

5 steps to help you take control of your workday

Once upon a time, each employee did the work of only one person. Some even had a assistants to help. Today, that seems like a fairy tale. Now, you routinely juggle multi- tasks projects, shoulder new responsibilities with layoffs and handle hundreds of e-mails, and employee visits each week.

It is a wonder you can ever leave the office, let alone leave feeling relaxed and in control. But you *can*. Take these five steps to take control over your workday:

- 1. Change your attitude.** Start with a fundamental shift in approach: Accept the fact that you can't accomplish everything.
Contrary to what time-management experts advise don't try to do more in less time. Perpetual "busyness" just leaves you burned out and unable to cope with anything new. Instead, seek results on the most important tasks.
- 2. Clear your priorities.** Of course, the execs don't want you to miss a deadline or important project because you were focused on something else. But their deadlines are precisely the point. Work together with the top brass to set your priorities. Expect to spar a bit with them over what's most important. In a fast-paced world, determining what's critical is often a matter of opinion. Don't be afraid to speak up, but climb on board when the higher-ups make a final decision.
- 3. Create a 'must do' list.** Once you know what the right priorities are, the secret to achieving them is creating a daily "must do" list. Include only essential tasks. Ask yourself, "What would I need to take care of tomorrow if I were going on a two-week vacation the next day?"
- 4. Cope with the details.** Taking care of essential tasks is critical, but how do you attend to the countless details that inevitably come up? First, make sure to write down everything. Whenever you jot details in a planner or create a to-do list, capture all information, no matter how mundane. Also, follow a two-minute rule: If something takes less than two minutes to finish, just do it.
- 5. Leave work on time.** When you must leave on time, follow this easy plan from Paula Peisner Coxe, author of *Finding Time: Breathing Space for Women Who Do Too Much*:

30 minutes before quitting time: Clear your desk, pack your bag and organize your next day's must-do list.

15 minutes and counting: Let voice mail answer the phone, so you're not drawn into a conversation that can wait, (Check the message before leaving, just in case it's critical.)

Five minutes out: Paperwork still need attention? Take it home. Better tackle it that night than to cut family time short.