Executive Report

Making Every Minute Count

How Researchers Can Fit 28 Hours in a 24-Hour Day

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Product Manager: Stephanie Lane   
Service Specialist: Jackie Passamani
VP: Lacy Gaskins   
President: Samantha Saldukas

Training Leader
1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW #7601, Suite 26526
Washington, DC 20044
Phone: 800-303-0129 • Fax: 800-230-2794
E-mail: info@pileader.com
Website: www.pileader.com

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EXPERT SPEAKER BIO:

DR. DONALD WETMORE

Dr. Don Wetmore has been in the field of Personal Productivity and Time Management for over thirty years. He created the Productivity Institute to assist professionals around the globe with their most challenging personal productivity and time management issues. His goal is to help everyone find more time in their day and be more productive.

During the past thirty years, Dr. Wetmore has helped more than 100,000 professionals at over 2,000 venues around the world improve their time management and personal productivity skills. Over the years, he has adapted his presentation to target specific industries to ensure unique industry needs are met. Dr. Wetmore’s presentations are always entertaining, humorous and down-to-earth, motivating his audiences to advance their own lives and reach their goals.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

How often have you said to yourself: “I surely could use another hour today?”

The trick is making small changes here and there that can add up to that much time savings and even more.

Let me give you a good concrete example:

*Today is the information age. You get more information thrown at you than your great grandparents saw in a lifetime. Information is power, and certainly, in research, it’s critical to get the right kinds of information. The average professional, such as yourself, spends about two hours a day reading emails and other material. You probably read at about 200 words per minute. What if you could double your reading speed?*

*By taking a speed reading course, you could cut the amount of time you spend reading in half and save yourself an hour every day. So, you can see why making small changes can have a big impact over time.*

Suppose you want to gain just one more productive hour in the lab each workday. That adds up to about six extra weeks of productive working time a year — time that can make a big difference in your research and your scientific career.

To add that extra hour to every one of your days, try these 13 basic strategies:

1. **Create a Prioritized To-Do List.**
   
   Try categorizing your “to-do” list by the importance of each item from A to D.

   **Mark your most CRUCIAL items with an “A.”**

   You’re the only one who can determine what goes into this category. Choose “A” items based on your commitments and responsibilities to others. You’ll also want to consider the balance you’re trying to create, your goals, and your "want-to's" in life.
Mark your IMPORTANT items with a “B.”
If you had a chance to choose between doing an A or a B item, you’d obviously want to work on the A first.

Mark your MINIMAL VALUE items with a “C.”
Most likely, you’re not going to get your C’s completed on any particular day, but that’s OK because everything else by definition is going to have a higher value.

Mark your items with NO IMPORTANCE with a “D.”
What do you do if you find you have a D on your list? Try to get rid of it. By its very meaning, it has no significance. You may not be able to eliminate every D, but those you do will give you a mental boost just for getting them off your back.

   If you know what you need to do tomorrow, you’ll sleep better tonight. By routinely planning the night before, you’ll be more rested and focused to start the new day.

   The person who works in a messy environment will spend anywhere from an hour to 90 minutes each day either looking for things or being distracted by things. Having to deal with a messy environment can rob you of vital time and energy from important work. It can lead to 10 to 15 percent of your workweek going down the drain never to be retrieved.

4. Digest Each Task Individually.
   CHALLENGE: You have a big written proposal that’s going to take about three months to complete. The solution lies in the answer to this question:

   “How do you eat an elephant?” The answer is: “One bite at a time.”
Use the first 20 minutes of your day to create an outline and a list of resources, and then write down the next portion the next day. It might take you four or five days, but you can consume that elephant one bite at a time.

5. **Eat the Crust.**

If you have something unpleasant to do and you schedule it for later in the day — just as you might save the crust of the pie for last — you give yourself all day to think of reasons not to do it and allow yourself to procrastinate.

6. **Assign Deadlines.**

If you give a task a deadline, you'll get it done. If you don't assign a deadline, it may not get done for a long time, if ever.

7. **Don’t Be Late.**

Organize yourself to arrive a few minutes early in the morning to get set up, or get to the meeting early to ensure you’re prepared. The alternative to being early is to be late. If you're late, you increase any tendency to procrastinate.

8. **Read the First Page.**

If you have something long and tedious to read, perhaps a long scientific journal article, make an agreement with yourself to read the first page. Before you know it, you will have finished all of it. There’s something about getting over the first-page “hump” that can launch you on your way.

9. **Avoid the Curse of Perfectionism.**

Depending on the task at hand, the 80/20 Rule can be a lifesaver. Basically, put in 20 percent of your time and achieve 80 percent of your result, and then move on. Sure, there are some tasks this can’t apply to (like your grant applications), but when you can use it, you’ll save a ton of time.
However, if you suffer from the curse of perfectionism, 80 percent is never enough; your results always must be perfect. That means it can cost another 80 percent of your remaining time to get that extra 20 percent of the result, making it 16 times more “expensive” in scarce minutes. **If it’s worth it, go for it. If not, let it go.**

10. **Delegate, Delegate, Delegate.**

Sharing the load will make you much more productive. The hardest part about delegating is simply letting go of control. Once you get over that, it usually works like a charm.

You can also try “**reverse delegation.**” If a tech or grad student comes to you asking for help to solve a problem that will take time away from your work, ask the person what they would do. Whatever the problem, ask, **“What do YOU think? Come on, you’ve solved problems like that before. What is YOUR best idea of a solution?”**

The word “you” is very powerful — a word of empowerment that helps people grow. Alternately, “I” is a weak word that creates dependency. Surprise! Often, when challenged, the questioner himself will come up with a solution that you can endorse.

You can always delegate some work to a family member, friend or colleague — usually people will help if you simply ask. Maybe hire someone like an undergrad student to help with necessary outside errands like putting gas in your car, dropping off or picking up your dry cleaning. Enlisting someone to do these things can add as much as 10-15 hours to your workweek.

Remember, if you want to get everything done, you don’t always have to do it yourself, especially if you’re pressed for time. Hand some things off.

11. **Avoid Meeting Overload.**

Meetings are among the biggest institutional time wasters. So, before you attend your next meeting, ask yourself these questions:

- **Is it essential that I attend this meeting?**
- **Is this meeting really necessary?**