8 Steps to Save 8 Hours A Workweek

Eight Proven Strategies to Accomplish More While Working Less

You are busy. You might feel too busy to even take these 8 steps.

I used to work six days a week at least 10 hours a day. I was stressed, fatigued and it was making me sick. Not only that, I wasn't creative and I wasn't making money.

I couldn't take it anymore. I made changes. Those changes allowed me to shift from a 60-hour miserable work-week to a 32-hour week that I enjoy. (I would have titled this "8 Steps to Save 28 hours a Week" but I don't think most people would believe that was possible!)

Not only have I saved time, my productivity has dramatically increased. So has my income. Stress has decreased. Health has improved. I'm more productive and happier.

It isn't magic. It won't just happen. But it isn't difficult or unrealistic either. Here's the deal: ***You can't get different results by doing the same things!*** You'll have to be intentional.

Liberating your time *will* happen if you are intentional.

Getting Started

Plan to succeed: These steps won't happen just because you downloaded this document. You'll need to set aside 1-2 hours, total, to think through how to apply these steps.

If you can't do it right now, schedule time for this into your calendar: You can schedule it all at once or you can do one step a day (perhaps 15-20 minutes per step) or something in between.

- ☐ **I have time to do this right now!**

Or

- ☐ **Yes! I've scheduled time in my calendar.**

Know Why. Why will saving time matter to you? 8 hours a week is one business day each week saved. You'll have recovered 52 days every single year. How will work or life be different? What will happen if you don't learn to save this time?

> ### Why saving 8 hours a week matters to me:

What will you do with your liberated time? Time is like a garden. Tend to it and it will produce. Ignore it and will fill with weeds. My major strategies for saving 28 hours (not just 8!) were to stop working on Saturdays, to leave work at 5 pm and to block out Friday as a day for personal & professional renewal. Once I knew what I was going to do with my liberated time, I learned to get *even more* done in the time I had left.

Decide how you will use your liberated time – or it will slip away. **What will you do with your time?**

What I will do with my newly liberated 8 hours each week:

Let's Begin!

Step One: Clarify Your 90 Day Theme or Priority

Why? Because clarity and focus in overall direction helps you guide your efforts. It gets you quickly get back on track from distractions. It helps you make decisions faster by already having decided what is (and isn't) important to do.

- ☐ **Write down the date that is 90 days from today:**
- ☐ **Create a list of what accomplishments that will be most meaningful to you or your organization's success over the next 90 days:** If you notice that a number of your accomplishments are similar – feel free to group them together as a theme.

- ☐ **Looking at your list, identify your *one*, top priority or theme for the next 90 days.**

  - o Put a star by it, or circle it, or underline it. This is the single priority that absolutely must happen. If nothing else gets accomplished in the next 90 days – this will.
  - o For most people, it first feels like a challenge to pick just one. The truth is, you will get more done if you focus on a single priority at a time. The rest of the list isn't going to disappear just because you chose to create focus for yourself.

- ☐ **Describe why it is a priority:** What makes this one priority so important? What are the consequences of not achieving it?

Myth Busting:

- • *Myth: If I choose one priority, I won't be able to get everything else done*! Choosing a priority only means this is the most important goal for you to pursue. It means it'll take precedent in your planning, goal setting and resource allocation. It doesn't mean it is the only goal or responsibility you will pursue.
- • *Myth: I have more than one responsibility or goal! I can't choose just one*. You may have more than one. However, research shows that creating and maintaining priorities is a faster way to accomplish more in the same (or less) amount of time.

Step Two: Clarify Your Two Week Priority

Why? For exactly the same reasons as Step One. When we start to look at the "near-term" it is easy to let things that feel urgent hijack time away from what is truly important.

☐ **To accomplish my top 90-day priority or theme what one thing do I need to accomplish within the next two weeks?**

☐ **Break my two-week goal down into "chunks."** Name or describe the "chunks" here. About how long will each "chunk" take to accomplish?

☐ **Put those "chunks" into my calendar over the next two weeks.**

Step Three: Clarify Today's Priority

Why? Notice the trend? When we always know what the most important thing is, we can more easily focus on it and accomplish it. Make this a daily habit.

I make a list of everything I need to accomplish in a day. One item on that list becomes my priority. When I accomplish it – I identify the next priority for the day. I do this until I complete my list.

☐ **What one thing needs to be accomplished today to move towards my Two Week Priority?**

☐ **What time will I set aside to do it?**

Step Four: Group Your Work

Why? It is a faster way to work. It takes less, total time when we group similar kinds of work together. It allows us to get into a state of "flow." It reduces the amount of time needed to start up, shut down or transition between kinds of tasks.

☐ **Create a list of the "kinds" of work you do on a regular basis. (E-mail, bills, writing, meetings, etc.)**

☐ **Set aside regular times for regular kinds of work.**

Don't do whatever comes up as it comes up!

☐ **I've grouped my work.**

Step Five: Time Blocking

Ha! I've already tricked you into starting this!

Why? Because when you become skillful with your calendar you'll get far more done with less effort. You will save time by deciding in advance how you are going to use your time. Time blocking is the practice of setting appointments with yourself, in your calendar, to work on your priorities. ***Learning to set priorities and learning to block time for prioritized work are the "power ingredients" to saving time.***

Tips:

✓ Experiment to see what typical block of time seems to work best for you. For many people, 90-minute blocks are a good starting point.
✓ Protect this time as if it were an appointment with someone important. Learn to say, "Sorry, I'm not available at that time," if someone asks.
✓ If you absolutely can't avoid someone "breaking in" on your block of time – move the block to somewhere else in your week – so the priority isn't lost.
✓ Don't block every minute of your week. Leave buffer time for things that come up. Experimentation will help you find the right balance

Your tasks:

☐ **Block out time for daily priority setting – at the same time every day**.
Usually, only 5 minutes is needed but get it into your calendar.

☐ **Block out time for Two Week Priority setting – every two weeks**.
You'll get faster as your practice – probably down to less than 15 minutes. But at first, plan to block out 30 minutes.

☐ **Block out time for 90 Day Priority setting – every 90 days.**
Plan to block at least 30 minutes. Experiment to learn what works best for you.

☐ **Block out time to work on your priorities.**
Look ahead at our calendar. Do a rough estimate on how much time will be needed to complete a priority. Break it down into 1.5 hour blocks. Put all those blocks into your calendar.

Here's what my typical week looks like. I'll make changes if a client has an urgent situation or if I'm working on a big project. However, if I need to meet with a client on Tuesday morning, I'll

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
•8:30 Morning Priority Setting	•8:30 Morning Priority Setting	•8:30 Morning Priority Setting	•8:30 Morning Priority Setting	•8:30 Morning Priority Setting
•9:30 Staff meeting	•9:00 Article Writing	•9:00 Creative Projects	•9:00 Creative Projects	•Anything I feel like doing that will energize, refresh or move me forward.
•10:00 E-mails & Admin	•12:00 Lunch	•12:00 Lunch	•12:00 Lunch	•Read, journal, write, pray, hangout with my kids, take a walk, etc.
•12:00 Lunch	•1:00 Client Meetings (or leftover admin)	•1:00 Client Meetings (or leftover admin)	•1:00 Client Meetings (or leftover admin)	
•1:30 Call Clients, Prospective Clients and Referrals				
•3:30 Staff meeting				

shift the writing time block to another part of the week. For example, into a free afternoon time normally reserved for client meetings.

This calendar serves me. I don't serve it. I build it to best accomplish my Two-Week Priorities. Which are based on my 90-Day goal. Every day I move forward.

Step Six: Manage Distractions & Mental Clutter & The Tyranny of the Urgent

Why? Because these are time thieves. Cut them off at the pass. Distractions and "Other People's Urgency" sabotage our efforts to block time. Don't be a victim. Take action.

Create a list of tactics to fit your needs. Experiment with it to figure out what works for you. Here is what works for many people:

- Close your door.
- Wear headphones.
- Turn off all e-mail notifications, text alerts, etc.
- Turn off your phone ringer and schedule times to check and return calls.
- Practice polite redirection: "I'm sorry, I can't talk right now but I'll be free in 90 minutes."
- Listen to music that helps you focus. (I use www.brainshiftradio.com. They don't know I sent you.)
- Go where you can focus. When doing creative work, I know I often write better in certain coffee shops than I do in my office. Work that would literally take me 20 hours to get done in my office I found I could complete in 4 hours at a particular coffee shop. (Just saved 16 hours right there!)

- ☐ **Create a list time-saving tactics to try:**

Step Seven: Get Rid of Time Wasters

Why? Because it is so easy to get sucked into time-wasting tasks or activities. Don't do things that won't produce value.

Learn to ask yourself these questions whenever you think something is a priority or you add an item to your to-do [1]. As an exercise – use your to-do list for the day and ask these questions about each item:

☐ **Priority Check:**
- How valuable is this to me or my organization? (Is this helping me accomplish my priority?)

- What would happen if it didn't get done?

☐ **Responsibility Check:**
- Is this really my responsibility? (Am I really the only person who can do this?)
  ☐
- Who else who can do this?

☐ **Efficiency Check:**
- How can I do this in a way that takes less time or effort?

- How would I accomplish this if I only had half the time?

☐ **Yes! I've used this check list at least once to think through my to-do list.**

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[1] Research reported in Harvard Business Review showed that regular use of these questions saved knowledge workers up to 8 hours a work week. https://hbr.org/2013/09/make-time-for-the-work-that-matters

www.vantageconsulting.org

Step Eight: Take a Daily Walk

Why? Many studies show that taking breaks, physical movement, getting outside, being among greenery all help reduce stress, improve thinking and creativity. This all leads to more productive work and fewer mistakes.

Additionally, when you walk you'll feel better. Cause and effect. You are teaching yourself that you can make choices that create positive change.

It doesn't need to be long. Even 5 minutes, outside, makes a measurable difference.

Plus, you've been working hard. You need a brain break.

- ☐ **Stop and take at least a 5-10 minute walk outside.**
  - o Block time every day. I usually walk at lunch.
  - o Walk outside. Research indicates that if you can walk in a "green space," like a park, you'll get greater benefit.
  - o Don't ruin it by getting on your phone or talking about work with someone.

Final Thoughts

Being busy might impress some people. But it doesn't make your life better. It doesn't help you get more done.

If you follow these 8 Steps, you'll save at least 8 hours or more every single week. You'll get even more done in the process. And you'll be happier.

Imagine that.

What will you do with your free time?