

# How to Get Things Done: The Task-Appointment

**SUMMARY:** Accomplishing a task requires action — not just good intentions or checklists. The Task-Appointment is an appointment *with yourself* to work on a specific task, at a designated date and time.

- A *Must-Do* or *To-Do* is just a concept – until it is assigned a date and time. Only then does it become a **Task-Appointment: An appointment with yourself to work on a specific task at a specific time.**
- **A task is NOT a project** – it is a single step (that may be one component of a larger project). A task is an activity that can usually be accomplished in a single session. NOTE: The first Task-Appointment of any project should be dedicated to breaking the project down into specific, do-able steps (tasks).
- **Schedule specific tasks (date and time) on your calendar**, just as you would schedule a meeting or activity. This turns a passive *Must-Do* or *To-Do* into an action step.
- **Assign both a start and a stop time – this is critical:** Knowing you only have to work on a task for a 20-, 30- or 40-minute period (even 10 minutes!) makes it **easier to start on something you're inclined to avoid.** This time-limited scheduling also makes you **less likely to hyper-focus** (spend most of the day) on one task, to the detriment of everything else.
- **Allow for 5-10 minute breaks** between scheduled Task-Appointments or Meetings. Don't schedule back-to-back appointments. **Use these breaks to help keep your energy balanced and your work in focus.** Take a *Movement Break* (walk, stretch, visit the restroom or snack area, etc.) and/or a *Relaxation Break* (close your eyes and rest, make a personal call, read non-essential material, etc.). **Anxiety makes everything more difficult**, so make a habit of including stress-relieving activities in your day.
- **Avoid overscheduling.** Be realistic and leave “unassigned” periods for catch-up, naps, etc.
- **Use a timer** (computer, phone, calendar, watch or desk alarm) to keep track of both appointments *and* breaks. **Don't rely on your 'sense of time.'**
- If the task will take longer than an assigned period, schedule additional Task-Appointments to complete it. Perhaps your definition of ‘task’ is too broad (which is why it can't be completed within a limited time period). **Or perhaps the ‘task’ is really a ‘mini project,’** which should be broken down into multiple ‘baby steps,’ or component tasks?
- Try to **schedule like tasks at the same time** (i.e., *10-10:30 Return phone calls; 2-2:30 Check emails; 5:30-6:15 Run errands at stores on route home*). Avoid continually shifting from one type of task to another – **transitions consume time and energy.** Plan ahead for efficiency, especially with outside chores.
- **Schedule different types of tasks within the day.** If you're spending most of the morning on writing-type assignments, spend the afternoon on more social tasks.

## IS IT A TASK OR A PROJECT?

If you're not sure where to start, it's a **Project, not a Task.**

The concept behind the **Task –Appointment** is to break each Project down into **baby steps, or chunks, that can be accomplished in one sitting.**

The Task-Appointment allows you to focus on one step at a time. When you separate a Project into Tasks (chunks, baby steps, components), it is easier to understand and plan for the different steps needed to complete the Project. Task-Appointments minimize confusion and procrastination by clarifying:

- What you need to do
- When you plan to do it
- What steps you need to do first
- How much time you intend to spend on it

- **Take your time-of-day energy-level into consideration.** Schedule tasks that are more complex during higher-energy periods. Open mail, browse catalogs, or return emails during a mid-morning slump, rather than first thing in the morning when you're fully awake and ready to go.
- **Work on the more difficult assignments first**, both for the sense of accomplishment, and so you don't feel pressured while you do other things.
- If something else must take priority over a task; **just reschedule the task, as you would a meeting or assignment that has been postponed.** (Stay aware of any related deadlines, and work backwards to ensure you devote enough time to completing the project on time!)
- Stay on track. **If something comes up that does not require your immediate attention – don't allow it to throw you off-track!** Consider what needs to be done, and by when. Then consciously schedule this new activity/interruption as you would *any* timely Task-Appointment. NOTE: **It is very easy to allow distractions to take priority**, especially when you'd like to avoid your already-assigned tasks, when the new activity is more stimulating (as new often is), or when someone else is applying the pressure.
- Reinforce task completion. Check it off as done in your planner. **Schedule 'Reward Time'** for later that day, evening or on the weekend – especially when you've completed difficult, boring or stressful tasks. **You need 'down time' to recharge**, and would probably take it anyway, but feel guilty and pressured. Now you don't have to – **Reward Time is your time to indulge in something you enjoy** (reading, TV, computer games, a movie, dinner out with friends, a long bubble-bath, etc.) **without guilt!**
- Be realistic about what you can actually accomplish within a given time frame. **Before you say 'Yes' to something, decide if it is really something you want/need to do.** Think about whether the way you would be spending your time is how you *want* to spend your time. Consider the cost of lost opportunity. Practice saying 'No.' Decide if you can eliminate or delegate certain activities or projects that are non-essential and stress-evoking. Sometimes, taking on 'too much' is compensation for the guilt we feel at doing what we consider 'too little.'
- Wanting to do something is not the same as getting it done. Working on something is not the same as being able to finish it in time. **Doing less, but accomplishing the things you do, is more fulfilling** than doing more and never feeling you have things under control.
- **Free yourself from the "I SHOULD HAVE/COULD HAVE/WOULD HAVE" trap.** There will *always* be 'more' to do (if not, consider taking on some interesting projects). The benefit of the Task-Appointment approach to time management is that you clarify priorities and set *realistic* daily productivity goals. **When you achieve these goals, you can allow yourself to feel good, despite the backlog of things you haven't yet accomplished.** Realize that it is often easier to follow the non-productive pattern of being critical of yourself for what you (or others) think you *should* have done, then it is to recognize what you *have* been able to accomplish and give yourself a well-deserved pat on the back!

#### SCHEDULE "SELF-CARE APPOINTMENTS"

It is important to take care of yourself, but self-care is usually a low priority. *Change the pattern.*

Schedule Task-Appointments to plan, shop, prepare and eat healthy meals, to exercise, enjoy a hobby, take a leisurely bath, spend quality time with your children or significant other, etc.

**\*\*How well you take care of yourself directly impacts your mental and physical health, which in turn determines your productivity level.\*\***

*Don't forget this!*