



# Moments Matter: A Three-Part Strategy to Leverage Your Time

You probably don't think about time management very often.  
Yet everything else depends on it.

*By Jill J. Johnson*

**M**ost people manage their time by acting as if all their priorities have equal weight. That's the wrong approach. To develop your time management strategy, you need to break your time into three different categories: routine activities, project-oriented activities, and crisis situations. Let's look at each of these in turn.

## 1. Avoid Chaos by Creating Good Routines

Routine activities involve responsibilities you can anticipate. Activities falling under this type of time management include those with an automatic or regularly occurring deadline, such as preparing quarterly reports, filing taxes, and taking certain actions on the first day of each month.

Unfortunately, most people procrastinate on assignments that have a routine deadline. Waiting until the last minute to focus on routine activities ends up compressing the completion time horizon. The frantic rush to meet the known deadline often results in unnecessary stress, errors, and a lack of quality work.

Routine activities aren't surprises. Don't treat them as such. Follow these guidelines to make sure you meet routine deadlines with a minimum of anxiety:

**Carve out the time you need** in your schedule and make sure it adequately reflects the time necessary to complete the assignment. If the activity requires research or advance

preparation, your schedule must allow ample time to work on them in advance.

**Shorten or eliminate all non-essential meetings** as you get closer to the deadline.

**Set up alerts** with a reminder of your impending deadline. Then send alert notices to others who have critical information or essential insight you will need.

Taking a strategic mindset to routine assignments encourages you to complete your preparation work as far in advance of your deadline as possible. The key is to dedicate the time you need into both your planning process and your schedule. If it's a new responsibility for you, budget time into your calendar to accommodate your learning curve.

If the routine activity is something you only engage in periodically, create cheat sheets with screenshots and notes to yourself on issues you ran into and how you solved them. These notes can be a huge time saver the next time you complete this activity.

## 2. Have a Precise Plan to Manage Your Projects

The second type of time management involves project time. Projects are often complex activities with a defined expectation for deliverables or a date of completion such as a major event. With projects, there are many moving parts

## “You need to break your time into three different categories.”

and multiple deadlines. Projects may also involve a variety of other team members or vendors.

The challenge is that most projects have long time frames. The result is that people perceive the completion date to be far in the future. Thus, they push off key responsibilities. They focus on day-to-day fires and don't worry about the project until there's an urgent rush to meet a deadline.

Projects require a clearly established plan. Here are steps to follow:

**Decide** who needs to be involved.

**Clarify** roles, responsibilities, and deadlines for each person.

**Break your project activities** into smaller components and more manageable parts.

**Engage in interim checkpoints** on a periodic basis. These checkpoints will tell you if you have adequate resources deployed to the right areas so you can meet the deadline.

Another helpful strategy is front-end loading. This means completing or beginning work on parts of your project when you're first assigned to it. By front-end loading your work, you'll identify challenges in obtaining a resource or needed information. This intensive work at the beginning of your project provides you with more time to resolve any glitches before they put your project completion at risk.

### 3. Ensure that You're Prepared for a Crisis

A crisis requires that you stop everything to address the situation. Your focus must shift to resolving the problem or the aftermath of an unexpected event, such as a fire, data breach, or the death of a key employee.

There are two important things to remember about a crisis:

**Always have a plan in place** in case a crisis occurs. Prepare a disaster plan for the types of crisis you're most likely to experience.

**Don't treat routine activities** or missed project deadlines as a crisis.

Few organizations adequately prepare for a disaster. When something hits, everyone scrambles to figure out what to do. It's difficult to think clearly to establish priorities when your adrenaline has kicked in and everyone is in a highly emotional state.

It doesn't need to be that way. You may not know when a crisis is going to happen, but you do know that it will inevitably occur. Every organization faces crises. The organizations that survive are the ones whose leaders prepare for problems in advance when they have clear minds to develop a framework for emergency action.

## Spend Your Energy Wisely

Each of these three types of time management has a different impact on your productivity and your daily focus. Developing a clearer understanding of what type of time you're dealing with allows you more options for developing a strategic approach to how you focus your daily priorities.

Initially, break down your key areas of focus by evaluating the urgency and significance of your primary activities. Then evaluate each of your major responsibilities to assess which type of time management it involves, and consider the amount of time that will be necessary to complete each of them. This strategic focus will help you develop a more proactive approach to managing your overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, responsibilities.

When you consider your demands as being different kinds of time, you can optimize your activities. This more process-oriented focus on productivity will help you better prioritize your actions. Then you can avoid time-wasting activities and ensure you're getting the desired results for the energy you spend. 

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**Will You Be Ready when Disaster Strikes? Creating a Crisis Plan** (Vol. 18, No. 3)

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