



# It's about time

Time management: A key skill for any professional, reports *Christina Ko*

**W**e think about time every day. It doesn't take a leap of faith to realize that time is one of the most valuable commodities in today's workplace.

In the 1940s, quality management pioneer Dr. Joseph Juran observed that 20 percent of a set is generally responsible for 80 percent of a related result. It became known as the Pareto's Principle or the 80/20 rule. This suggests that 80 percent of your work is actually completed in 20 percent of your time, and while no one can be productive 100 percent of the time, balancing the ratio will help you be more productive.

The first step is to assess your habits. Keep a detailed time log for a week, noting all your activities and the

time spent on each. By the end of the week, you should be able to identify excessive lapses in productivity, whether they are self-indulgent (taking a coffee break) or uncontrollable (taking public transport to a meeting).

Next, as Polly Bird suggests in her book *Time Management*, "take time to make time." You will be more efficient if you can map out a schedule, including a to-do list that is prioritized.

Kwizzle Chan, managing director of Canadian web design firm L'Orange Productions, relocated to Hong Kong to start up an online retail venture. He still manages his Canadian web design clients and says as an entrepreneur, he needed to learn new ways to manage his time.

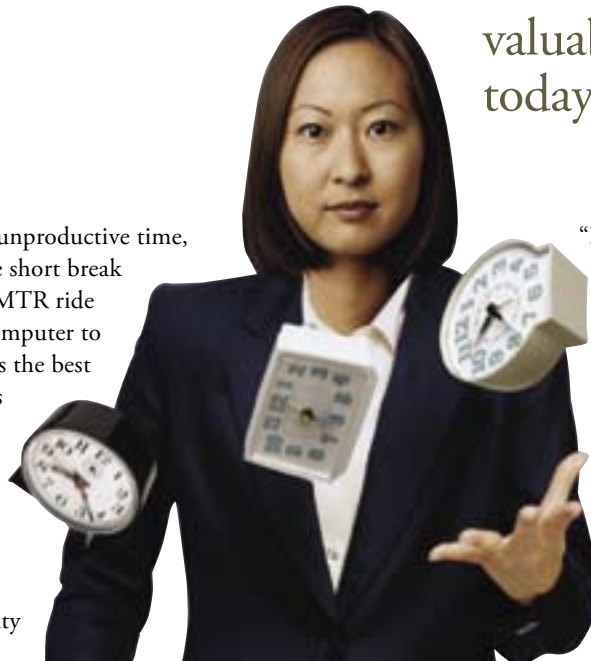
"When you don't have a boss and you work in a small office," Chan says,

"it's easier to slack off and lose track of time. My clients in Hong Kong need me during the day, and those in North America contact me at night. When I started off, I was working around the clock. I was tired all the time and the quality of my work suffered. Then I decided to schedule a break for myself in the middle of the day. For a couple of hours, I do not work, check emails or take phone calls."

Taking short breaks helps break up the monotony of a day. Staying in the office at lunchtime is a common practice in Hong Kong, but instead of ordering takeaway, go downstairs and pick it up. The time away from your desk will help you refocus.

The 10 minutes you've "lost" in picking up lunch are easily regained

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– one way is by filling your unproductive time, which is the time during the short break between two meetings, the MTR ride to work, waiting for your computer to reboot after stalling, etc. It is the best time for wrapping up chores you tend to push back such as returning non-urgent phone calls, checking documents and reading news articles.

Quality matters. But learning to judge the necessity of high quality is the real talent. For example, an internal memo doesn’t require perfect grammar and punctuation, but using the proper form in addressing all communications with a client, however casual, shows attention to detail and a high level of professionalism. An impeccable workspace is nice to look at, but a merely organized desk will suffice and saves time. If it doesn’t have to be perfect, then don’t waste time making it so – the pursuit of perfection is often just another procrastination tool.

When things do need to be perfect, such as presenting to a client, putting work off until the last minute promotes sloppy presentation and can result in careless execution.

If you feel that you understand the above concepts, but are still always pressed for time, you should consider an aspect most people don’t associate with time management: The ability to say no. When a colleague or boss asks you to help out on a task, remember that you can say no. Your boss’s priorities are not always as important as your own. In fact, superiors often have more respect for employees who stand their ground. If you feel guilty for declining, then end your “no” on a positive note, offering to help out after your own project is completed, or the next time around.

Saying no to clients is difficult, but a valid explanation helps them see why it is sometimes necessary.

“If something cannot be done, or I don’t think it’s a good idea, I’ll tell them,” says Chan. “There’s no point in my executing a horrible idea, and it’s much more efficient to work together to find a solution. Time saved, problem solved.”

Overall, organization is the watchword in using your time properly. Take time to evaluate tasks and projects before doing them. After all, time management isn’t just about getting work done. It’s about improving the quality of your life.