

You're not as busy as you think



“There was a time, not so long ago, when I was busy, busy, busy,” says Laura Vanderkam, author of *168 Hours*. “At least I thought I was.”

Then she began tracking her time and found she’d been kidding herself. Washing dishes didn’t take nearly as much time as she thought, while she’d frittered away long stretches on the Internet.

Rather than complaining about your long to-do list, own up to how you’re really spending your time. Benefit? You may gain more control of your time—and life.

Here’s how:

1. Start a time-tracker. Just as you’d track every handful of M&Ms you eat while you’re trying to lose weight, track what you do with your time. Did you hop on Facebook six times during the day and spend five minutes each time? That’s 30 minutes of your day accounted for.

Try project management software for tracking (such as [Clarity](#)) or a basic spreadsheet.

One admin, Victoria, uses Outlook to track her time. She first creates a list of tasks that are labeled by type of work (IT, Catering, Invoice Processing) or specific projects.

“When I start working on a project, I drag the task to the calendar and change the appointment time to now,” she says.

“Then when I’m done, I close the appointment, recording the time.” Every quarter, she exports the data to Excel to analyze where her time goes.

2. Be truthful. Americans may believe they sleep six or seven hours per night, but time logs actually show that we get more than eight hours’ sleep on average.

3. Ask, “What would I like to do with my time?” Say your time-tracker reveals that you work 50 hours per week and sleep eight hours per night. That leaves 62 hours per week for you to spend on exercise, volunteerism or spending time with family.

Set goals for that available time. How many hours would you like to spend exercising versus watching television, for example? What could you do with those 62 free hours?

4. Change your words. Stop saying, “I don’t have time” and start saying, “That’s not a priority.” Do your priorities ring true?

“Changing our language reminds us that time is a choice,” says Vanderkam. “If we don’t like how we’re spending an hour, we can choose differently.”

— Adapted from [“Are You As Busy as You Think?”](#) Laura Vanderkam, *The Wall Street Journal*.

What's an admin's best time-management tip?

We asked this question on our [Admin Pro Forum](#), and the No. 1 tip: putting all work-related meetings, project due dates, tasks, assignments and personal items in an *Outlook Calendar* as an appointment.

“I set my reminders about 1 hour in advance with a side note that shows what needs to be completed. I also set monthly reminders for the meetings I attend and weekly reminders on the projects I work on with deadlines,” commented one admin.