



BCF Group

**TIME MANAGEMENT  
TECHNIQUES TO  
IMPROVE YOUR  
WORK/LIFE BALANCE**



Time is really the only capital that any human being has,  
and the only thing he can't afford to lose.

**Thomas Edison**



# INTRODUCTION

Too much to do and not enough time to do it in?

We get it. And we hear it a lot.

The delegates on our leadership and management skills courses often tell us that time always feels like it is in short supply.

Every minute counts in the increasingly fast-paced world of work.

We can't give you more hours in your day.

But this eBook will give you the tools to manage your valuable time better. And you can use them straight away.

# WHY SHOULD YOU TAKE THE TIME TO LISTEN TO US?

**Good question.**

**After all, your time is precious. You can't afford to waste it.**

**Over the past 24 years we have helped thousands of people to take control of their working lives and become more effective and efficient leaders and managers.**

Many of our clients have asked us to improve their work / life balance or increase their business performance so they feel less stressed or anxious about their work and workload.

Time management skills are an essential part of many of our courses, particularly during our leadership and management training courses, where they feature on our [ILM \(Institute of Learning and Management\) Level 3 and 5 courses](#) and our [First Line Management](#) training.

Established in 2001, we've delivered training to everyone from household name brands to public sector organisations and charities.

**In the following pages of this eBook, we will explore:**

- Why time management is so important
- Time management tools, techniques, strategies, wisdom and quick tips for success you can use now
- How to better prioritise your workload and develop more purposeful priorities

All you need is an open mind.

Try the different time management approaches and discover the ones that work for you.

We are confident that investing a little time in this eBook will save you more time in the future and give you greater control of your work life.

# WHY IS TIME MANAGEMENT SO IMPORTANT?

Sounds like a bit of a weird question at the start of an eBook on time management.

But it is crucial to explore the implications of poor time management.

When we manage time badly, it can weigh us down. It increases the risk of stress, anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, sleep issues, ineffectiveness, bad decision-making, poor performance and strained relationships.

It can also put other team members under more pressure and impacts overall productivity and employee retention.

At the extreme end, poor time management can lead to burnout, where people suffer physical or mental illness.

It's why time management is explored during all our courses. Everyone wants to make the most of their time and work more effectively.

**In a work environment, there are many different threats to our time, including:**

- Endless emails
- Office distractions
- Managing last-minute diary changes
- Meetings, meetings and more meetings
- Procrastination
- Forgetting or failing to delegate
- Perfectionism
- Trouble identifying priorities
- Taking on too much

And none of this considers your home and family life.

# GAINING BETTER CONTROL OF YOUR TIME

**While the implications of poor time management can be severe, the better news is that time management is a learnable skill.**

There are seven simple and effective steps you can take now to better manage your time.

And it begins with something one of our expert tutors describes as a “game changer”.

Shall we get into it?



# 1. PLAN THE DAY AHEAD THE NIGHT BEFORE

A great way to improve your time management is by improving your planning.

Before you finish your day's work, spend the last few minutes planning what you need to do the next day.

We know you can't plan for every eventuality – and things can change overnight.

But this approach sets you up well. It allows you to focus on your priorities, reduces the risk of surprises and enables you to hit the ground running when you start work again.

It means you don't waste the start of the day trying to remember the vital things you need to be getting on with or becoming distracted by the newest items in your box.

And that's not the end of the benefits.

It also means you are not stressing overnight because you have a clear plan of attack for the next day.

And reducing stress means better sleep which leads to increased efficiency when at work the next day.



## 2. EFFECTIVENESS WITH PEOPLE - EFFICIENCY WITH THINGS

**“Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.”**

Does that quote feel relatable?

It comes from Stephen Covey, the author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, which sold over 45 million copies.

It is about using your time effectively by focusing on getting tasks done so you are better placed to give people the time, energy and effort they deserve, ensuring you communicate clearly and listen actively to them.

Dan Boniface, one of our expert tutors, recently said about this:

“When you are working on things, get them done. That doesn’t mean lowering standards. But sometimes, when working on a project or task, it may not need to be 100 per cent completed. Sometimes 90 per cent is a job well done.

“You have to make judgement calls – but give people the time they need.”

# HOW CAN YOU BE MORE EFFICIENT WITH THINGS?

Good planning, as we've just outlined, is essential. Thinking about tomatoes is another excellent method. Pomodoro is the Italian word for tomato, and the Pomodoro technique is an approach many use.

It was developed by Francesco Cirillo. And the technique takes its name after the Pomodoro-shaped kitchen timer he used to track the progress of his work.

The technique involves breaking work into intervals – normally 25 minutes – followed by five-minute breaks to improve concentration levels and avoid mental fatigue.

We'll talk more about that later in this eBook, but you will have different attention spans for different tasks.

Ultimately, you need to find what works for you.

Laura Bridgeman, one of our senior leadership and management trainers, has recognised that her concentration levels begin to waver after two hours and 14 minutes.

That seem like a weirdly specific length of time. But that's because she has trained her brain to stay focused for the length of time it takes her washing machine to complete a full wash cycle.

When the machine pings she then takes what she calls a 'washing and wellness break' from her work.



### 3. ELEPHANTS, FROGS AND MONKEYS

You might think at this point that your eBook has gone off on a strange tangent.

First, there were Italian tomatoes, and now we are going on about animals.

However, these are different analogies and metaphors used to promote better time management.

Let's start with the monkey business as it explains why middle and senior managers are often time-poor.

The idea is we have a monkey on our back, which symbolises the tasks and projects we are working on.

And then someone comes to us and says, 'I have this problem that I don't know how to resolve'.

Typically, managers respond to this by saying something like, 'Leave it with me', because they feel they can do it quicker than how long it takes to train someone to solve it. So, they take that monkey on.

And then someone else comes to them with an issue, and they take that on as well.

Now, they have their monkey and two others on their back. Let's say you've got 10 people in your team.

You can quickly find a troop of monkeys climbing on your back.

How can you better deal with these pesky monkeys and their time-consuming antics?

It might cost you some time initially. But showing someone how to tackle and solve the problem will mean you get more time back in return in the long term.

And, crucially, you are empowering your team to solve more of the issues and challenges they face.



# ELEPHANTS

What about elephants?

Well, this is based on a quote often attributed to Desmond Tutu.

He said: “There is only one way to eat an elephant: a bite at a time.”

The idea is that we get overwhelmed by a big project or task and need to break it down into small chunks.

Even if you wanted to, you could not eat an elephant in one go. You’d have to do it a little bit at a time.

During our business coaching courses, we talk about the first next step – the next thing you need to do.

For example, if you think about conflict management and difficult conversations, your mind probably goes straight to meeting with that person. And it can feel like a daunting task.

But that’s not the first next step.

The first next step is booking the meeting.

The next step after that is planning what you have to say. The meeting is probably four or five steps down the line.

Breaking tasks into small chunks gets the ball rolling.

What initially seemed daunting begins to feel achievable. And the finish line appears closer.



# FROGS

And then there is the frog.

Mark Twain once said: “Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day.”

Who knew better time management was so closely linked to eating animals and famous quotes?

Anyway, what this means is you should tackle that task you have been putting off first.

We all have those tasks we don't want to do. But once it is done, you can tick it off and get on with the rest of your day.

If you do it the other way around and leave it until last, you may run out of time, and it carries over to the next day.

And it plays on your mind all day. You can't focus if you have something heavy weighing on your mind.



## 4. START WITH THE END IN MIND

When you begin a task, it can feel overwhelming and unachievable.

And most of us start with the here and now – the bits we need to do immediately.

But a better approach for time management is to think about the endgame of each project or task.

Then, you can work backwards from that point and break down what needs to happen to achieve that overall goal.

If you have a big deadline, work back from that point and work out what you must have done at certain stages.

Now, the task is split into sections that feel much more manageable, with smaller deadlines.

And there is a sense of achievement as you complete each one.

## 5. BUILD POSITIVE HABITS

'Habits' is a word that often comes with negative connotations.

Smoking, drinking and overeating are generally considered to be 'bad' habits.

But habits don't have to be bad for you.

A good way of avoiding the daily race against the clock is to build routines that become habits.

It is about exploring the approaches and methods that work for you and building on them, so you do them automatically.

This allows us to make marginal gains – the one per cent improvements that add up and make a difference.

These habits must be obvious. If you find something hard to follow, it is unlikely to form as a habit.

It also needs to be something you want to do, and there must be a sense of achievement from accomplishing that habit.

Dan, one of our tutors we quoted earlier, said: "I like to get through the quick wins first. If I have 10 things I need to do in the day, ticking off six or seven of them gets me off to a great start.

"The two-minute rule is another excellent habit. If it takes two minutes, get it done now while it is fresh in your mind. Otherwise, it will keep slipping to the bottom of the list, and you will not get to it."

Forming new habits is not always easy.

But habit stacking can make the process smoother. It is about identifying your habits that work well and then attaching – or stacking new ones to them.

For example, let's say you always start your working day with a coffee. You could stack on to that getting through those quick wins we just spoke about while you have the drink.

The more you do this stacking, the more automatic it becomes, and you begin to do it without thinking about it.

## 6. SELF-DISCIPLINE

Imagine that feeling when you are in the zone, fully focused, your complete attention is on the task at hand, and you get through it quicker.

It's called flow state, a phrase coined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. And it describes that sweet spot where you are immersed in your task.

Self-discipline is integral to it.

You must eliminate distractions like the notifications that can pull on your attention. Are they helping in your role and staying focused or taking you off task?

Why? Because once the flow state is broken, it can take 15 minutes to get back into it, which negates its time-saving benefits.

It is also crucial to appreciate that you have different attention spans for different tasks. You are more likely to achieve the flow state with the tasks you enjoy and find it trickier with those that are monotonous.

Get to recognise your limit for different tasks and when you are at your best. For example, are you more productive in the morning or more of a night owl? Are you more focused during lunchtime when the office is quiet?

And deal with one task at a time rather than trying to multi-task.

Regular breaks are also essential. You can't schedule every minute of the day.

Build breaks into your schedule and stick to them.

## 7. PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

This time management technique is all about how you prioritise your tasks and maximise your productivity.

It is called The Eisenhower Matrix or Urgent Vs Important. It is based on how former US President Dwight D Eisenhower organised his tasks.

He once said: “I have two kinds of problems, the urgent and the important.

“The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent.”

The result is a simple framework that divides work into four categories: Urgent and important, important not urgent, urgent not important, and not important and not urgent.

### **Urgent and important**

The things you need to do now.

### **Important not urgent**

Important tasks that are not urgent. These are the things we often put off.

### **Urgent not important**

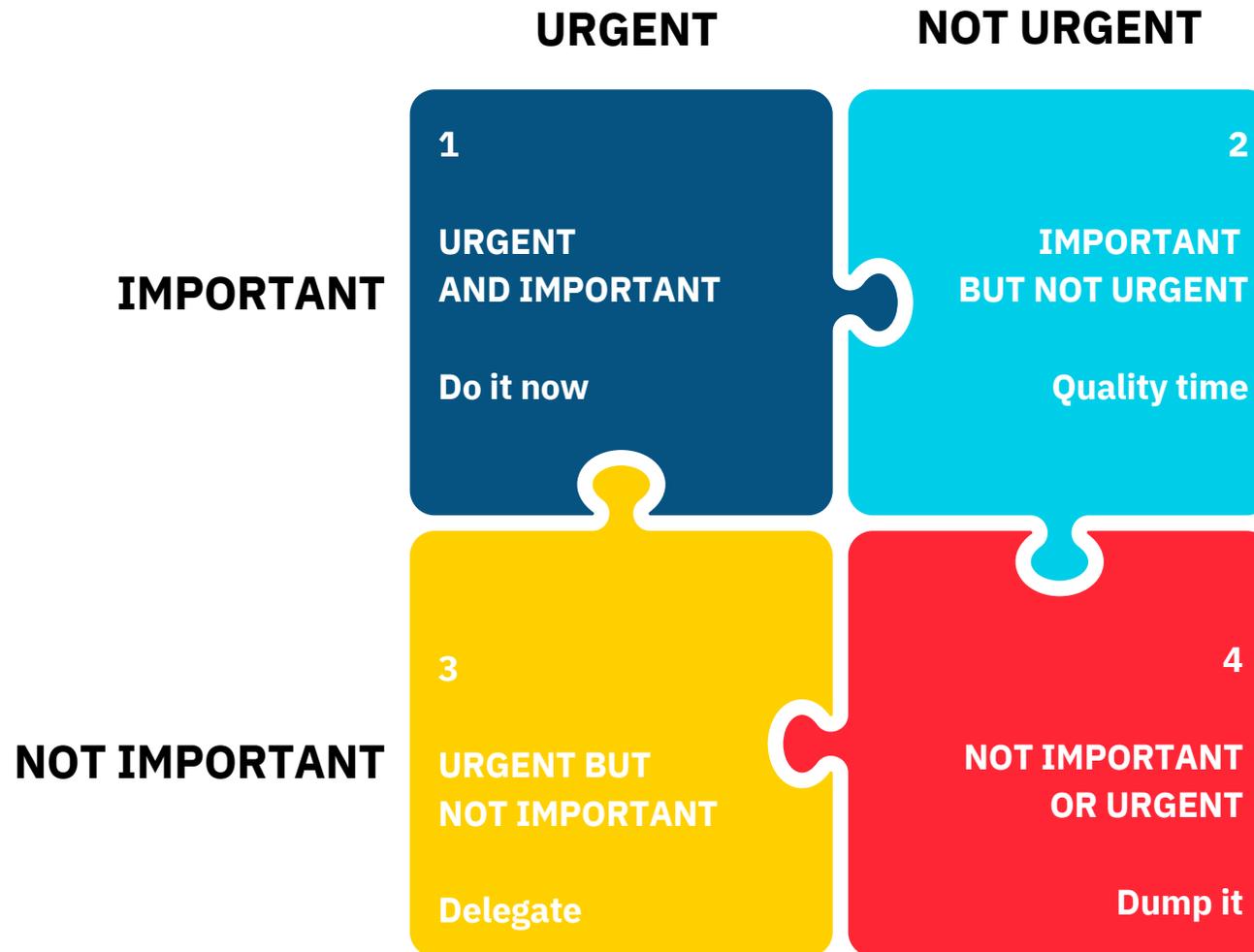
These are tasks that need to be done quickly but could be done by someone else. They are the tasks that could be delegated.

### **Not important and not urgent**

Tasks that take up time and that we don't need to do. The things at the bottom of your to-do list that never get done.



# THE EISENHOWER MATRIX



# THE EISENHOWER MATRIX

Of course, in the workplace, what is 'urgent' and 'important' can be a bit murky. Everything can feel immediate and vital.

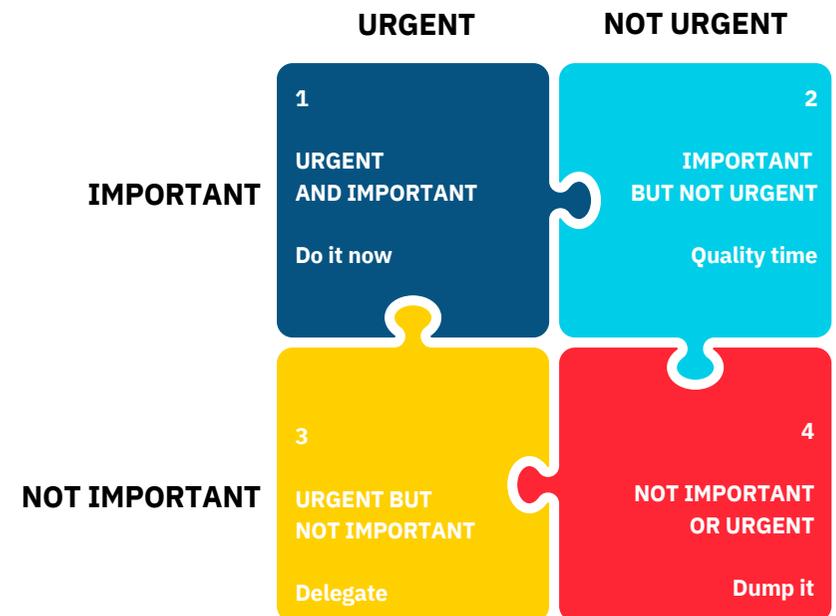
Nevertheless, it is a great way to focus on your workload, think about and prioritise your tasks – and their outcomes - and identify the things distracting you from them.

It is a massive upgrade on those scribbled 'to-do' lists most of us fall into the trap of relying on.

What about if you don't have anyone to delegate those 'urgent not important' tasks to?

Not everyone has direct reports.

But there will be work you can push back on and say 'no' to. You can also explain to others that if you take this work on, something else will not get done or will need to be pushed back.”



## 5 BONUS TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS

The seven techniques and strategies outlined in this eBook are all things we believe you can put in place immediately, so you can quickly see improvements in your time management.

But it is by no means an exhaustive list. So here are 5 more bonus tips to help you be even more efficient and effective with your use of time.

Here are some other approaches you could consider:

### Assertiveness

We've probably all been in a position where we have reluctantly agreed to take on a task or project. And quickly regretted it.

Saying 'no' feels uncomfortable and will not work in every situation. But it can be crucial to managing your time more effectively.

Saying 'no' is likely to be better received if you give an explanation. Show that you have considered the request and then outline why you can't do it.

### Pause

This is closely linked to saying 'no'.

How many times have you instantly agreed to do something and then quickly regretted it?

It happens a lot. Taking a pause can help avoid this. It gives you time to consider whether you can take on the task and its impact on your existing work.

Can you give it your full attention?

It also helps show you have carefully considered the request. If you can't take it on, explain why and suggest alternatives.

## Create a 'done' list

We are all familiar with 'to-do' lists.

But what about a 'done' one?

The idea here is to keep track of those tasks that come in during the day and distract from your 'to-do' list.

It can remove the frustration of not making the progress you wanted with your to-do list.

It helps you keep track of all the things you do, and it is a handy reminder that you have not wasted time being unproductive.

## Pad your time

Back-to-back meetings are a workplace nightmare. And they can seriously eat into your time.

Adding time around meetings in your calendar can avoid back-to-back ones being scheduled.

Even a 15- to 30-minute break gives you time to reflect on the meetings you've had and what you need to do as a result, check unread emails, or work through some of those quick wins we discussed earlier.

## There's an app for that

There are many, many apps that can help you improve your time management.

My Minutes, for example, enables you to set a maximum or minimum of time to put into a task.

Ever wondered where the time has gone? RescueTime measures and tracks what you do on computers and mobiles.

Do you find your phone is your biggest distraction? Forest could help. When you want to maintain focus, you plant a (virtual) tree. And it grows on the screen as you complete your task.

If you lose focus and leave the app, your tree withers and dies. As you progress, you collect coins you can use to plant a real tree.

So, there are time management and environmental benefits too.

# FINAL THOUGHTS

Every moment counts in our modern, fast-paced world of work.

Time management matters in every industry and role.

None of us can slow down time. Or gain more of it.

But you now have some techniques and strategies to help you better manage your time inside and outside work, boost your productivity and motivation, and meet your deadlines.

If you'd like to learn more about these techniques and how you can implement them to regain control of your time, get in touch with us to find out more about our leadership, management and coaching courses.

That sounds like time well spent to us.

# WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT OUR TRAINING

Our clients know time with us is time well spent.

We have a 4.8 star rating on [CourseCheck](#), the 'go to' evaluation for training providers.

## Here is a snapshot of what our delegates have been saying:

“Thank you very much for the course, it was really useful, great content always explained by good examples. Positive attitude and friendly environment made me to feel good and absorb all the information delivered.”

**Ina A**

“Great course, very thought provoking, stimulated thinking whilst being very enjoyable, thank you.”

**Paula R**

“Wow! This course was so informative and insightful. I've come away with so much knowledge, enthusiasm, confidence that I'm ready to share with my colleagues in my organisation. It's been inspiring and validating for my own personal leadership journey. Laura was a fantastic trainer, clear in delivering content, helping me to understand the different techniques and theories and giving real world examples and allowing me the space to also share anecdotal stories in relation to what we were discussing. Thoroughly enjoyed and recommend - thank you!”

**Rachel S**

“The course was great! There was a good combination of anecdotes, theory and self-reflection which really helped me consolidate my understanding of each concept. I've come away feeling confident and excited to try out new management and leadership techniques.”

**Alice B**

## ABOUT US

For the past 25 years, we have been helping organisations develop their talent, inspire their people and overcome obstacles and challenges.

We do this by delivering training that makes a difference.

We spend time getting to know our clients and listening to them so that we have a good understanding of what they want their delegates to achieve and the challenges and obstacles they need to overcome.

For some, the best option will be our ILM accredited training. Others will benefit more from something bespoke.

Whatever option works best for your organisation and delegates, your training will be delivered by trainers who have worked with some of the country's leading organisations and most senior business leaders.

**If you'd like to find out more about our training courses, get in touch:**

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BCF Group