

Time Management and Productivity Strategies for Résumé Writers



A Special Report from BeAResumeWriter.com

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One of the saddest facts of life is that people who need to use time management the most aren't very good at it. That might seem like a ridiculously obvious statement, but it's important to realize it can also be a self-fulfilling prophecy. It's the reason why so many people try system after system, only to quickly abandon each one, remaining rooted in everything from all-out chaos to simply never reaching their full potential due to inadequate time management habits.

The most important time management success comes from going beyond the basics of using Daytimers™ and making a plan — it starts deep within the realms of managing yourself, so we're going to devote the first half of this Special Report to the issues that keep us “stuck” in bad time management habits.

And some of them may be traits you aren't even aware of...

Think back to high school and you've probably known someone “set up for failure” (perhaps even been that person): A real-life example from years ago — grade nine student Ekaterina was terrible at mathematics, but no one realized this until her first grade nine exam, when the quiet student who “never gave any trouble” scored an abysmal 14% as her final mathematics grade.

Over the next several weeks Ekaterina worked with two private tutors and a home-study course, trying to master the art of math. It was anything but fun, but she worked hard and in her next set of exams achieved...49%.

At this point, the math teacher, Mrs. Totton, patted her kindly on the shoulder and said: “Ekaterina, I know you worked really hard, dear, but face it, math is just not your thing. I’m going to write you a note requesting that you drop out of math for the rest of high school.”

Ekaterina was crushed, and spent years suffering from the belief she was a “math dummy,” denied several career choices because of this flaw in her intelligence.

Years later, she finally realized she hadn’t had a hope of mastering math because there were several factors the teacher (and her tutors) weren’t taking into account. Namely:

- She had just immigrated from a completely different country, where mathematics wasn’t started until grade nine
- She had never been taught the basics of “new” math
- She had only ever been exposed to arithmetic
- English wasn’t her first language. Although she had diligently learned English in school, she was also now grappling with the speed at which her new classmates and teachers spoke.

She had really needed to start back at grade five level and learn mathematical concepts from scratch before adding the two personal tutors and the grade-nine home school course. So she took home courses starting at grade five level...and discovered she wasn’t a “math dummy” at all.

Ekaterina came from a rigid culture where failure was not an option and you tried your hardest, so she put more genuine effort and perseverance into her forays with the two tutors and the home school course than the average North American teenager might. She knew she would have to face and endure much

disapproval and shame-making from her family after the math incident. But we North Americans aren't subjected to such rigid expectations...

...are we?

The Myth of the Superwoman

As early as 1963, pioneer feminist Betty Friedan warned readers of the “myth of the superwoman.” According to early feminists, the superwoman was all or most of these things:

- Mother
- Wife
- Chauffeur
- Career professional
- Child care worker
- Launderette
- Housekeeper
- Chef
- Caterer
- Personal assistant
- Executive
- Laborer
- Bookkeeper
- Saint

We were sold a bill of goods implying that unless we could effortlessly master all of these roles — and do them all *at the same time* — we were letting down the women's movement and ourselves.

Men demanded we do all these things to prove we were worthy of being “allowed” to work. Women demanded we do all these things to prove to men that we could.

No wonder so many women ended up like Ekaterina, beating themselves up for not being able to effortlessly master daily life with impossible odds stacked against them. Most of us know better now...

...don't we?

Finding the Root

Ekaterina's problem — which has more to do with the subject of time management than you might think — was two-fold:

- a. She accepted other people's expectations without question
- b. She didn't identify *what was causing her problem*

Show me someone who has tried multiple systems for time management (never sticking to one) and I'll show you someone who has bought into Ekaterina's way of thinking. You need to go back to the root before you can permanently change ineffective patterns. You need to understand the cause and address the cause. Do this, and the changes will start to flow, naturally and easily.

Number one — Throw other people's expectations out the window, if you've been laboring under this baggage. Number two — If you're saying “that isn't me,” simply take a moment and ask yourself these questions:

1. Do you ever beat yourself up for not	
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accomplishing more in the day?	
2. Do you find yourself “putting out fires” and dealing with unexpected emergencies?	
3. How many of these emergencies consist of demands made by other people on your time? (Yes: That résumé prospects and clients.)	
4. Do you find yourself taking on other peoples’ tasks?	
5. Do you find yourself caretaking seniors in your family?	
6. Do you find yourself babysitting for other family members – especially at times you had let it be known you need to work?	
7. Are you the person who ends up doing all the “miscellaneous” mundane tasks that don’t fit into any particular category?	

If you answered “yes” to more than three of the questions above, you may need to tackle the issue of **boundary-setting** before you ever attempt to manage your time – otherwise you’ll end up with the same-old “same old”: Namely, others managing your time against your will or expectations.

Boundaries

There was an extensive discussion about time management and interruptions in one of the careers industry professional association discussion groups, and the responses centered on setting boundaries.

Your time belongs to everyone else. Ever feel like that? It happens when you announce you’re going to work till lunchtime and would appreciate no interruptions...only to have your husband pop his head round the door and tell you he needs to go to the hardware store so could you please keep an eye on the twins...or your sister phones and chats for over an hour about her dog-training problems.

While these sort of interactions are all a normal part of family life, you do need to develop a clear picture about four key issues, in order to manage them without having your boundaries breached. You need to clearly understand:

- What is a valid emergency
- What can be legitimately turned down and given back to the imposer
- What is “my stuff”
- What is “your stuff”

No one would deny that a child falling off a swing and having to be rushed to hospital is a legitimate emergency, but it’s those grey areas that cause the

most trouble. For example, when your best friend calls and chats for an hour after you've told her you won't be available that morning, you may feel irritated or even guiltily enjoy the conversation...but she has still ignored the boundary you clearly set.

You have two choices, when this happens:

1. Ignore the phone and let her leave a message
2. Pick it up and, after checking to see that she indeed has just called to chat (rather than letting you know of a dire emergency), remind her that you are working this morning and let her know you will call her after lunch. ("Tara, I'm working this morning and I don't have time right now to chat: What would be a good time to call you after lunch?")

Let's be clear: Choice number one (ignoring the phone) is the most effective way to get your message across – the message that you always mean what you say. If you opt for number two, you are making life more difficult for yourself by introducing an element of choice for your caller. She can argue; feel hurt; let you know she feels hurt; agree that she knows you are busy and continue to chat for 20 minutes anyway; tell you it's an emergency (when it's not); and so forth.

If you choose number one, it may not feel so comfortable to you initially...but you will achieve two important objectives:

1. **Reinforce your message** – that you are not available this morning
2. **Prevent yourself from being taken advantage of** or yielding to the temptation to chat

There's one other advantage to choosing option number one: You will avoid the phenomenon that most abuse counselors are familiar with – “upping the control.”

“Upping the Control” – This occurs with the nicest family members and friends, because they are human beings who either (a) really like your company or attention or (b) want what they want – now!

They are used to having you cave in and cater to their needs when you let them know you need time for your own. It's a habit by now! They're also probably used to assuming you'll drive them to a doctor's appointment without advance notice – if you've consistently (or even inconsistently) done so in the past...or that you will naturally listen for an hour whenever they feel like chatting (because you always do).

What do you think the normal human reaction is, when something that is so taken for granted it feels like a “right” is suddenly withdrawn? Are they going to respect your wishes when you suddenly start setting up fences?

No. They're going to “up the control” – even if they don't know that's what they're doing. Or why. They'll feel insulted, let down, disappointed...but this is **not reasonable**, and they need to be trained out of it.

So when you tell your best friend you need to work without interruption that morning, she might still call you. If she has a conscience, she'll say to herself: “I know Marti's working, so I'll keep this short, but I need to know if she's coming to the baby shower next Tuesday.” She may have the best intentions (and reasons) in the world...but when the two of you get talking, next thing you know, 40 minutes has gone out the window. (Yes; even if you spend most of that time saying: “I really have to go now...” “All right – oh, but one more thing...”)

Then there are the really tyrannical controllers – for example, the anxious jobseeker who has an interview tomorrow and is freaking out about it. She’s going to call you for reassurance – bet on it! If you answer, count on your train of thought, flow, motivation, and more being interrupted and perhaps even derailed: But if you force her to leave a message, you can evaluate the call’s urgency without engaging with her...or simply call her back on your time frame.

Finally, there are the “real, nasty ones,” to quote the movie *Ghostbusters*: Those who deliberately flout the small boundaries you set because they think they are “special” – and need you to validate that belief by waiving your boundary *for them alone*. You can recognize them easily because these are the ones who usually begin a conversation with “I know you’re [not available, busy this morning, working till 12, etc.] but...”

So when you start setting firm boundaries – especially if you’ve never set them before – **expect** friends and family to bombard and besiege them at first. They most likely won’t even know they’re “upping the control” – but they are.

Here are 12 tips to avoid caving in and undoing all your good work:

1. **Decide in advance** how you are going to handle expected – and unexpected – breaches of your boundaries (and time!).
2. **Recognize that tactics you’ve never before employed will not feel comfortable** at first (e.g. letting your voice mail take a message while you’re actually sitting there). Don’t worry – you’ll de-sensitize yourself and overcome the almost-impossible compulsion to answer or catastrophize (“what if mom really IS having a heart attack this time?”) Stick with it!
3. **Be consistent.** Don’t answer on one occasion; let voice mail take the call the next; and then answer the third call. The only way to teach

people that “I’m working until noon” means “I’m working until noon” is to consistently **not** be available...until noon!

4. **Respect yourself.** If you don’t respect your own time by honoring your decisions, no one else will. (And respecting your own time and being consistent is a wonderful way to model assertiveness to your children, who need to learn this skill also.)
5. **Set “me” time** — even if it’s only 20 minutes a day. Make that 20 minutes absolutely set in stone. Whether it’s retreating to your room and reading a book, sitting out in the garden with a cup of green tea, taking the dog for a walk, meditating, or having a bubble bath, respect yourself still further by realizing that everyone needs to recharge their mental batteries — including you!

Again, you’ll also be teaching your children **by example** (“modeling”) that you are a *person*, rather than a House Elf they can take for granted to pick up after them or magically provide food. It’s a lesson your children (particularly your daughters) will one day sincerely thank you for.

6. **Dress for success** — This one is less of a “must” than the previous five tips. Consider it more of a suggestion, based on personality. There are many people who can work comfortably and assertively in pajamas, but many others have found that wearing nice clothes and putting on make-up as if they really were heading to the office not only makes them feel more assertive, but also **helps reinforce the message to family members** — namely, they’re “going to work” now. Particularly if you have issues with depression or self-worth, making sure you practice good self-care and pay attention to your appearance can help you feel more worthy of allowing yourself to stick to your boundaries.
7. **Ask yourself: “Is that ‘mine’?”** Every time someone attempts to breach your boundaries and do something that doesn’t fit in with your

work plans, asking yourself “is that my stuff, or his stuff?” can really help you decide more clearly on how to handle curveballs while still maintaining boundaries. For example, your husband pops his head around the door and says: “Honey, can you make me some sandwiches? I’m late!” Asking yourself “Is making sandwiches for his lunch his stuff, or mine?” quickly showcases the fact that he is (a) a grown adult (b) perfectly capable of making his own sandwiches and (c) perfectly capable of scheduling enough time to do so. You can then decide exactly how you’re going to reply.

- 8. Offer viable alternative options.** You can rigidly stick to your boundaries — or you can show the imposer a good, solid “third alternative” that helps solve the problem while letting them know, in no uncertain terms, that it is their problem to deal with — not yours. For example, though your husband should have scheduled enough time to make his own sandwiches (he obviously has time management issues too), he is now in a legitimate bind and is asking for a favor. The trouble is...**one-time favors soon become regular habits**, so rather than caving in, offer alternatives that protect your own boundaries — and your time:

- “I’m working right now — perhaps you can ask [responsible older child name here] to make your sandwiches.”
- “Sorry, sweetheart, I’m rushing to meet my own deadline right now. Looks like this is one day you’ll have to buy a lunch.”
- “I don’t have time, but you’ll find a box of meal bars in the left-hand cupboard beside the stove. Feel free to take a couple. Oh, and there are cans of soda in the fridge.”

All of the above (a) recognize the problem (b) maintain your boundary and (c) offer a viable solution...without resorting to aggressive responses such as: “You’re a big boy. Make your own *\$R@\$* lunch!”

9. **Journal and anticipate regular boundary issues.** For example, if you keep a journal — even hastily scribbled notes — of boundary issues that cause you to lose time, you may notice that your husband always asks you to make that “rush” lunch on Friday mornings. You can then plan to forestall breaches by deciding on a strategy (e.g. making his lunch the night before; reminding him to make his lunch the night before; making sure you’re stocked up with meal bars, etc.)
10. **Never, EVER “explain.”** This is one of the most crucial rules to start living by when you’re working on building strong boundaries. People not used to maintaining firm boundaries almost always feel compelled to “soften the blow” by explaining why they can’t oblige. The trouble is, whenever you give a reason, you open an opportunity for the imposer to argue against it. To your astonishment, “I’m sorry I can’t drive you to the store tomorrow because I’ve hired a babysitter and I’ve planned to work till noon” instantly gets countered with: “Well, it’s the only time this sale is on — and you can always work when Mike gets home — AND save yourself the cost of a babysitter! Right?” (Remember, imposers are good at it — whether they mean to be selfish or not.) So practice just saying “no” at every opportunity — and resist the urge to justify your decision.
11. **Be a “Broken Record.”** When you’ve said a firm “no” in any form, you will encounter objections 99% of the time, so be ready for this — and be prepared to simply keep repeating your refusal. One of the best phrases I ever learned was “Sorry, that won’t work for me today.” It felt less “mean” than a blunt “no.” And you can easily repeat it until the imposer stops asking. (It goes like this: “Tara, can you watch my kids for half an hour right now while I run to the store?” “Sorry, Lara — that won’t work for me today.” “Aw, but I’m only going to be gone 20 minutes, tops.” “Sorry, that just won’t work for me right now.” “Hey, I babysat your kids last night when you went to the gym.” “I know,

sweetie – but I can’t do it this morning. It just doesn’t work for me today.”

Notice that not once in the above sample conversation did “Tara” explain – or even offer alternatives. She simply kept repeating her original “no” – even though she sounded as if she was discussing options. (Another great refusal phrase is “my plate is full right now.”)

These two phrases are particularly helpful if (a) you alternate them (b) you feel enormous guilt over refusing. Remember that even the most skillful arguer in the world can’t find anything to counter with, **if you simply keep repeating your refusal.**

12. Be assertive and respect your own boundaries with clients, too.

“Can you do this rush job?” can be an infuriating question when it eats up your weekend. “Sorry, my plate is full” is a great way to refuse without having to explain or justify your decision. (Another suggestion: “I’ll be happy to do it – but I do charge 50% extra for weekend work.” (Just be prepared to take on the work – and make extra money – if you take this particular approach!)

If you’re tempted to “just squeeze it in,” remember that the rush job for client A might mean you don’t respect client B by devoting as much time to *his* already-scheduled project.

Cultivating healthy boundaries takes practice. Wonderful things like children, spouses, family, and friends can easily and sometimes painlessly nibble away at them until we’re back to engaging in behaviors that may (or may not) be fun...but they won’t help you get your work done. And they will eat up your work time at an alarming rate.

Remember: If **you** don’t take yourself and your time seriously – no one else will.

Procrastination

We come to the second great self-sabotaging trait — procrastination. There have been all sorts of articles and books written on the subject, including a number that tie procrastination back to childhood trauma with authoritarian teachers or parents. Even if you can definitely identify with that one, it's important never to lose sight of the most important thing about procrastinating...

...People do it to escape.

Face it — procrastinating is more fun than tackling your income tax return or writing an unusually tricky résumé for a client. The trouble is, your job doesn't get done and your self-worth goes down. You lose confidence in your own abilities and perhaps even berate yourself, feeling guilty. Procrastination is the sort of “pleasure” that leaves you feeling like the kid who ate two bags of marshmallows — it was fun while you were doing it, but now you have to pay.

There are four basic reasons people dread tackling a task:

- It's boring
- It's “too” difficult
- It's unpleasant
- It's out of their comfort zone

This latter point can encompass a wide range of psychological baggage: For example, a task out of your comfort zone may actually also feed into a fear of success. You know if you get the résumé done, you've got to move on to the next client — and maybe that client's résumé is harder. Or it may feel out of your comfort zone because your husband is the family expert on the subject,

and you feel as if you're encroaching on his territory. Or it's out of your comfort zone because you're suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome or depression, and right now, even the smallest change in routine feels overwhelming and threatening.

So it's important, when dealing with the urge to procrastinate, to identify which particular cause is fueling this urge.

- If a task is too boring, promising yourself a reward on completion may help.
- If a task is too difficult, either consider outsourcing it to an expert or identify the first step you need to take. Don't think of the entire task or project; just break it down into steps and take that first one! (Beware of the temptation to "take a course first" – it's often not necessary, once you've broken your task into steps and begin tackling these one at a time. Responding with "I need to take a course" is often simply a way of saying: "I'm not confident in my own ability to understand new information.")
- If a task is unpleasant, the "reward" technique often helps – as does realizing you need to knuckle down and Just Do It. (Outsourcing is also an option: What might be the most mundane task to you will be a delightful walk in the park for someone who specializes in that area; plus you're paying them – so don't feel guilty!)
- If it's out of your comfort zone, do your best to identify *why* it is out of your comfort zone and what steps you can take to get past that.

Finally, look for ways to make the task easier and more fun. Schedule it for the optimum time of day – after first identifying what that means to you.

For example, some people might schedule their most-dreaded task for first thing in the morning...because they know they do best when they get the worst task out of the way for the day.

On the other hand, someone else might never start their workday, if they try that technique. For that person, outsourcing the task may be the best option...or scheduling it for just after lunch or for the last hour of the workday (so that urgent priorities are taken care of first).

Many people have reported their best success occurred when they scheduled the hated task for a particular, regular day: For example, saving all your paperwork up for Mondays, or writing a week's worth of blog posts and pre-scheduling them on Fridays. The advantage of this strategy lies in the fact you're creating a habit — and habits are easier to tackle and harder to break — by always making Mondays, for example, your client consultation day.

If you do this, however, make sure you schedule a real humdinger of a reward for the end of that day! (A friend of mine who was simultaneously working on losing weight and conquering procrastination scheduled her one treat of the week — a mind-blowing mocha concoction with a piece of gourmet cheesecake — as her “reward” for spending Mondays on bookkeeping — a task she hates, but prefers not to outsource.)

The reward system is a strategy that works well for many people when it comes to motivating them to rise above procrastination. It works best when you identify the type of reward that appeals to you the most.

Ask yourself, “What would be the reward I’d enjoy the most, after I complete this task?”

Suggestions from seven people who regularly admit to fighting (and conquering) procrastination:

- “A date with my husband!”
- “A bubble bath and a glass of my favorite white wine.”
- “A shopping trip to the mall with a coffee – even if all I can afford that day is the coffee!”
- “An afternoon with a good book works for me every time. I tell myself if I can get all my work done in four-and-a-half days, I can have Friday afternoon completely to myself – and I buy the book in advance, so I can anticipate it. It really works!”
- “I celebrate by spending the whole evening watching my favorite TV show.”
- “I do something nice for myself that feels luxurious; like give myself a manicure or watching one of my favorite movies with a big glass of cocoa and whipped cream.”
- “I love mindlessly watching TV with my feet up for an hour before the kids and my husband come home, if I’ve managed to finish my work by two p.m. That’s my big motivation!”

As you can see, the reward is different for everyone. **What would feel most like a true reward to you?**

Breaking It Down – We mentioned breaking hated tasks down, but there’s a specific way to do this in order for this trick to work:

- **Analyze** and jot down (or type) the basic steps comprising the task

- **Identify** either (a) the first step you have to take or (b) the most important step you have to take in order to get the hated task under way and rolling
- **Focus** only on that one step. Take it. Very often, simply getting started is all it takes to jolt us past that “block.”

Another way to break a hated task down is by segmenting it into short blocks of time. Face it: “I have to do the bookkeeping all afternoon” is going to feel far more overwhelming and boring than “I have to spend 10 minutes bookkeeping, after which I get 10 minutes of Words With Friends!”

And do use a timer for your time chunks! (Online or offline – there are timers in both worlds!)

Your Emotional Hard-Wiring

If you find yourself consistently taking the reward before you tackle the task (especially when you never *do* later tackle the task) you may have another problem altogether: Poor “impulse control.”

This is a much deeper issue, and it may go back to your childhood. You may find the procrastination-fighting techniques already suggested simply don’t work for you.

If this is so, invest in a book called “Emotional Intelligence” by Daniel Goleman. The next time you find yourself irresistibly succumbing to procrastination, procrastinate by reading it! This groundbreaking book will help you understand your emotional pitfalls, characteristics, traits, and motivations as few have ever done before.

Similarly, if you're dealing with difficult life issues, such as the death of a parent or a marital break up, be kind to yourself. It's natural to "blow" responsibilities at this time by doing uncharacteristic things like spending a whole day in bed or mindlessly watching your favorite movie over and over instead of working.

Particularly avoid negative self-messages if you catch yourself procrastinating in such circumstances. Recognize you are going to find focusing harder than when your emotional health is at optimal pitch. You may find yourself distracted or apathetic. That's the time it's most important to nurture good work habits. If you can hold onto them, working through the pain can help you through the most difficult times of your life, boosting your serotonin and norepinephrine levels as you praise yourself for small victories and enjoy well-deserved rewards. (It's particularly important for you to break everything down to small time-chunks and focus only on taking the next step.)

The "Busy" Trap – Another way of procrastinating peculiarly unique to moms and perfectionists (and if you're both, may the Lord Have Mercy)... finding another task totally unrelated to the hated one you're avoiding, then throwing yourself into it, heart and soul!

For example, the last time I found myself confronting a particularly daunting work project, I ended up cleaning out my hall closet! While there are undeniable rewards to this type of procrastinating (as opposed to lying in your bed with covers over your head) – namely, more space, a feeling of virtue, and a sparkly-cleaning closet – it still doesn't get you any nearer to taming the work-beast.

In other words, if you find yourself cleaning the barbeque grill in winter...you're procrastinating about something. **What is it...and what are you afraid of?**

What it all boils down to is that procrastination is just another **habit you create**. And, like any habit, you can change it – though it does take commitment, consistency, and work to reverse a bad habit and replace it with a new one.

Print out the worksheet below, grab a cup of coffee and do some brainstorming...

Worksheet: Overcoming Procrastination

Answer these questions:

- 1.** Tasks I always procrastinate or put off include...

- 2.** I know I do best when...

- 3.** My favorite type of reward would be...

- 4.** I do/do not have a problem with impulse control

- 5.** I have broken down the hated task into small pieces. In order of importance, I need to tackle these specific steps:

- 6.** I am always distracted by...

Creating Systems (and Habits) That Work

Now we've dealt with identifying and strategizing underlying emotional issues, it's time to get down to systems and strategies.

A final reason many people procrastinate — and it has nothing to do with emotional issues or bad habits — is simply because they don't know how to accomplish any task *systematically*.

(If that's you, you're going to love this section!)

Four key steps you need to take, every time, are: **Delegate, Systematize, Automate, Delete**. Apply these four key steps to any task or project you are about to tackle. But first, identify what has to be done — resist the urge to “wing it” and make a plan for the project — even if it's only a rough, three-point plan on a napkin.

Delegate

“Delegating” means giving a task to someone else, so he or she can perform it for you. It can be one of the most liberating tactics you will ever employ. And this goes double for tasks that aren't even related to the one you're trying to tackle! While you'll be able to delegate *some* of the tasks related to your résumé writing business, delegation is especially powerful in your personal life.

Take our example of the husband who wanted his wife to make a sandwich. One of her options was to advise him to ask an older child in the family to make the sandwich if he didn't have time to do it himself. This is pure delegation — and you can use it with family members to free up the time you need for working.

Take a moment right now to list all the little duties and chores you currently, habitually do yourself that you can effectively delegate to other family members:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

You can be arbitrary about it...or you can sweeten the pot by offering them rewards or even payment for their help.

Similarly, you can delegate work-related tasks to **outsource contractors**. Why struggle to do your own bookkeeping every week, when you can throw all receipts and invoices in one big envelope marked with your name, the month and the year and hand it over to a bookkeeper once a month? Why drearily load your autoresponder when you can hire a virtual assistant who specializes in

A Weber to do it for you? Why shred old paperwork for a precious hour when you can bribe your 13-year-old niece to do it in exchange for extra pocket money?

Delegating works best when applied to tasks that (a) others can easily perform (b) it's not a "key" task that only you should have your hands on.

You should always delegate tasks that lose you money if you handle them yourself. That includes ones you need to learn new skills for in order to handle (unless the particular skill is going to prove central to your business in the future) or tasks you simply have no aptitude or liking for.

Tasks You Should Never Delegate – Well, okay. Maybe "never" is too strong a word. But there are definite times when it pays to "do it yourself" – even if it's something you're not comfortable with.

Tasks it's generally best to undertake yourself include ones that:

- Build your public persona
- Showcase your visibility
- Provide your "signature" stamp on the project
- Need your unique, money-making touch
- Connect you personally with your clients or customers

For example, some résumé writers outsource the actual writing part of the résumé project (we call it "subcontracting" in the industry), but retain the hands-on contact with the client to make the sale, collect the initial information, and then finalize the project.

Anything that needs your unique "special touch" should never be delegated – **unless you position your assistant as an extension of yourself**. (People should feel that "talking to Marti's subcontract writer is like talking to Marti herself.")

And finally, never delegate the process you most enjoy (unless you have your eye strictly on profits alone) – otherwise, what’s the point of working if you never experience the reward of being “in the zone”?

Systematize

Let’s look at what you need to tweak in order to create systems that work for you...

Your Physical Space

So you’ve already got a home office. Time to re-evaluate it. What’s working for you in your current physical set up...and what’s not? Do you find you don’t get as much work done as you like because your office is so far away from the kids, you’re constantly running out to see what they’re up to? You don’t get as much work done because your office is in the kitchen and your children, their friends, the family dog, and the family cat are constantly going in and out, chatting you up on the way?

Whatever the problem, there’s a way to fix it. If you feel you’re stuck between a rock and a hard place and you find yourself saying things like “there’s no place else to work,” look for the “third alternative” – that principle works well in any part of life.

There’s no such thing as “the only place” to work. Think outside the box for a moment, and you may be surprised at the solutions you come up with. The addition of a shelf, moving a dresser out of a room, converting a cupboard...all these tricks can work for you. First, however, decide where in the house you most want to work – and then make it fit into your plans.

A Word of Warning – Resist the temptation to fuss about your physical space so much that your workload suffers. I know a résumé writer who actually managed to convince herself that she couldn't work at all until a desk unit she had ordered arrived. Don't slow the flow – but do take the time to tweak your physical set-up, so that it doesn't slow you down.

If you find that you spend 20 minutes a day looking for a client's CD or you've lost all your receipts because you thought they were in the pile on top of your dining room table, it's time to “tweak” your set-up. Lose the box you throw your stuff into and put three stacking file trays or an accordion file in a handy spot instead. Affix your monthly bookkeeping envelope to your bulletin board. *Get* a bulletin board, if visual reminders work for you and online Daytimers™ don't. Invest in a simple, wall-mounted CD shelf for your CDs. And so forth.

Creating a streamlined home office shouldn't become another distraction technique to help you procrastinate, but if you're ever going to create the set-up you need, “now” would be the perfect moment. Take a moment to fill out the following mini-worksheet...

Home Office Makeover

What I Like about My Home Office	What Doesn't Work for Me
Why Does it Work for Me?	What's the Problem with it?

What I Need to Buy or Create:	What I Need to “Lose”

Your Business Plan

Where do you want to be this time next year? In three years? Five? Ten?

You can't run an effective business unless you know who you are and where you're going. Write down a clear "mission statement" for your business. It can reflect any of the following:

- Your personal goals
- What you want to provide for your clients
- Your values

Be specific. Don't just write, "to help my clients succeed." State your intent for that client: "To make each résumé speak with my client's voice and showcase who he/she is."

Most of all, that mission statement should resonate with you. It should inspire you and encourage you to keep going when things are tough. (And if you can include pictures, so much the better!)

Mission Statement

To live in every moment with purpose and love
To always provide a safe place for my family
To treat my clients like family and my family
the way I respect clients
To listen and create the dream

MY GOALS: WHY I AM WORKING

Leave a legacy of successful, grateful clients
Retire in ten years
Have that cottage at Moose Lake!



Create a Business Plan and write your actual business goals down in another file or on another piece of paper – remember, your business plan can change as new information comes in, or client needs morph into something else. Unless you're applying for business loans, your plan does not have to be detailed – think of it more as a statement of intent and don't be intimidated. (You can write a plan in five minutes, if you can be succinct!)

- You can add to your plan later
- You can delete things that no longer work
- You can articulate the things that are most important to you

Haziness in planning causes more failure than any other single cause. At the very least, failing to plan results in never maximizing your business potential (and never making as much money as you could if your focus was clearer).

Now pin that mission statement to your new bulletin board!

Tracking and Documentation

So you have a mission statement and a business plan. Now you need to document your processes:

- Write your **terms and conditions** for working with clients (What clients will you absolutely not work with? What would cause you to “fire” a client?)
- Write **policies** for customers (What is your policy on client refunds? How many résumé re-writes will do you?)
- **Document your procedures**, if you’re planning to outsource any portion of your workload in the future (For example, when finalizing files, the résumé will be provide in Word, text, and PDF formats.)

If your business is fairly new, you may find you are changing systems as you work. Documenting these allows you to:

- Create manuals for subcontract writers or virtual assistants
- Standardize your procedures so you don’t reinvent the wheel – or, worse yet, forget something
- Track your results!

Tracking your results is essential – you can bleed huge amounts of money or miss opportunities, if you are not tracking:

- How long processes (and the steps and tasks that go into them) take
- How much you spend on them (including hidden costs)
- Resources you have to purchase and/or use

- What you make from each project
- What your actual profits are

One other good reason to track: This allows you to see exactly where you are losing money, if you are losing it. For example, you may start tracking and realize that you make \$50 an hour when you write LinkedIn profiles but actually lose money when creating cover letters...or that you make your most money when you write résumés from scratch – and lose it when perform résumé updates. This helps you know with assurance what you should be outsourcing and what you need to focus on doing yourself.

It also allows you to gain a realistic overview and brainstorm effectively.

Tracking and documenting can help you to effectively see:

- Your patterns and work habits – and where they could be “tweaked”
- Your clients’ patterns – so you can create packages they’ll love
- Where you lose money – so you can effectively create measures to stop the leakage (maybe you only provide update services for clients who have purchased your career services membership program).
- Where you make your most money – so you can concentrate your business in these areas
- What can be re-purposed – that is, sold more than once in different formats

Look for anything that interrupts the flow – and brainstorm the best way for you to overcome that “gremlin.” It might be a client’s habit of always wanting revisions at the last minute, right before you’re about to start another client’s project. It might be that you always have to leave and take the kids to hockey, right before an important monthly deadline that leaves you feeling stressed. It

might be that it's simply taking too long to write those blog posts yourself, or it might be the hour you always spend searching for receipts for your bookkeeper.

The “glitch spots” are going to be different for every person, but if you're getting in the habit of strategic thinking and you have a good overview of your business goals and where the glitches lie, you'll find it's much easier to brainstorm your way past the problem.

Another source of interrupted flow is, well, interruptions — whether that's interruptions from telephone calls, email demands, or questions from clients — or the cat throwing up on the rug.

How do you minimize interruptions?

First, identify the cause — and type. Are clients coming to you with common questions? Can you provide emails or handouts that answer these common questions?

Would a babysitter solve the two hours you lose after the kids get home from school — two precious hours you find you need every day? Could your oldest child cook supper the day on days when you do a lot of client consultations, or could she be responsible at least for physically ordering the pizza and accepting delivery?

Would a questionnaire solve the problem of clients who don't know what to tell you? Don't know what to expect? Sending each new client your standard questionnaire helps you:

- Identify potential problems or areas that will need more attention
- Reduce the risk of losing money by not pricing properly
- Identify common needs (helping you create better packages)

- Let client know what to expect from you
- Guide your client through the process of effective project communication

Automate

Outsourcing won't always be the best strategy for dealing with time-consuming areas of your business that lose you money. And many résumé writers — especially those just getting started — are wary of outsourcing anything beyond tax preparation. So you need to find a way to “work smarter.” Automating as much of your business as you can will also help you streamline for success.

Here are six ways to instantly automate your business: (HERE)

1. Get an [Autoresponder](#) — and use it! An autoresponder will help you build your list — but only if you populate it with content. You can load up your autoresponder with a handful of emails to begin with so that people signing up for your “Ten Top Tips for Getting a New Job” sheet or free eBook will stay in touch with you — while you're actually off doing other things. Or seven days worth of information when they engage you for résumé services. (These could include job search strategies and to-do items, plus information about your policies and use of their career services documents.)

Don't waste time trying out free autoresponders — no matter how much of a shoestring budget you're limited to using. Not only do these usually serve up ads that annoy potential customers (as well as steal business for your competitors) the lack of support inevitably leads to glitches. You won't be able to export your list when you do want to move it to a better autoresponder service (and you will). Plus using a tried-and-true autoresponder (I recommend [AWeber](#)) allows you to take

advantage of built-in features you'll want and need as you grow more familiar with the benefits of keeping in touch automatically. Best of all, these powerhouse autoresponder companies provide plans that start at \$19 per month! (Inexpensive when you realize how much money you can save and that they can actually *make* you money if you include affiliate offers.)

2. **Automate Purchases** – you can do this in several different ways: The important thing is to find the best one for your business (and the way you work) – and implement it. You can choose from shopping cart systems, PayPal or even a smartphone app that allows you to take payments.
3. **Make Use of Apps and Plugins** – With the astonishing variety of apps and plugins available today, there's no excuse for not putting these to work for your business. You can coordinate your résumé writing business on the go through apps that allow you to handle email on your smartphone as easily as if you were home with your computer, schedule client consultations and check your calendar, access PayPal to check your daily sales figures; use Skype or FaceTime on your iPhone as well as on your computer, and much more.

You can also use cloud computing – online storage and sharing – to help you run your business or check on project status data while away from your desk. (This is especially useful if you work with subcontract writers.)

Here are six popular apps you may particularly appreciate:

- [Google Calendar](#) – You can use this **general calendar system** both on your computer and on your mobile phone. And you aren't limited to one calendar – you can create one for your personal life plus an overall Business Plan calendar or whatever type of

calendar you can dream up. This easy, free and powerful app will help you keep the “big picture” accurately in mind at all times.

- [BaseCamp](#) – The ultimate cloud-based online **project management system**. You can set it up so that your subcontract writers and even your clients upload work and project requests directly to your BaseCamp, giving you an instant overview of where any project is at, as well as upcoming deadlines. Plans currently range from \$49-199 per month. (If you’re just starting out and really need a free option, [Dropbox](#) provides similar options and flexibility.)
- [FreshBooks](#) – A complete and easy **invoicing and billing system** that integrates with PayPal. Their “seedling” plan allows you to handle up to twenty-five clients a month for only \$19.95. It also allows imported data and report creation, so it’s a wonderful system for tracking your costs and profits.
- [PayPal](#) – yes, there are PayPal apps for your iPhone, Android or Blackberry, allowing you to view and manage your account no matter where you are.
- [Wunderlist](#) – I use this free app to track to-do items.

And there are hundreds more “specialty” apps you can easily find, such as:

- [MyStickies](#) – a relatively new app that allows you to place sticky notes on web pages, as well as on your desktop. Currently only works with Firefox. Free – but they do have a Donation button.
- [Tungle](#) – A free iPhone **scheduling app** that eliminates multiple calendars and allows you to not only schedule on the go, but allow others to instantly know your availability.

If you use WordPress for your website or maintain a blog, you can easily install free plugins such as **Editorial Calendar** to see an overview of blog posts you have pre-scheduled; **WPTouch** to allow viewers accessing your site to see a

mobile version; **BuddyPress**, which allows you to manage all your social networking via your WordPress blog; **Affiliate Link Manager** to help you cloak and manage your affiliate links; and **Automatic WordPress Backup** – no website should be without regular backups.

There are also standard plugins I shouldn't even have to tell you to use, such as **Google XML Sitemaps**, **All In One SEO Pack**, **WPSecurity** and the **Akismet** spam filter.

All of these plugins can be easily found and installed through your WordPress Dashboard, which allows you to search the WordPress.org [Extend Plugins](#) section. (You can also purchase premium plugins.)

The Key to Successfully Using Apps and Plugins – Don't be dazzled by all the bells and whistles. *Pick only the apps and plugins specific to your business needs.* (Exceptions: Akismet, All In One SEO Pack and Google XML Sitemaps are universal, basic “must haves,” if you use WordPress as your online content management system.)

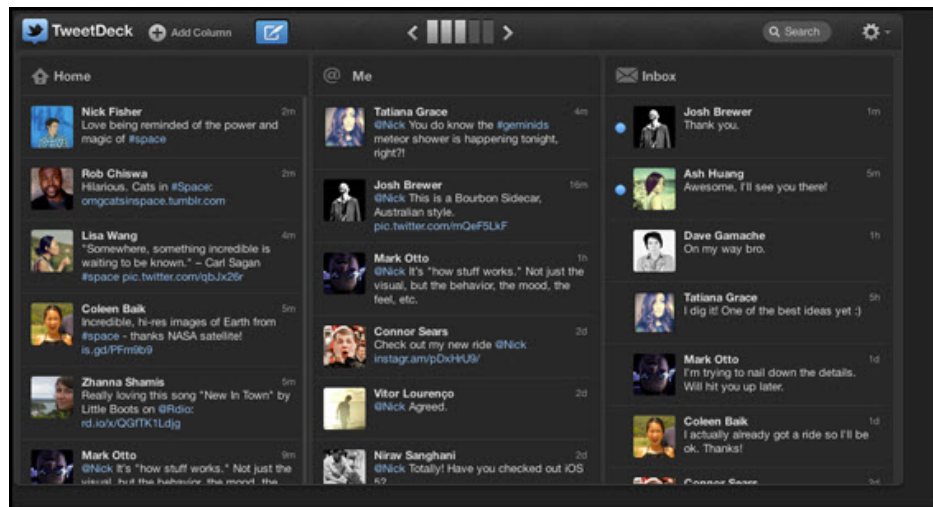
Find ONE calendar app or plug in – and use it. Find ONE online project management system – and use it. Find ONE invoicing system – and use it.

Automating Your Social Networking

Save time in your social networking too by using “dashboards” such as [HootSuite](#), [TweetDeck](#) and [Seesmic](#) that allow you to:

- Pre-schedule posts
- Post to as many (or as few) social networks as you like – with one simple click

- Instantly check for posts that have been shared or retweeted; or responses to your posts



It's nice to keep the personal touch in social networking (and essential, if you're branding yourself rather than a product or business)...but social networking dashboards can help you save a lot of time.

Delete!

A final way to streamline, de-clutter and ultimately save time in your business – Delete all your “baggage” – both online and off.

Offline Decluttering – If you haven't used that reference book on your shelf forever, remove it. Make space for another book that's handier – say, résumé reference books (or “[Write Great Résumés Faster](#)” – which has more great time management tips).

If you never use that printer because you only provide your clients with digital résumé files, donate it.

If your desk is overwhelmed with a mountain of papers, put them all in a box — then schedule a date to go through them. Throw out everything you don't need.

If you're an "information junkie" who collects dozens of magazines because each contains one or two articles you want to refer back to, save space (and de-clutter your mind) by cutting out the exact article you need, then filing it in a binder. (Create alphabetical or Specialty Subject sections with Index Tabs.) Better yet, [get a document scanner](#) and file it online.

Remove outdated notes from your bulletin board. Throw out those outdated CDs (especially the ones that don't load any more!) Recycle the 16 pop cans crammed into crevices, and wash those coffee cups.

Well, okay, perhaps your desk hasn't got to that particular state of chaos yet — but you get my point.

And while we're at it, de-clutter your desk of all those **computer cords**. Go wireless on things like headphones, keyboards and mouses (mice?). Tie messy chords you have to keep loosely together and out of the way with plastic twist ties specifically made for that purpose.

Digital and Online De-cluttering — The best way to start? **Unsubscribe** from email newsletters you don't read! (You'll be amazed how blissful it is *not* to open an inbox spilling at the seams.)

Pick a date on your calendar and every day, week or month (whichever works best for you) delete extraneous Notepad notes, Stickies, or emails.

Clean up your **contact files** and **address books**, removing people who are no longer part of your life.

Use Gmail filtering. I know, I know: You've been meaning to do that forever — but set a date and a time limit and do it now.

What to Do About Disposal Anxiety — And if you suffer from Disposal Anxiety, put all your discarded physical items in a big cardboard box and keep them — away from your office — for at least one month.

If you haven't used an item in the box by then, discard that item permanently.

If you're also experience digital disposal anxiety, copy those files onto a memory stick, and put the stick away in a drawer. Set a time limit, and if you haven't accessed those files by that date, delete them — and re-use the stick.

Deleting Client Files — Don't. You never know when you'll have to refer back to a note, find information for your tax accountant, use an ancient project as a template, or settle a dispute. I'm a digital packrat — I have every résumé I've written — some on my laptop, some on my desktop computer, and the rest on five Zip disks. Don't forget to backup your files!

Getting It Done

Finally, make sure you put all these tips and strategies to use by scheduling time daily (on your new, online calendar) to start implementing them. When you've done this, you should know clearly that Monday is Physical Office Evaluation and De-cluttering Day, Tuesday is Hard Drive De-cluttering Day, Wednesday is Social Network Streamlining day, etc. etc. Make it a week-long or two week project — even if you only allot half an hour a day.

You may feel like you're "losing" time every day by tackling these chores, but in truth the time you'll permanently gain will be priceless. If you're tempted to abandon the effort, ask yourself: "What could I do with an extra hour a day? An extra afternoon a week? And extra day a month?" (Print those questions out and put them up on your billboard!)

No time management app or system will really work...until you make it.

Remember – "You can't manage time, you can only manage yourself."