



It's About Time

The myths and realities of time management

Have you ever heard of Pareto's Principle, or Pareto's Law as it's sometimes called? It's the 80/20 Rule, and it's based on the principle that 20 per cent of anything is always responsible for 80 per cent of the results. It caught on in the late 1940's and still remains relevant today. You can successfully and easily apply the 80/20 Rule to almost anything — including time management.

The value of the 80/20 Rule, as it relates to time management, is that it serves as a daily reminder to focus time and energy on the 20 per cent of the work that really matters. In turn, this 20 per cent can produce 80 per cent of the required results.

Mastering this Rule, and incorporating it into your work, can be a powerful tool to keep you organised and efficient, especially when you are under the pressure of tight deadlines. The key thing to understand is, that 'time management' is really about 'self-management.' It's about learning how to leverage the time that you have; for example, how you plan, prioritise, delegate and organise your daily activities.

There are a number of tools and techniques that you can use to help incorporate the 80/20 Rule into your workday. But, in order to understand how to apply these, it's important to recognise and overcome a few of the more commonly accepted myths we sometimes adopt, in relation to our ability to produce and perform.

Myth number 1: "I work best under pressure, so I put things off until the last minute."

Some people convince themselves that pressure stimulates creative thinking and productivity. In fact, nobody is at his or her best under pressure. Procrastination only makes things worse. The more you avoid a task, and therefore reduce the amount of time available to properly complete it, the more unpleasant the task becomes.

Instead, try breaking down larger projects into smaller, more manageable activities. Then try working on each task in short bursts. Not only will the 'bite-size' activities help make the task seem much less daunting, these short bursts of activity will help you overcome your resistance to starting the project.

Myth number 2: "I get twice as much done when I multitask."

Be careful when you multitask. While doing this can be both necessary and, at times, a real lifesaver, it can also quickly spin out of control and impair your ability to complete any one task effectively. Researchers have discovered that when you multitask, you do two things worse, than you would do if you did just one. Not only do you lose time when you switch back and forth from one task to another, the speed at which you perform each task decreases.

The bottom line is that the brain isn't set up to do two things at once effectively. And for many people, frequent multi-tasking only leads to cluttered workspaces and multiple, half-finished projects. Try to block out the time required to accomplish each individual task, and concentrate only on the task at hand. If any given task requires an extended period of time, you can help by 'resetting' your brain with five to ten minute breaks every hour or so.

Myth number 3: "I'm too busy to get organised."

The truth is that you're too busy not to get organised: One sure way to guarantee that you don't use your time effectively is to surround yourself with unnecessary clutter and disorganisation. As a matter of fact, the average worker loses at least one hour a day looking for misplaced information or materials. Not only is this a huge drain on your time and energy, it can lead to distraction, frustration and produce unnecessary stress.

If you need to 'de-clutter,' you can help make this seem less daunting by not trying to do everything at once. Divide your workspace into small, manageable areas to be 'de-cluttered.' As you work on each area, choose one of the following four actions:

- refer it to someone else;
- act on it;
- file it; or
- toss it.