

TPS Tech Sheet 26

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Is Time on Your Side by Ann Daly

About Time Management

As anyone who's ever run a photographic practice knows, the Rolling Stones had it completely wrong when Mick Jagger sang that "time, time, time is on my side." For creative professionals with their own businesses, time can feel more like private enemy # 1.

Unfortunately, time cannot be stopped, or expanded (the universe notwithstanding). It can only be arranged, shaped, and planned. In a word, time can be managed.

There are two basic components of time management: effectiveness and efficiency. Effectiveness is about what

you choose to do, and in what order. Efficiency is about how you do those things. The two components are separate, but completely interdependent. If you become adept at one, but not the other, you'll find yourself missing out on peak productivity.

Time is an intensely personal experience. Cultures define it differently, families run on a various "clock," and each individual has deeply felt connections to times of the day, days of the week, seasons of the year. In a real sense, time is an ingrained way of being--a personal habit.

As with any habit, time management can't be changed overnight. Below you'll find truths and tips about time efficiency and time effectiveness. After you've reviewed them all, choose one thing at a time to improve your own practice. (Try easier ones first and work up to the more difficult challenges.) Give each change a full month to get grooved before you move on to the next one. Before long, your photographic practice will be ticking along like a handcrafted Swiss watch.

Efficiency

You'll never "find" the time. You can only make time.

Keep track of everything you do for two weeks. For each week, categorize your activities and calculate how many hours you spend on each category. Then analyze the results. Where are you wasting time? What's not getting done? What could be streamlined, rearranged, or eliminated?

You need a daily/weekly schedule to provide the supporting rhythm for your workaday life. When do you begin/end your day, your week? Which blocks of time are fixed from week to week, and which are flexible? When do you need to be in the office, and when do you need to go out? Build a foundational structure for the days of your week.

De-fragment your schedule. Bundle similar tasks together. For example, set aside a block of time to return phone calls, or print invoices, or mail marketing materials.

Write it down. On to the paper, off of your mind.

Set deadlines. Make them realistic, mark them down, and keep them.

Pick one calendar system. Make it paper, or make it electronic, just make it consistent. Spreading out appointments across a laptop and a datebook will only duplicate your efforts and lead to confusion.

Set aside one lunch hour a week to be your designated "lunch date." Use this hour to meet with key colleagues, suppliers, current and prospective clients, etc.

Multi-tasking is a myth. The scientists have done the research and concluded unequivocally that you can get things done better and quicker when you're focusing on one thing at a time.

Attitude counts. What if you believed that time were abundant, instead of scarce? Could you ease through the day without kind of frantic, hectic energy that sabotages the quality of your work?

Be wary of one master to-do list. It's too overwhelming, and crippling.

Instead, be reasonable about assigning specific tasks to specific days when they really can be accomplished.

Set limits on administrative tasks. Decide how much time a task deserves, set the egg timer, and remain vigilant.

Match rhythms between your energy level and your work. Dedicate your peak periods to your most important activities. Schedule your typically low-energy hours for less demanding work.

Try delegating tasks and activities that are not the optimal use of your time. Calculate your hourly rate and offload anything that can be done cheaper by someone else, thereby allowing you to use your time more cost-effectively. Outsource professional services like accounting and repetitive tasks like errands. If you can't afford to pay for the professional services, then barter for them. For non-professional services like childcare or purchasing supplies, create a cooperative with other photographers.

Limit email engagement. Log on at designated times in the early, mid, and late day. Otherwise, resist the temptation to constantly check in. Literally quit the program so you aren't seduced by that sound of a "new message" alert.

Just say "no" to unwanted interruptions. Just because a phone rings doesn't mean you have to answer it.

Be realistic about how much time you need to schedule for a given task, activ-

ity, or meeting, including travel time and recovery time.

Keep organized in your office. Don't waste a nanosecond having to look for papers, supplies, addresses.

Monitor success. Check in every week or two to evaluate what worked well, and what didn't. Apply those lessons learned to next week.

Focus on what's important, not just what's urgent. The New Yorker once

ran a cartoon featuring a man at his home computer and the Grim Reaper stepping through the door. The caption reads: "Thank goodness you're here--I can't accomplish anything unless I have a deadline." Ironically, it's true, that the limits of time keep us focused. If we manage time mindfully, we too might find ourselves grateful for how it spurs our success. Jagger may have had it right, after all.

Effectiveness

How exactly do you keep focused on what's important? Stephen Covey eloquently described how most of us live "in the thick of thin things." In order for day-to-day efficiency to lead to success, you need to make sure that you're choosing to do the thick things that will lead directly to the accomplishment of your goals. Consider these planning tactics:

Take time to hit the pause button. Schedule regular chunks of downtime for yourself, when you can check in on your goals, re-assess your strategies, and make the necessary course corrections on your to-do lists.

Actions speak louder than words. If you say you desperately want to start/expand/upgrade your practice, but you never do, ask yourself: Is this really what I want? Or is it only what I think I should want?

Make sure that your daily activities align with your goals and that your goals align with your ultimate dream or mission.

Make distinctions among short-, mid-, and long-term goals.

Set priorities and stick to them. Don't get caught up mindlessly in "the thick of thin things."

Don't plan less than a week at a time. Otherwise, you're just managing day-to-day crises.

Set goals a year in advance, then break down what needs to happen each month and week to meet those goals.

Measure the value of your strategies. Which tasks and activities give you the biggest return on your time investment? Adjust your planning accordingly.

Regularly review your goals and strategies. Don't assume that what gave you the best value last year will do so this year.

Time Is on Your Side

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Ann Daly (www.ann Daly.com) is a consultant, coach, and author/speaker specializing in the arts and creative professions. Based in Austin, Ann Daly Arts Consulting helps clients increase their effectiveness through improved strategy in areas ranging from marketing and brand management to planning/evaluation. Dr. Daly writes "The Successful Artist," a free monthly e-letter (sign up at www.ann Daly.com/letter), and she is launching a series of how-to books for artists in late 2006. She conducts her "Skills for Success" workshops for artists nationally and internationally. A former professor in the College of Fine Arts at The University of Texas at Austin, Dr. Daly is the award-winning author of three books on the performing and visual arts.

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