

Time Tracking Procedures

Directions: Almost no one likes time tracking. However, it's difficult to manage something if we don't really know the facts. And trust me, when it comes to time, everyone is self-deluded. So use this as a tool to help you manage yourself and your most precious asset, your time. Everyone wastes time – and usually the same way, day-after-day. So here's the procedure.

1. Keep track for one entire week (minimum five days, better all seven)
2. Keep track in fifteen-minute intervals (the lines on the time sheet are in half hour blocks so just use a diagonal line to mark fifteen minutes if a task takes less than a half hour).
3. The more detail you supply, the better. "Email" works, but "Emailed John, Sally, and Frank" is better.
4. Keep track IN REAL TIME. Remember, when it comes to time, everyone is self-deluded. If you don't keep track of how you use your time, simultaneous to the usage of that time, you'll severely undercut the usefulness of this tool. You'll think, "That only took fifteen minutes to do," when in reality it may have taken a half hour or forty minutes. So keep track of your time concurrently, throughout the day. In other words, keep your time sheet next to you and record whatever you're doing every fifteen to thirty minutes. If you want to be more productive, this is critical.
5. Don't worry about trying to find or create a perfect week. That would undercut the helpfulness of tracking your time. The helpfulness of this tool isn't found in recording an aberrant week so that you look better than you normally do. You want a "real" week. So start with this week. Then do this once a month.
6. If you miss a few hours, don't give up. Just jump back into it. Very few people do this perfectly so let perfection roll away. Just jump back in and get back to recording your time simultaneously.
7. If you're like every other person on planet earth, you're not going to like what you see. Everyone wastes time and it's no fun observing it. But don't let that stop you from recording your time. Remember, nothing changes until something changes. And it's hard to change what we don't know or don't confront.
8. Make sure you include all your distractions. If you're working on a project for an hour, but you also had three people stop by your office, answered four emails and replied to two text messages, you need to record them. Remember, this is a tool for you. If you're not actually recording what you did, then you're hindering the effectiveness of this tool. This means that you need to record how long that call took, or how much time you spent checking Facebook, or how long that text to your spouse or child took, or how long you spent re-reading that email before sending it, or how long you sat in your chair staring at the wall or ceiling ☺.
9. To save time and space, feel free to come up with your own abbreviations. For example, "E-J" could mean "Emailed Jacque." Or "T-S" could mean "Texted Steve." Etc.
10. When the week is over, start looking for patterns for how you use and waste time. Trust me, they're there – and even worse than you think. Why? Because any time you track time, the actual tracking of time usually improves performance – which means that the week you're recording is one of your better weeks (i.e. you normally waste more time and get more distracted more frequently than your time sheet says – now aren't you glad you read this ☺).