

MAKE A 'NOT-TO-DO' LIST

More than a quarter of each 9 to 5 day (28%) is consumed by interruptions. And even more time can be lost, since there is a psychological switching of gears that occurs when you are interrupted that can require up to 45 minutes for you to resume a major task. Controlling such disruptions of your day can give you back much of that lost time.

What you don't do often determines what you can do. Here are seven stressful situations experienced by almost everyone. Work on one or two at a time, just as you would with high priority to-do items. You can become more efficient and effective and you can train those who deal with you to do the same. 'Not-To-Do' lists can be just as effective, or even more so, than 'To-Do' lists.

Do not answer unrecognized phone calls. Almost everyone has Caller ID and it is invaluable in keeping you in control of your day. Calls from 800 numbers and out-of-area numbers you are not familiar with can go to voicemail so you are not distracted by unsolicited interruptions.

2. **Do not e-mail first thing in the morning or last thing at night.** Put yourself in control of your time and work by organizing your tasks and projects first thing in the morning and tying up loose ends before you leave at the end of the day. Once you look at your e-mail, you are responding to other people's questions, needs, and emergencies.

3. **Do not hold or agree to meetings or calls with no clear agenda or end time.** Everyone has been to meetings or on conference calls that lack focus and don't come to a timely conclusion. You need a defined purpose and end time.

4. **Do not let people ramble.** Forget "how's it going?" and embrace "what's up?"

5. **Do not check e-mail constantly.** Check at set times, say at 10am, 1pm and 4pm, or whatever works for you. You will have to train your clients, co-workers, suppliers, etc. that you only review e-mail at certain times but you handle them promptly. (If you can't go cold turkey, then practice not leaving your current work to check each incoming e-mail. Take off the auto-notification feature so you are not distracted by every new message.)

6. **Do not over-communicate with low-profit, high-maintenance customers.** Managing such clients can consume a lot of your time that could be better spent on activities that generate a higher return, such as business development or servicing high-profit clients. More customers does not automatically mean more income.

7. **Do not just work more when you get overwhelmed—prioritize.** Focus on the important tasks. Lack of time can sometimes be a lack of priorities, or too many interruptions (such as those on this list).

Starting something doesn't automatically justify finishing it. If you are reading an article or book that doesn't engage you, put it down. If you have too many obligations, then eliminate a project, resign from a board, or decline an invitation.

Set the rules in your favor. Limit access to your time, force people to define their requests before spending time with them, batch routine menial tasks to prevent postponement of more important projects. Do not let others' agendas control your own.

To rephrase Nike: Just don't do it! *Credit to the book, The 4-Hour Workweek, by Timothy Ferriss.*

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