

## How Organization Helps Make Most of a Workday

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Logging in long hours to get ahead? By strategically organizing your workday, you may be able to get on the fast track without sacrificing your personal life.

Nearly two in three full-time U.S. employees say their workload has increased in the past 12 to 24 months, according to a recent survey from Accenture Ltd., a global management-consulting company. Of those, almost half say the heavier burden has negatively affected their personal life, the survey shows.

"You have a finite amount of energy and talent to provide, and you need to protect it," says Karlin Sloan, chief executive officer of Karlin Sloan & Co., a global leadership-development firm in Chicago, and author of "Smarter, Faster, Better: Strategies for Effective, Enduring and Fulfilled Leadership" (Jossey-Bass, 2006). "The goal is to be able to sustain a career throughout your life."

Here are five tips for getting the most of your workday:

**Know when you work best.** Many professionals are more productive at certain times of the day than others, says Dee Soder, founder and managing partner of CEO Perspective Group, a New York executive-coaching firm. Tackle challenging tasks during those hours and leave easy ones for when you're less energized, she says.

Jason Chupick says he's "not a morning person," so he avoids scheduling important meetings or client calls before 9:30 a.m. Mr. Chupick, a vice president at public-relations firm Bliss, Gouverneur & Associates Inc. in New York, says when fully alert, he's less prone to mistakes that need correcting later.

Call it a day if you're feeling ill or zapped out, says Ms. Sloan. "A lot of people think that being present in the office makes a big difference, even if they're not

doing anything," she says. "The opposite is true. If you're in the office, be productive or don't be there at all."

Early birds who start and leave earlier than their co-workers may want to occasionally send an email to a co-worker after their arrival. It can subtly signal that they're working full days, even if others aren't around when they start.

If your office doesn't have flex schedules, consider meeting with your boss to pitch them as a way to increase productivity, says Ms. Sloan.

Leaving early just isn't an option? Handle tasks that require little mental energy when you're not 100%, she says. For example, you might prioritize your to-do list or tidy up your office, she suggests.

**Set deadlines.** **Jo Bennett, a partner at executive-search firm Battalia Winston International in New York, says** she gives herself a time limit to complete assignments, even if they're not due by a certain date.

"Then I tell people I will deliver something, and that forces me to work to the deadline," she says. "It's better to get things done while they're fresh in my mind. If you wait a week, you're going to forget a lot."

**Control your environment.** The average full-time knowledge worker loses about two hours a day to office distractions, such as pop-ins from colleagues, according to a 2005 survey. The survey, from New York research firm Basex Inc., had more than 1,000 respondents, most in the U.S.

To avert interruptions, place a sign on your door or desk that says you're busy, says Dr. Soder, who has a doctorate in industrial psychology. "People will start working around it," she says. Also, devote a regular time slot for colleagues to stop by with questions or concerns, she adds. A client at a financial-services firm sets aside Friday afternoons for this purpose, she says. The strategy encourages visitors only during that time, unless their needs are urgent, she explains.

Paula Balzer, a founding partner at New York marketing-services firm MKTG.partners, says she disciplines herself to ignore emails and calls while working on projects. "If you get distracted all the time, then it's hard to get anything accomplished," she says.

Select certain times during the day to check all your messages at once, says Ms. Sloan. "Instead of letting your email, BlackBerry or phone control you, you need to control it," she says.

**Eliminate unessential work.** Identify low-value and inefficient tasks that you can remove from your plate, says Marcee Harris, a senior associate in advisory services in San Francisco for Catalyst, a New York-based nonprofit that researches women's career issues. "We recommend that employees partner with their managers to ask the question of what is taking away from their work effectiveness," she says.

For example, maybe you're writing memos that colleagues don't need, or you can combine several reports, says Ms. Harris. "There may be relics of work that used to make sense but no longer do," she says. The effort will demonstrate that you're taking the initiative to streamline your workload, she adds.

**Work on the go.** Recruiter Erika Weinstein, 47, says she sends about 10 to 15 emails during her 30-minute subway ride to and from work. "It's taking time that's normally nonproductive and making it productive," she says.

Stick to noncritical issues, such as scheduling meetings or approving projects, says Ms. Weinstein, president of Stephen-Bradford Search in New York. Drivers can listen to work-related podcasts or recorded books and make cellphone calls using a hands-free device.