

Checklist for Busy Executives
10 tips for better time management, efficiency and organization

by Mary Sigmann, Certified Professional Organizer ®

1. "Bookend" your day with planning and organization.

When you start your day with a plan and an organized office, you are able to hit the ground running and accomplish so much more. Each morning, review and revise your "to do" list. At the end of the day straighten up your work space and create your schedule for the following day.

2. Focus on the task at hand.

It is hard to do more than one task well at a time. Put your energy into doing one thing right and move on to the next thing when you are done. If necessary, keep a running list of what needs to be done as new tasks pop up.

3. Set aside a block of uninterrupted time during the day.

Let everyone you work with know that you are unavailable for phone calls, appointments or questions and during this time. Use your undisturbed time to reorganize or for catching up on tasks you usually don't have time for.

4. Take control of your email.

Delete emails on a regular basis, check email only at designated intervals, and keep as little in your in-box as possible. If you feel like you are drowning in emails, set aside a block of time just for the task of getting them under control.

5. Develop a "short call" mindset.

Courtesy is expected in business conversation, but you can still make brevity your intention without being rude. Replace, "How are you?" with "How may I help you?" Open-ended questions like, "How are you?" invite lengthier responses.

6. Establish boundaries on how long you will allow meetings to last.

The key to an effective (and brief) meeting is preparation. Let everyone know ahead of time how long the meeting will last, the topics that will be addressed, and the information you expect each person to contribute. Stick to the plan and discourage sidetracking.

- 7. Make a single page list of frequently called phone numbers and post it near your phone.**

It takes more time than you realize to look up a number on your computer or rolodex. Have the numbers you need most often at the tip of your dialing finger.

- 8. Group similar tasks for maximum efficiency.**

Returning phone calls, answering emails, writing personal notes, and running errands are all categories of tasks that are done more easily if grouped together. When you make one phone call it is easier to just keep moving down the list.

- 9. Keep separate in-boxes for different categories of papers.**

Try separating your papers into these categories: items that are immediate and important; items that are "on hold" or pending; items that are ready to be filed, passed on to someone else or reviewed at a later time. Keep the in-boxes on a surface near your desk.

- 10. Keep your desk clutter-free.**

Keep your stapler, tape dispenser, extra pens and other supplies in a drawer rather than on top of your desk. Display photos, awards and knickknacks on walls or shelves, and reserve the top of your desk for the essentials - your telephone, computer, and today's paperwork.

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