



## **Keeping Time and Project Management On Track**

**By Lilach Bullock, Managing Director, asklilach Ltd**

It can be difficult to keep all the plates spinning in the air when you are starting or running a business but, for many people, it's not just because there is too much to do. Often, they haven't found the right systems, habits or resources to help them make the most of the time available. If you feel like you are drowning in work then consider some tried and tested methods to get you back on track and help you work smarter.

### **Where are you now?**

Analysing how you spend your time now is a useful way to see where improvements can be made. An easy way to do this is to print off your diary day by day and record when you complete tasks. Note the time of day you complete the task, how long it takes and the importance/urgency of the task (using a 1 to 5 scale). Doing this for a week will help you identify:

- what tasks you are doing when
- the balance between important and urgent tasks
- when you are most productive



- interruptions
- unplanned tasks against planned tasks
- how you group tasks
- how successful you were at completing tasks on your 'to do' list.

Look at the analysis - if you are more productive first thing in the morning then it suggests that that is when you should do the most important tasks. You can often save time by grouping similar tasks together. Prioritising and blocking out time is also useful:

- make a 'to do' list at the end of each day for the following day. This will relieve stress - you can put it all on paper and start thinking about tackling the work rather than worrying about it
- after you have drafted your 'to do' list mark up each activity in terms of priority and allocate the time needed to complete the task. Some people find that it is useful to then re-write their 'to do' list in priority order - it may depend how disciplined you are at completing priority tasks before moving onto other pieces of work
- depending on the nature of your job it may then be helpful to block out time in your diary for particular tasks



- if possible, respond to emails in specific time slots rather than as and when they come in
- for large projects it is worth devising a separate activity plan breaking down the individual actions necessary, recording who is responsible for each action, the deadline by which the action needs to be completed and including a column so you can indicate when the action has been completed.

If your analysis has identified a lack of resources, then ask yourself whether you are the best person to do the task, can anyone else in the organisation help, is technology letting you down? If you need specialist skills, or just an extra pair of hands, it may be more time and cost effective to seek outside support.

Temporary recruitment agencies that can provide long and short-term help, or virtual support, might be the answer. A Virtual Assistant is someone who can provide a range of services to support businesses - they work remotely, from their own office using their own equipment. Listings of Virtual Assistants are available via online search facilities on the websites of a number of governing bodies:



- **The International Association of Virtual Office Assistants -**  
[www.iava.org.uk](http://www.iava.org.uk)
- **The Society of Virtual Assistants -** [www.scottishvirtualassistants.co.uk](http://www.scottishvirtualassistants.co.uk)
- **International Association of Virtual Assistants -** [www.iavo.com](http://www.iavo.com)
- **Alliance of UK Virtual Assistants -** [www.allianceofukvirtualassistants.org.uk](http://www.allianceofukvirtualassistants.org.uk)

Reviewing how meetings are run is also an area to explore. One way to make them more effective is to ask in advance for an agenda and how long the meeting will take. If this information can't be provided then question whether attending will be an effective use of your time. It's also worth assessing how much time you spend searching through piles of paper for documents you need. If you waste time doing that then re-organising information as it comes into you may well be helpful - is it something that requires action or should it be filed for information? If action is required then does it need to be done straight away, can it be done later or can you delegate it? If you are delegating the task then a delegation tracker is a useful tool. This is a table that lists each task that has been delegated, the person it has been delegated to and the relevant deadlines - when you have asked for the task to be completed and when you need to deliver it.



### **Is procrastination the culprit?**

After doing your analysis you may find that there are one or two projects that are on your 'to do' list but never quite get completed. Are you avoiding that particular task? If the task is important then you are being undermined by procrastination because:

- the work doesn't get done
- you use up mental energy thinking about the work without actually progressing it
- there is a risk that failing to complete that piece of work may have a negative impact on other parts of the business/customers etc
- leaving or ignoring a task could turn it into an urgent piece of work – with implications in terms of quality and cost
- keeping things on your 'to do' list without managing to complete them can be stressful.

### **Tackling procrastination**

There are many reasons for procrastination - other tasks seem simpler, more comfortable or more enjoyable. Maybe you are unsure whether you have the right resources or skills, feel overwhelmed by the task, don't consider it important



or simply don't feel in the right frame of mind to complete the task. Deep down you will know why you are putting it off - recognising this is the first step in tackling it. There are a number of steps you can take to overcome procrastination if you feel it is causing a problem:

- put the task on your 'to do' list as high priority and do not attempt other tasks until that one is completed. Often, anxiety about completing the task is worse than actually tackling it
- encourage other people to chase you on it
- think about what will happen if you don't complete that task - is there a risk that you will lose business or could you be putting the business at risk?
- decide on a reward for completing the task.

To keep on top of things you need to have the time, space, resources and tools to do the job. Don't be afraid to try different systems - what works for one person may not work for another. Using new systems, or working in a different way, may initially seem daunting but you will soon see the benefits. Reviewing your time and project management regularly is essential - it will stop you from falling into bad habits and help you to stay on track.

## **The author**

Lilach Bullock, Managing Director of asklilach Ltd, has more than 17 years of experience in PA, secretarial and training roles including working as a bi-lingual legal secretary. She also holds a number of secretarial qualifications. asklilach Ltd is a member of the Institute of Qualified Professional Secretaries, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Watford and West Herts Chamber of Commerce. asklilach Ltd holds memberships with: The International Association of Virtual Office Assistants; The Society of Virtual Assistants; and International Association of Virtual Assistants.

### **Contact Lilach Bullock on:**

- [info@asklilach.co.uk](mailto:info@asklilach.co.uk)
- telephone 01442 231663
- [www.asklilach.co.uk](http://www.asklilach.co.uk)