

Time Management

Ask Dr. Sharon



By Dr. Sharon Lamm Hartman

Do you ever feel like there are not enough hours in your day? Dr. Sharon tackles your To-Do list with tips on how to manage your minutes.

Q. Help! I am feeling overwhelmed. I have so many items on my to-do list and I don't know where to start.

A. Feeling overwhelmed can add more stress to any situation. Get perspective by taking a 10-minute break to do some deep breathing, a short meditation, or take a walk. With our minds clearer, it's easier to be productive. Make sure your to-do list is in order. Here are some steps I use:

- Break the larger tasks into smaller tasks. For example, the first step in writing a presentation might be to write an outline and get a good quote to start you off.
- Which tasks can be executed only by you? List those, and then delegate the others if possible. Independent women need to remember that their support systems are there to help, whether they are family members, temporary agencies, co-workers, or assistants. For example, if you have a busy work week ahead, hire an errand runner to help out at home.
- What tasks are essential to meeting your goals and commitments to your business, your clients, and the people you care about? Every task is not of equal importance. Identify the most important ones and move them to the top of the list.
- Assign time frames and due dates to each item.

Q. Why am I always the last to leave the office? My co-workers have no problem interrupting me throughout the day, yet they are the ones to leave promptly at 5 p.m. and I am still here at 7 p.m.

A. Women have been taught for years to be nice, but in the business world, being nice may make it difficult to say “no” or set boundaries. At work, it is your responsibility to put your commitment to your job first. If a coworker interrupts you when you are working, let them know that it is not a good time to talk. Find a time to meet when you can be more present for them. Remember, when we drop in on someone unscheduled, it is always proper etiquette to ask if they have the time to meet, even if it's for a moment.

Q. My boss keeps telling me that I need to prioritize more efficiently. I would love to do this better, but I am always in a reactive state. How does one prioritize when they are always putting out fires?

A. First, listen to your boss and take an hour or two to prioritize. If you are always putting out fires, chances are that you are spending time on tasks that seem urgent but overall may not be important to you. Steven Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, defines important priorities as those that contribute to your mission, values and high-priority goals. Before you prioritize your tasks, take time to define your mission, values and goals in your professional life. With the awareness of what is important to you, examine your daily tasks and get a fresh perspective on which of the many “urgent” items you are faced with truly require your immediate attention and which of them can be delegated or removed from your list. Priorities change with the ebb and flow of our lives. When you spend at least a third of your time in the “important” but not “urgent” category, you will be working to reach your long-term high-priority goals.

Q. I have a friend who is always 15 to 30 minutes late. It drives me crazy, and she just says, “If it's important enough, I will be on time.”

A. Your first option is to set boundaries. You can say to her, “If I am important enough to you, then I would like you to arrive on time for our meetings. I don't want to wait for you.” This can put your friendship at risk, because if you are true to yourself and she can't or won't be on time, you might stop planning to do things with her. Another approach is to accept this quality of hers and not take it personally. When you are planning to meet her, bring something to keep you busy during the time you know you'll be waiting for her arrival. Another trick is to tell her to meet you 15 minutes earlier than your actual meeting. You might both be on time without the stress. ■

Dr. Sharon Lamm Hartman coaches executives, leaders and entrepreneurs as they discover balance in their lives and purpose in their work. She is the President of Inside Out Learning, Inc., and serves as adjunct faculty at Columbia University and the Center for Creative Leadership. Contact her at www.insideoutlearninginc.com.