Own Your Time: 8 Essential Calendar Management Skills

Setting boundaries is the key to keeping your calendar under control.

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You may not realize it, but your calendar habits can make or break your success and your productivity. That's because without proper calendar management you aren't able to be as focused and productive as you should be.

With that in mind, here are eight ways that you can own your calendar like a boss.

1. Consolidate

When it comes to calendars we all have our own preferences. Some people still rely on a paper agenda. Others make the most of giant wall calendars. And, there are those who can't live without an online calendar app.

There's no right or wrong calendar as long as it keeps you organized and productive. But you will usually be able to find one that feels good to you.

The problem is that with some calendars you may feel that there are too many options. Maybe you have one appointment jotted down in your agenda and another that's been automatically added to your online calendar. As a result, you get easily confused and start double-booking.

In order to manage your calendar like a pro, consolidate to just one calendar. This way you have everything in one location.

The same goes with your entire productivity toolkit. The less, the better.

I use one calendar (Google Calendar), one task manager (Wunderlist), and one Moleskine notebook. However, I begun experimenting with bullet journaling to limit my productivity tools even more. This way I'm not switching back-and-forth between my calendar, to-do-lists, and notes.

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2. Create a routine.

Before I go to bed every night I have clear idea on what my day is going to be like tomorrow. I have at least a general understanding about what next week, month, and even next year will look like. The reason? I use my online calendar to create and stick to a daily routine.

In my calendar I have specific blocks of time set aside for specific activities so that I'm trying to figure out how to spend my time. I already know well in-advance. This keeps my calendar organized since I'm not overlapping tasks or meeting. It also guarantees that I remain productive because if it's not planned I don't do it. Here are a few time management books for helping with this.

3. Group similar activities in blocks.

How many times have you been in the middle of working on a project only to stop because you need to attend a meeting or

respond to an email? That definitely hinders your productivity. That’s because when we get interrupted it takes about 25 minutes to resume the task at hand.

To make sure that you stay on track, stop multitasking and start single tasking by:

- Scheduling and grouping similar activities together, aka batching. This helps you enter a flow state, reduces stress, saves time, and keeps you focused and energetic since you’re not switching between tasks. For example, block out a specific time in your calendar to respond to emails and another block for undisturbed work.
- Schedule similar meetings on the same day so that you remain in that flow. Also, the information is still fresh in your mind.
- Schedule blocks of free time, as well as blocks for rest and lunch. This gives you a chance to rest, refocus, and recharge so that you can power through the rest of the day.

4. Optimize time for various meetings.

Whenever scheduling a meeting the default is always an hour in your online calendar. The thing is, you don’t always need to set aside that much time for every meeting.

For example, for an introductory meeting your schedule a ten-minute phone call. This way you can get right to point. More importantly, if you feel that the relationship isn’t beneficial you only used-up ten minutes of your day.

If you already know the person, then block out 45 minutes, along with 15 minutes of travel, to catch up them at a nearby coffee shop. If you’re sharing advice, keep that conversation to 10-15 minutes. Only hold weekly staff meetings that are

between 20-30 minutes.

Those are times that work best for me.

The idea is that not only meetings require the same amount of time. Before setting a meeting in stone, determine what the ideal block of time that should be set aside.This way you're only scheduling the appropriate amount of time in your schedule for the meeting. Here are a few other time managment hacks to help you through your meetings.

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5. Eliminate back-to-back appointments.

Speaking of meetings – stop scheduling those back-to-back appointments. This is a surefire way to guarantee that you'll be late for your second meeting. That's because some meetings run longer than expected, you need several minutes to prepare, or you get stuck in traffic.

I try to have at least a 15-minute buffer time between meetings – 30 if I'm going to a different location. This gives me a chance to catch my breath, refocus and ensure that I'm never late to a meeting.

6. Clear the clutter.

Want to lose complete control of your calendar? Let it get so full of clutter that it is bursting at the seams.

This would means that your calendar is full of:

- Standing meetings, like "check-ins."
- Meetings without an agenda or purpose.
- Recurring events and commitments that no longer fit into

your schedule.
- Filling your calendar with minute tasks.
- Scheduling activities that are second nature, like walking your dog first thing in the morning.
- Learn to delegate.

Take a couple of minutes and clear that clutter for your calendar. It will keep it lean, mean, and much easier to manage.

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7. Just say “no.”

If you’re constantly saying “yes” to each and every request and invite then expect your calendar to become jam-packed with tasks and events that aren’t your own. In other words, instead of having blocks of time for your work, they’re filled with helping other people finish their work. Instead of having your weekends open to go hiking or take a cooking class, you’re going to party after party.

This doesn’t mean you can’t ever say “yes.” It means setting boundaries so that your calendar remains in your control.

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8. Conduct a weekly review.

This is a principle from David Allen’s book “Getting Things Done,” and the concept goes as follows:

“From a practical standpoint, here is the three-part drill that [makes up the Weekly Review]: get clear, get current, and get creative. Getting clear will ensure all your collected stuff is processed. Getting current will ensure that all your

orienting "maps" or lists are reviewed and up-to-date. The creative part happens to some degree automatically, as you get clear and current."

So before filling your calendar-up with standing appointments, conduct a your own Weekly Review where you:

- Review the Past. Look over last week's calendar. You may have overlooked something like sending a follow-up email.
- Review Plans for the Future. This will remind you of any upcoming appointments or meetings so that you'll be prepared.
- Starts Your Week on a Good Mindset. Reviewing your calendar on a Sunday night or Monday morning ensures that you'll proactive and prepared for the upcoming week.

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