

CHAPTER 3

MANAGING TIME: SOME PRACTICAL TIPS⁴

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Abstract

We get recharged through „*Ibadah* Camp activities every year. „*Ibadah* Camp programme motivates us to follow the imperatives of *Istiqamah*. To remain on the path of *Istiqamah*, we need to manage our time properly. It is a basic responsibility entrusted to all of us. In this essay, I have briefly outlined few ways on how to enhance our time management skills.

Keywords: Time management, *Amanah*, Productivity, Prioritization

Introduction

Every year we embrace „*Ibadah* Camp. The Camp activities enrich our knowledge base, motivate us to better our ibadah and raises our level of *iman*. In the language of quality management, we seek continual improvement in all our mundane activities. We need time to do any our activities. Here comes the urge to manage our time to reap maximum benefits in our life.

It is widely known that time is an *amanah* given to a human being from the Creator Allah (swt). Allah (swt) revealed a complete surah (*Surah Al-Asr*) in the name of time. In a hadith Prophet Muhammad (saw) said that on the Day of Judgement, children of Adam (as) will not be able to step forward, until he/she answers five questions. One

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of these is how he/she spent his/her lifetime in the world. We do not know how much time has been given to us (i.e. our life time) in the world. Then it goes without any argument that we must utilise our time so that we can be successful in this world as well as hereafter.

In the following, a number of tips are provided that aimed at maximising our productivity and benefits.

Practical Tips

- (1) **Self- motivation:** We do not need to go that far to find out that every great person, regardless of his/her area of achievement had a mission in his/her life. The person has worked very hard to realise this mission. Constant pushing someone may not lead the person achieving excellent results. Motivation must come from within. The motivation of managing one's time is not an exception. Charles Garfield, a noted thinker found one thing common among the world class athletes, who have broken world records or world class business-people who have achieved extraordinary business results, that they share extraordinary reserves of energy and they are passionately committed to a mission.

- (2) **Have a to-do list:** One day can be considered as a unit in our life. If we can effectively pass one day, one week, one month, then probably we are going to succeed in our life. There are possibly so many things that can be done in weeks time. Prepare a list of all the activities for a week. This list is called to-do-list. It can be done manually or using some device such as smart phone.

(3) **Prioritization:** It is necessary but not sufficient to have a list of activities. This list must be prioritized into three categories:

- Category A: Must do
- Category B: Should do
- Category C: Can do

As it sounds, the tasks in Category A must be done first. It may take one day or few days to complete all these activities. The Category A tasks must be updated constantly. That is, revise category B activities often and see whether time has come to promote some tasks from B to A. Same goes for the promotion of the tasks in Category C to Category B. Note that this is a dynamic process that needs to be done continuously.

(4) **Planning, Planning, and Planning:** It is not that you only plan for the number of activities, you also need to plan how you will carry out those activities. Alan Lakein said that failing to plan is equivalent to planning to fail.

(5) **Hardest thing first:** One particular day's to-do list should be prepared in the preceding evening or latest by the morning of the particular day. It is extremely important to spend few minutes to prepare this list. This is essential for time management. This is to ensure that we do not forget to carry out some essential activity in that day. So, when the day begins, we have a list of activities. Which activity should be done first? Some say, well, we should begin the day by doing the most important task. True, but there is another suggestion from experts. According to them, first we should carry out the toughest task (which is also an important one that should be

done in that particular day) in the beginning of the day. The rationale is, once the task is done, we can exhale a sigh of relief. The rest of the tasks can be done one after another more comfortably.

(6) **One task at a time:** While some people may think that multi-tasking increases productivity, but it is not. Multi-tasking may lead to loss of focus and quality of outputs of the tasks may be inferior. Imagine that someone is on phone call and at the same time he is typing a memo. Often, we have experienced this in a typical office environment. How can a person concentrate on talking as well as typing at the same time? There is enough possibility of making mistakes in both cases. Note that it is illegal as well as dangerous to attend phone call while someone is driving. World famous management Guru Peter Drucker said that multitasking requires 20% more time to complete the tasks compared to doing one task at a time. Engage your full energy, have your total concentration in doing one activity, finish it and then start the next one.

(7) **No Procrastination:** Procrastination means postponing some activity which is supposed to be completed. In general, procrastination of activity is considered as bad. If it is repeatedly postponed, the activity may emerge as a nightmare. People postpone it due to a possible reason that the task is difficult or requires a long time to finish. Remember that the task may be difficult but if it is important, it must be done. So, better to do it as soon as possible. Again, if you are repeatedly postponing it, then there is a tip for you which is known as –15 minutes rule. This means that you just start the work and think that, well, I am not going to finish it today, but I will do the work just for 15 minutes. You will see that this is a head start of the work and

very soon you will see there is a good headway in completing the task. The choice is yours whether you want to postpone the work for a long time or just start and do it for 15 minutes. It may happen that the work may take much less time compared to what you originally thought and there is enough possibility that the work will be completed soon.

- (8) **Time wasters:** One of the important things in time management is that we identify our time wasters. This may come in the form of some activities that are –excessivell prefixed, i.e., excessive phone calls, excessive dealings with Facebook or excessive socializing. While some sort of socializing is good and recommended but excessive socializing consumes a lot of time. Another big waster is gossiping or watching television program that are not that educative. It is recommended that you call people one after another on a particular time or you can open your e-mail box and reply e-mail at particular time of a day. This will enforce more control on your ancillary activities.
- (9) **A polite „No“:** You maybe already overburdened but new things/requests keep on coming. Perhaps you have reached at the time to politely refuse, just saying no. It is better to say no rather than not being able to complete the task in time or worse yet completing the task with inferior quality. This will also enable you to focus more on the tasks at your hand.
- (10) **Delegate tasks often:** This is especially true for managers or administrators. In fact, it is true for many other kinds of people. If you are spending too much of your time on activities which other people should be doing, then possibly you will not get time to do your core activities. But important thing to

remember is that the task needs to be delegated to the right person who has the necessary skills to carry out the task effectively. In management theory, this is considered as some sort of recognition of the person's skills. Delegating task is a good time management tips as by doing so your overall productivity level can reach to a greater height.

- (11) **Important vs. Urgent works:** 34th American President Dwight D. Eisenhower said all the works that are considered as urgent may not deemed to be important. Stephen R. Covey, a celebrated management guru devised a matrix that puts all types of activities into two categories: Important and Urgent. The design of the matrix is the following Table 3.1 to illustrate important and urgent works.

Table 3.1 Important and Urgent Works

High I m p o r t a n c e Low	Important goals	Critical activities
	Distractions	Interruptions
	Low	High

Many times, people are obsessed to carry out urgent works leaving the important ones. However, if the urgent works have low importance, then those may be considered as interrupters. Perhaps we can negotiate about the delayed deadlines of those acts, if that is at all possible. To maximise our productivity and

achieving our life goals, we should be paying more attention to the important tasks. To do this, obviously, first we need to assign the levels of urgency and importance to all our tasks.

- (12) **Pacing:** Pacing means to keep buffer time for some activity. For example, if your deadline is 30th of September, you assume that your deadline is say 28th of September and have plan to finish by this time. The extra buffer time of two days will allow you to accommodate any eventuality that may emerge in course of doing the task.
- (13) **Use planners:** Use of planners is essential for a person who have to carry out many types of activities. As and when the tasks come, this should be entered at the right date (specifying the time as well) of the planner. However, only important activities are to be entered into the planner. Small-small or petty tasks can come into the to-do list. Do not forget to browse through your planner often.
- (14) **Physical organization:** Be wary about cluttered table. This needs to be put in order. The reason is simple. Searching an important document which is on your table but since there are so many things, sometimes it is hard to find it. So, you lose some time and this kind of search might affect the smooth rhythm of workflow. So, arrange the stuff nicely and put on the table in order.
- (15) **Make use of your waiting time:** Everybody experiences waiting time: while to catch a train or bus or flight or at a government office. Especially, if you are waiting to get your connecting flight, you may have to wait for a long time, sometimes 7 or 8 hours. Always carry something useful with

you, be it within your smartphone apps or clipping of important newspaper articles or simply may be funny story book. Further, you may know that in some particular day you may have some waiting time, so plan a priori how you are going to utilise this time. Use your waiting time by reading the material that you carry or simply do *zikr* of Allah (swt).

(16) **Punctuality:** This is one of the great human qualities. Punctuality is the bedrock of time management. How many times you have seen that the meeting or the seminar did not start in time? Remember that when you are supposed to attend a meeting at 10 o'clock, be there at 9.55 am (pacing concept). If you think that you will reach exactly at 10 o'clock, most probably you will be late for few minutes, as we live in an uncertain world; you may get an important phone call or may meet some friend on the way that may make you late. Do not ever think that, ok, the meeting time is 10 o'clock but I know it will not begin before 10.10, so better I reach at 10.10. No, it is wrong to think in that way.

(17) **Put things in writing:** We listen many things from many people. Put in writing some useful information that is expected to be referred in future. Otherwise, you may forget those, or you have to spend a plenty of time to recover those. So, it will save your time if you develop your habit to put useful information or even new ideas in writing. My friend Professor Thomas Saaty of University of Pittsburgh once said that some night he needs to get up 2-3 times from sleep to put in writing new research ideas that may instantly crop up in his mind even in midnight. This is very true, as his busy mind might forget in the morning what ideas came into his mind in the midnight!

- (18) **Reduce absent-mindedness:** This is easier said than done. This is one of real problems of mine. To certain extent, all of us are absent-minded. In many cases, it happens that we lose inordinate amount of time in looking for stuff which we misplaced. This loss of time can be minimised if we place stuff to its designated location. It is said that we the human beings have our own houses; similarly, everything else has its own house. So, put the stuff in its own house and while searching for it, be in its house. Further, keeping calm and coolness in mind and focusing one work or one thinking at a time, can reduce absent-mindedness.
- (19) **Exercise, good-sleep and healthy diet:** Are these also related to time management? Yes, in a big way. Some of my friends once lamented that we don't have time to do physical exercise, but have enough time to be on hospital bed, unfortunately. Obviously, good sleep and healthy diet are also necessary to keep our brain fresh and body fit. A healthy body is essential to concentrate on our activities so that these activities can be completed at a minimum amount of time and with impeccable quality.
- (20) **Miscellaneous:** Following are some extra tips:
- Arrive mosque early for *jamah* prayer and pray with full concentration with utmost humility
 - Do not forget to spend your quality time with your family members and visiting sick relatives
 - Minimise watching television
 - Gossiping – absolutely no. That does not mean that you do not need to have leisure time. Rather, to energise yourself, you need to have leisure time but use it prudently

- Go to bed at a reasonably fixed time of night and get up everyday at the same time in the morning
- Try to schedule all your phone calls (except emergency ones) at a particular time of a day
- To avoid disturbance in doing some important work, either switch off or put your mobile phone in silent mode
- Have a wall-clock in front of you
- Be flexible so that eventualities can be accommodated in your schedule
- Spend about 10 minutes at the beginning of your day on what activities from your to-do list you intend to carry out in that day, sequence them and start doing one by one.

Conclusion

In conclusion, managing time is equivalent to managing one's life and a life is a full of activities. It is hoped that the tips discussed in this article can help in carrying out our day-to-day activities so that we can attain our ultimate success in both worlds. However, success does not come overnight; it requires a meticulous plan and its execution with patience, persistence, and perseverance.