious mind can only deal with one thing at a time. So only have one piece of work on your desk at any one time. If there are other things on your desk, such as the telephone or other piles of paper, then you will see these in your peripheral vision and they will distract you. Your conscious mind will switch from the task in hand and onto something else. The task you are doing has stopped.



It's distracting enough if you actually know what's in that enormous pile of paper sitting on your desk; it's even worse if you don't! Remember, it's what you haven't done that causes you stress not what you have done.

So, task one is to clear your desk...and that doesn't just mean clearing the surface of your desk, it means clearing those drawers out as well. And make sure that you are absolutely ruthless. Ask yourself the question as you lovingly look at that piece of paper that's been with you since you were nowt more than a twinkle in your mother's eye, 'What's the worst thing that can happen to me if I throw this away?' and we bet the answer is, 'Nothing!' If the answer is anything else, then ask, 'Where else could I get this information from?' and, if there is somewhere, then throw the piece of paper in the bin. We bet if you do this task thoroughly, you'll fill more than one bin bag with unwanted documents.





If you can, get your phone and your computer off your desk as well. Put them on a trolley or a separate desk. Again, the principle is, 'Out of sight, out of mind'. Concentrate just on the job in hand.

And in this electronic age, how about clearing out all of those unnecessary e-mails. Read them and trash them.

## Office

Now that you have cleared out your desk, let's start to work on the rest of your office. Do you have papers and documents piled around your office? On the floor, on filing cabinets, in bookcases, on windowsills? Do you know what they all are? Do you really need them? Or are they just distracting you from the job in hand? Are they taking your conscious mind away from that job in hand?



If you work closely with a secretary or other colleagues, get them involved in the clearout.

The big lesson from all of this? In an office, the waste bin is your best friend!

## Work Management

So, you've cleared your desk and office and you feel better and you work better. What you must do now is to introduce systems that make sure that you do not lapse back into bad habits. If you don't, in no time at all, your office and desk will be cluttered with paper. That mess you spent the weekend clearing didn't all arrive at once in a big lorry, it came in dribs and drabs over a long period of time and you stored it, just like a squirrel storing acorns for winter. Let's make sure that it doesn't happen again.



You need to make sure that every piece of paper that comes into your office is dealt with straight away. You need to set up a storage system that organises your papers and you need to use one that mirrors the capabilities of the human brain.

We know that our conscious brains can only deal with one thing at a time (and that therefore we should only be working on one thing at a time). We also know that we will be receiving papers dealing with all aspects of our work, not just one, so we go to the next level of our brain, the pre-conscious for our system. We know that our pre-conscious brain can deal with about 10 things at a time so let's use a system that



mirrors that. We suggest, to start with, 8 separate files for your papers and later we'll suggest reducing that to just 6.

How you physically store the papers is up to you. You may use clear plastic wallets, a concertina folder, dividers in a filing cabinet, it doesn't really matter. What's important is to store your papers in an organised way so that the mass of papers doesn't interfere with you getting on with your work.

The 8 files we suggest you start with are:

- **Do Now.** As the name suggests you put into this file, things that need to be done immediately.
- **Do soon.** Into this file go things that you do not need to do immediately but do need doing within the next day or two. (Maybe you need to go and talk to someone before you can complete the task.)
- **File.** Things that simply need filing away. Either this is your job and you can do it when you're less busy or it's someone else's and you can pass the papers to them.
- **Read.** We all receive papers that we just need to read, then file or throw away. Separate them from the rest of your papers and then set aside time in your diary to read them, maybe on the train or after hours when the phone stops ringing and you're waiting for the traffic to die down.
- **Pass on.** If you can. When you first receive a piece of paper, ask yourself, 'Who can I give this to?' If there isn't anyone, then it goes into one of your files.
- **Pending.** Only if you have to. A very dangerous file. If this one starts to get too thick then look in the mirror because it's likely your starting to *look* like a squirrel again as well as acting like one.
- **Projects.** Most of us have longer-term projects on the go. Let's get the papers about them separated from the rest.
- **Others.** Anything that doesn't fit into the above 7. Depends on what your job entails. Just like, 'Pending', this is a dangerous file for the horder.



The above is a simple system for organising your papers to help keep your mind clear for the job in hand. If you can, get rid of Pending and Others as quickly as you can. And if you receive anything that doesn't fit into any of your headings...then throw it in



the bin. You're not going to do anything with it anyway; it will just clog up your papers. So throw it away now.

You've now got your desk and your office organised and you've introduced a system for dealing with your papers that suits you. What do you do now?

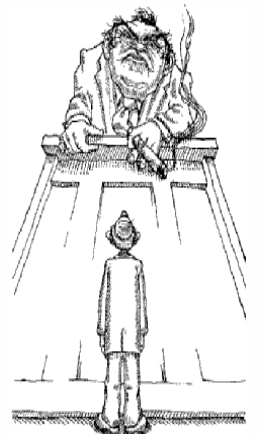
Well firstly accept that you are human and that you may lapse occasionally. You've been operating the way you do for a number of years now and you won't put things right over night. Just keep plugging at it and, before you know it, your organised desk, office and files will just be second nature.

And secondly, start to think about organising yourself.

## Self Organisation

Life is so simple. You plan your work and list out what you are going to do on your 'Job's List' and then you just get on with it. No one interrupts you, you don't get any telephone calls, your boss doesn't make unreasonable demands...and there are fairies at the bottom of your garden!

OK, so life's not like that. You do get interruptions, you do get telephone calls and your boss does make unreasonable demands. So what are you going to do about it? Not bother to plan because there's no point? Just get on with whatever comes to mind? We suggest not. Get organised. Let your conscious brain rule your working life, not your subconscious. Don't let your subconscious cloud what you are doing with those negative emotions.



We suggest that you operate a three-tier system of self-organisation,

- **A day book**
- **A job's list**
- **A diary**

Let's look at each of these in turn.

### Day book

Most, if not all of you, will already be using job's lists. But are you using them efficiently? How many jobs have you ticked off at the end of the day? How many new jobs have been added? If your boss rings and asks you to do one or two extra things for him, do you just add them to the list?



Why not keep a daybook? A simple bound book will do. Then, whatever happens during the *day*, well, note it in your daybook; don't interfere with your job's list. It's a place to record all of those reactive things that just happen.



Then, at the end of the day (or first thing in the morning if you prefer) go through your daybook and transfer the relevant items to your job's list.

## Job's list

Use your job's list to control your day to day work. As part of your daily review of your work, go through your list and prioritise your work. Use any classification that you like. Why not just keep it simple? 1 for the most important jobs, 2 for the not so important and 3 for the rest. It doesn't matter how you do it; devise something that suits you.



If something needs to be done today, then clearly it's category 1. What about those jobs that, well, they don't have to be done today but it would be a real bonus if they were. Maybe these are category 1 as well. Look at each job and look at the return on investment. Which ones are going to give you the biggest payback in respect of your personal and business goals? The bigger the payback, the higher the category.

There are two exceptions to this rule. Firstly, jobs that are causing you stress. Get these out of the way as quickly as you can. You won't really be able to concentrate properly on anything else while these are hanging over you. Your subconscious brain will keep reminding you of them and you'll feel bad. Secondly, jobs that require contact with people. Whether that's within your organisation or outside, deal with these jobs as category 1.



Don't have too many jobs on your job's list. It will just make you feel depressed if you look at the list at the end of the day and you've only ticked off a couple of things. Maybe have sub lists for ongoing projects; maybe have sub lists for those small tasks that aren't important that we could do in those rare moments when we get some free time.

## Diary

Now you can plan your day. Look down your job's list and put down in your diary what jobs you would like to do today and when you would like to do them. Put times



down if you want. Maybe just put 'morning' or 'afternoon'. Be realistic. Don't put down more than you can realistically do.

Now we've got ourselves organised with a daybook, a job's list and a diary, what are the things that are going to stop us working with these in the best possible way?

## Procrastination

We are all guilty of procrastination at some time. There are those jobs we don't like doing. Those jobs we find boring. Those phone calls we don't really want to make. That person we need to see with the news we'd rather not tell them. We're human; we're all guilty!



We subconsciously think that maybe those nasty jobs will go away. But they never do. We have to do them in the end. Sometimes this means that we don't do as good a job as we should have done due to lack of time. Sometimes the task turns out to be not as difficult as we thought; that confrontation not as upsetting and we wish we had just done it straight away and avoided all of that stress.

So do the jobs you normally procrastinate over first. Get them out of the way. Get rid of that stress. Do it. You'll be proud of yourself! And then give yourself a reward.

## Meetings

As well as thinking about what you need to do, think about who else needs to know. We all work alongside other people. There are people above us in the organisation, we have our peers and there are people who work for us. We do not work in isolation.

So how about a weekly meeting so that the team can all compare notes? Discuss what each of you intends to do that week. You might find out that it would be better if someone else in the team did it. Maybe someone else can take time out to help you. Maybe everybody else will realise that what's on your list is vital for everyone, and now that they know that, they'll leave you alone!



Get a different member of your team to chair the meeting each week and make it their job to produce a list of the team's jobs for the week.



Similarly, if you are fortunate enough to have a secretary, then sit down with them, probably each day, to plan your tasks together.

## Delegation

Delegation is a major part of business life. Delegating tasks frees up the higher levels of management for more strategic thinking. Delegating tasks means that the more junior members of staff get more challenging work and develop more in their jobs and as people. This is how your staff really learns. But it's got to be done right!



What are the rules? Well, it's delegation, *not* abdication. You can delegate the task; you can't delegate the responsibility. What's happening when you delegate is that someone is doing part of *your* job for you. Although they might do it, the job remains yours.

The person you are delegating to needs the following to be able to do the job you have delegated:

- the capability,
- the tools and equipment,
- the authority (the delegator must ensure that everybody knows that they have the authority),
- your help and support.



If you do all of that, then there's a chance that the job delegated will be done properly.

Don't forget that delegation doesn't just have to happen from boss to subordinate. Maybe you could delegate sideways. Maybe at your weekly meetings you might discover that someone was willing to share a task with you.

## Large projects

Always break down large tasks into digestible chunks. If you don't, you will cause yourself stress, simply because the human brain can't take in a mass of information all in one go. It will be the parts you know are there but can't bring to mind at the moment that will cause you stress. Breaking the task into parts means that you will be able to see the wood from the trees. It's just like climbing Mount Everest. No one would attempt to do that in one go. They'd establish a base camp and additional camps at regular intervals, climbing the mountain a bit at a time, before making the final push to the top. Do the same with your large tasks.





## Perfection

Beware of striving for perfection. It's rarely necessary. Ask yourself, 'is doing 90% of the task good enough? Will it satisfy everyone's needs?' If it will, well that's good enough. It's one of those inexplicable rules of life that to achieve that last 10% will probably take 50% of the time. Remember the advice you used to get on exam technique? Allocate time to each question and stick to it. The first 50% of the marks are easy to get; the last 50% will take forever.



People who strive for perfection usually end up annoying all of their colleagues who can see that the extra effort is a waste of time.

## Time management

There are only two things in life you can never get back...your virginity and time! Maybe it's too late to give you any advice on the former, so let's just stick to the latter.

'If only I had more time, I could do so much more.' How many times have you said that to yourself? Time is the one thing we can never get any more of and it flies by so quickly. We bet you can think of lots of people and situations that rob you of valuable time; people and situations that you blame. If you want to know who the real villain is, then go and look in the mirror and you'll see the culprit smiling back at you! Take control!

Hard work and long hours may well be the sign of someone who is reaching for the top. It may also be the sign of someone who is not organising their time properly. There's a lovely cliché for this – work smarter, not harder.



Who and what are the time stealers?

## Telephone

The telephone is very intrusive. If it rings you answer it. It doesn't matter what you are doing; you'll stop and deal with the call. Well that makes sense. It could be your biggest customer on the phone with the biggest order this century. You'd feel a bit miffed if you missed it!

But what can you do to minimise the impact of the telephone?



- **Screen your calls.** If you have a secretary, get them to filter calls through to you. If you need some peace and quiet, ask a colleague to take your calls for an hour or two. You can always return the favour.
- **Telephone time.** Why not set aside time and do all of your calls in one go. It's more efficient than doing them in dribs and drabs.
- **Notes.** Before you make each call, jot down the things you want to cover. It will keep you on track and the call will take less time.
- **Why telephone?** Ask yourself whether the telephone is the best means of communication. Could you use e-mail? Would it be better to just go and *talk* to them? What a revolutionary idea in this electronic age!

## Interruptions

'Oh no! It's the office gossip. I've got piles to do and the last thing I need is interruptions'. Sound familiar? You can't be rude. You've got to work together. Well, what can you do about it?

- **Stand up.** Stand by the side of your desk to talk to them. The unmistakable message you are giving with your body language is that they're not welcome and your body language message will always over-ride what you are saying. OK, what you say will be polite but they'll soon get the hint. If standing by your desk doesn't work, then point your body towards the door whilst still looking at them. If they're too thick skinned to get that message, then glance at your watch. That should do the trick!



- **Go to their office.** If they ring first to check if it's OK to see you, then say you'll go and see them. You are more in control now and can decide when you've had enough, make your excuses and leave.



- **Shut your door.** If you don't want interruptions signal that fact by closing your door. Brief your colleagues and ask them to screen out unnecessary visitors.
- **Put a time limit on it.** Say you can spare them 5 minutes or whatever. Maybe say you've got a meeting to go to. Having a clear desk policy will help here. By folding away the one piece of work you have on your desk, your clear desk will give the impression that you mean what you say and your visitor won't overstay their welcome. It will also show that you are really listening to them. You've put everything else away.



## Meetings

What do they say about meetings? It's where someone takes minutes and everyone wastes hours! Most people's experience of meetings is bad. But they *are* an essential part of business life. They do, however, have the potential to get out of control. So here are some simple rules to help your meetings run more efficiently.



- **Should I go?** Before you go, ask yourself that question. Should you go, or should you send somebody else? Is there an agenda for the meeting? Are there goals for the meeting? These will help you decide.
- **Timetable.** Is there a start time and a finish time? Encourage people to be disciplined and get through the business in the time allotted. If you're chairing a meeting, start it on time. Don't wait for latecomers.
- **Minutes.** Are proper minutes issued? You don't need chapter and verse on what was discussed, just who was going to do what and when they were going to do it by.

## Committed time

Are we making the best use of our committed time? The best example of what we mean by committed time is travelling time. How about going by train instead of by car. We could use the time to catch up on our reading – no, not Mills and Boon, your office reading! We could organise our job's list and diary. We could sketch out that report. And once we've done all of that we can read 'The Highwayman Rides Again!' if we want to.



## Admin time

Don't make back to back appointments. Build some time into your diary for yourself and treat the time you have scheduled for yourself with the same importance as everything else. Don't give it away to the time stealers. You'll just put yourself under more stress. You need time to get yourself organised. To sort out that filing. To go through your files and throw away all of that unnecessary paper. You need time to think.

## Say, 'NO!'

There are lots of people around who would be more than happy for you to be working hard so that they can achieve their own personal goals and ambitions. They'll keep



loading you with work that develops their own career but does little for yours. And they're usually very polite about it so they're difficult to spot.

Negotiate expectations. Don't just accept an unreasonable deadline. You'll just put everybody under stress, no one will enjoy the work and you risk missing the deadline. Agree sensible deadlines and then, if you get the work in a day early, you'll gain loads of Brownie points and people will remember what you did. Move from deadlines that are impossible to meet to ones that are possible to beat!



Learn to say, 'No'.

## Leisure

We've talked a lot about using your time sensibly at work, now let's spend some time talking about sensible use of your leisure time.

The bad news is that, lying on the settee in front of the TV with a can of beer in your hand is not a sensible use of your leisure time!



You need to use your leisure time sensibly to make sure that you get all of the stresses and strains of your working life out of your system. The two things work in parallel. Get control of and enjoy your working day and you'll find more time for and make better use of your leisure time. And vice-versa.

What you do with your leisure time is up to you. Whether it's a ten-mile run, golf, music, reading, walking, it doesn't matter, just make it something you can lose yourself in. And then every now and again, sit in front of the TV with a can of beer and enjoy yourself!



## Summary

So, in summary:

- Sort out your desk. Only have one thing at a time in front of you. Sort out your office. Get rid of any distractions. Be brutal. Throw all of the rubbish away.
- Introduce a system of working files that takes account of the way your subconscious brain works. It will stop you re-offending.
- Organise yourself. Use a system consisting of a daybook, a job's list and a diary. Stop procrastinating; do it now! Meet with your colleagues and organise your time together. Delegate but do it right. Break up large projects. Avoid perfection.
- Manage your time. Control the telephone; don't let it control you. Manage those interruptions. Manage meetings. Make the most of your committed time. Allocate some time to yourself. Learn to say, 'No!' Use your leisure time sensibly.

Congratulations! Now you're organised!

