Before you start thinking about time management, you must learn one key lesson. Time is finite. What does that mean? Starting today, you will need to stop saying things like “There isn’t enough time” and “If only I had just one more hour.” Good time managers say things like “How can I better prioritize my activities?” or “Tomorrow, I will take on one fewer important task.”

**So, what exactly is time management?** To some, it’s a dreaded idea, and for others, it’s the gateway to make millions of dollars writing self-help books. In the context of business school, **time management is mindfully prioritizing and executing your tasks and activities to create the most value.**

That’s a lot of buzzwords, but that’s precisely why you should care. Time management involves so many concepts that will allow us to be great business professionals and leaders.

**Good time management:**
- Allows you to spend the right amount of time on the right tasks. By doing what is most impactful, you create the most value for your career, your life, and your organization.
- Will help you become more organized by default as you practice.
- Helps you declutter your calendar and your life to allow you to de-stress effectively.

**To become effective at time management, you will need to work on four key skills:**

1) **Planning.** Effective time managers are skilled at looking along the short and long time horizons that impact their careers, and they are realistic about what can be achieved in a certain amount of time. Planning skills are critical because they will help you plot out the most value-creating activities and actions when you move forward.

   *Example: Johnny wants to develop good connections in business school, seeing the big picture of becoming a VP in an Investment Bank. He chooses a range of activities to support those short-and-long-term goals.*

2) **Prioritizing.** Those who can take a list of tasks and prioritize by value are by far the homerun hitters. Effective managers ruthlessly think through what they “must do” and what they “want to do,” using value creation as the only metric for keeping things on the list.

   *Example: Jenny puts a difficult case competition deck on the top of her “to-do” list; it’s very difficult and absolutely no fun, but partners from her top firm will be judging her final presentation.*

3) **Saying “No.”** Collegial business school students want to help and do everything, and we think our reputation will suffer if we say no. On the contrary, saying “yes” and falling short is the quickest way to damage your credibility. Assessing your bandwidth, the value of the opportunity, and delivering a polite, certain “no” is key.

   *Example: Gordon’s professor asks him to TA a class Gordon isn’t interested in. Gordon has filled up his planner already, so he politely but firmly declines the offer.*

4) **Concentrating.** You’ve perfected the prior four, have a killer schedule in front of you, and...off you go to Facebook or Twitter for just a few moments, and you are undone! Put plainly and simply, everyone can concentrate, and you cannot make excuses here.

   *Example: Laura has four main tasks to get done on Tuesday. Ignoring the call of the cute cat video, she finishes all four and even has time for a glass of wine before bed!*

Easier said than done, right? Well, check out the four tips and four exercises below to start working toward becoming a better time manager today!
Tips for Becoming an Effective Time Manager

1) **Close your email.** The constant dinging of the inbox is a major distraction. Unless you’re waiting for an urgent email (which you probably aren’t), close your inbox until your task is done.

2) **Use a planner.** Carrying a planner with you during the day (whether as a moleskin or an app on your phone) will help you constantly focus on your tasks for the day.

3) **Use a daily and weekly schedule.** On Sundays, create a long list of all the tasks you’ll need to do that week. Keep this in your planner all week and add to it as tasks come up for you to do. Every night, pick the 4-5 most critical tasks (no more!) from your weekly list for the next day.

4) **Check your schedule (NOT your email) first thing in the morning.** Checking your email provides an instant dose of chaos. Checking your schedule centers you on your major tasks for the day.

**Exercises to Practice Time Management Skills**

Here are several exercises you can do to try to improve your time management skills. Take each exercise seriously, and try to stick with it for at least a few weeks before moving on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Inventory</strong></td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>For a week, catalogue blocks of 15 minutes of your day; use general categories like “commute,” “school email,” “gym,” “Pricing HW,” “sleep”</td>
<td>An honest inventory of exactly how you spend your time will reveal time you can reclaim for other activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Say “No” Slowly</strong></td>
<td>Saying “No”</td>
<td>For a week, politely decline to take on or attend minor tasks/events; observe reactions</td>
<td>Comfort with saying “no” and seeing there are no major repercussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value Creation 2x2</strong></td>
<td>Prioritizing</td>
<td>For a few days, put each task in the 2x2 below; honestly assess tasks and take action based on where each task falls</td>
<td>Better understanding of value tasks; improved delegation; less desire to do everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Email Cataloging</strong></td>
<td>Prioritizing, Concentrating</td>
<td>Create “Archive,” “Follow-Up,” and “Hold” folders in your email; drag each email into one of these folders. If it doesn’t belong in one, delete it!</td>
<td>Breaking the chains of email; recognizing opportunities to respond, reading less important email</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**The Value Creation 2x2**

- **Urgent**
  - Do now
  - Put on list
- **Important**
  - Do if time
  - Delegate/Don’t do

**Email Folder Definitions**

- “Follow-Up” – Emails in this folder require an answer. You will go here first when you open your email.
- “Hold” – You temporarily hold emails in this folder to understand what to do next. You should go here after emptying the “Follow-Up” folder.
- “Archive” – Emails in here are held for long-term reference but do not require action.