



## Pippa's Guide to Managing Time and Efficiency

I often hear people talking about work/life balance and I'll level with you, secretly I believe the answer to achieving it is obvious. Shall I tell you what it is? It's a four day week. That my friends would surely solve everything.

If we had three days off we could use one day for catching up on life admin, doing the washing and housework (and perhaps some form of exercise). Then the second one could be reserved for carousing, social stuff and debauchery and the last for recovery. Perfect.

Of course sadly I don't have the power to insist upon or indeed implement this rather fantastic but probably economy ruining strategy. So, as it is, like most of the population, I am a slave to a five day week and forced to fit all of the above into a mere two day window. During my life as a PA some days are more hectic or stressful than others but there aren't many where I am left a shell of a woman at the end, rocking gently back and forth, eyes twitching, wondering how I'm going to get everything done.

However, like anyone with a full time job, just occasionally, particularly if there are a lot of things going on in my personal life, these days can and do occur. Take the other week for instance. My boss was getting ready to go away and the build-up was proving rather intense. There was a lot to organise so when there was a fire drill it wasn't the ideal time to be separated from my computer. Plus, in the back of my mind, I was stressing about the fact that I needed to buy my Dad a birthday present before the weekend, my roots desperately needed doing and I'd also been put in charge of finding a new intern for the department. At home the fridge had broken down, my bank account had been hacked so I needed to organise new cards and my roommate had given me two months' notice. In short, I was feeling swamped by it all, plus my work inbox was filling up at such a rate of knots it was almost funny. Almost.

So today let's talk a bit about how to manage our time effectively so that things don't spiral and so that if you ever find yourself standing on a pavement due to a fire drill you don't feel like crying over the valuable minutes you are being forced to waste.

### 1. Lists

I've talked to you about the power of lists before I'm sure. I am an absolute believer in them. Even if the things I write are only as simple as 'Buy Dad a birthday card.' Somehow, simply by having written something down it helps me remember it, so when passing a Scribbler I'll be more inclined to pop in. If you are an old fashioned type of guy or gal, have a pen and notepad with you at all times. Otherwise make a list on your phone's notes or download an app. I recommend 'To do list'. It's very easy to use and you can always upgrade to the premium version for just over twenty quid and share lists with your boss. Lists mean that if things are extremely busy certain important stuff won't be forgotten or missed. If I don't make lists I tend to end up experiencing horrible 'sit bolt upright at 3am' moments as I remember something vital my boss asked me to do and I've totally forgotten about.

### 2. Prioritise

Some are better than others at working out what needs attending to right away and what can wait. It's a great skill to cultivate. I remember one poor PA who ended up 'not having her contract renewed.' She was nice enough but very slow and only able to see to things in the order she'd been given them to do. So for example, if she'd been asked to do some data imputing and also to organise lunch for the board meeting, even if the inputting took her till four in the afternoon, she would plod through it, meaning the executives who were stuck in the meeting reached the point where they were starting to consider eating one another. Similarly, if you are wrestling with wanting to go the gym before work for an hour plus the fact that you need to prepare for a presentation but are very short on time, it might be that sacrificing the gym is a good idea. Always examine deadlines to establish the true situation though - people asking you to do things will often

say 'now' when 'later today' would be perfectly acceptable. Appeal to the other person's own sense of time management: it's impossible for anyone to do a good job without the opportunity to plan and prioritise.

### **3. Time Log**

Sometimes (though not always) when people go on ad infinitum about how busy they are I feel compelled to question it, because if they used the hours they were currently using for moaning about busy they were they could probably finish off the To Do List and still have spare minutes leftover. I once worked for someone who used to regularly stay in the office till ten at night, a fact she used to tell anyone prepared to listen. Yet because I was her PA I know for a fact she was taking three hour lunch breaks for shopping, having treatments and/or surfing Facebook. So as far as I could work out, staying that late was less a badge of honour, more her choice.

So really think about how you currently spend your time. If you don't know, keep a time log for a few days to find out. There are plenty of time management apps available to help you do this. By discovering what your week really looks like, you can determine what the first steps to improving it should be and truly make the most of your time.

Challenge anything that could be wasting time and effort, particularly habitual tasks, meetings and reports where responsibility is inherited or handed down from above. Don't be a slave to a daft process or system. Know your deadlines. When do you need to finish your tasks? Mark the deadlines out clearly in your calendar and organizer so you know when you need to finish them.

### **4. Learn to say “No”**

Saying 'yes' is a positive thing and something we are all therefore programmed to lean towards saying. However, sometimes, funnily enough, turning something down or saying no to something that you know deep down you don't have time for, can be a really liberating and indeed positive experience. Don't take on more than you can handle. For the distractions that come in when you're doing other things, give a firm no. Or defer it to a later period.

### **5. Target to be early**

When you target to be on time, you'll either be on time or late. Most of the times you'll be late. However, if you target to be early, you'll most likely be on time. For appointments, strive to be early. For your deadlines, submit them earlier than required. And thus it should all pan out.

That's it for now my fellow busy bees but I look forward to speaking with you all soon.

Love,

Pippa x