

Where Does the Time Go?

Based on the mathematical formula developed by Vilfredo Pareto, only 20% of something is vital and 80% is trivial. This familiar 80/20 rule can be applied to the time you “spend” as well. The odds are that 20% of your time results in 80% of your accomplishments, and the other 80% is largely non-productive. The 80/20 rule is good news, because that means you could increase your productivity and possibly have even more time for family, friends, and yourself.

Do you feel you could accomplish more but run out of time? There may be ways to combine activities or use your time more effectively. Start by keeping detailed track of how you spend all your working hours, including things like opening the mail, talking to co-workers and friends, reading email, and every other activity of your workday. (If home life seems out-of-control, consider recording that, too.) Be honest and be detailed, tracking everything by five minute increments. You might want to make a chart broken down into these increments in advance so you can quickly enter activities. It's important to enter things as they happen and not try to “catch up” later. At the end of each day, highlight those activities/time periods that were the most productive.

Try to do this for a week. It's not as easy as it sounds. As the week progresses, you'll probably be surprised at how much time you waste. In fact, just the process of accounting for your time could improve your productivity automatically. You may want to keep your time chart as a regular tool to help you spend your time more wisely.

After you have at least a week worth of time sheets, notice which times of the day and which activities are the most productive for you. Once you identify where the 80% of your accomplishments are coming from (that you spend 20% of your time on), it's up to you to decide how you want to spend the other 80% of your time. Instead of “spending” your time, “invest” it in the things you want to make happen. Maybe you want more free time. Perhaps you would like to earn more money. Take inventory of your life and where you want it to lead you next. Then make the time-conscious changes that will allow that to happen, because you're the one in charge of you - not that ticking clock.