

# Five Time Management Tips for the Creative Entrepreneur

**Busy, stressed out clients will not wait for you to manage your time. If you are not already effectively managing your time, they will go to someone else who already has it together.**

For many creative entrepreneurs, organization and time management activities are not at the top of the priority list. You know it's a necessary evil in order to run a successful business. However, if given the choice, you would prefer to put it off ... forever!

But we both know this is not realistic, nor is it good business practice.

One thing you'll learn quickly, if you haven't already, is that much of your time will be dictated by client deadlines. If you can't organize your time in-house to meet your client request, then you will struggle to make a good name for yourself.

Quoting the famous words of Benjamin Franklin, "Time is money"? One of the best ways to manage your time is perform regular tasks on a regular schedule. I know, I know, I can hear the grunts and groans already. Oh the monotony of a schedule... Following a schedule (no matter how simple) will help to keep you from feeling overwhelmed, and will prevent mismanagement of projects and scheduling.



Right here at your fingertips, you have five time management to put into practice right now. If you're moving right along with your business, see if you are already using some of these techniques. If not, try to take something from these tips and incorporate them into your current business model:

## 1. Establish and follow and WEEKLY SYSTEM.

Friday afternoon is a better time than Monday morning to handle these types of tasks. The idea is to have all of your ducks in a row when the Monday grind comes. If you don't mind working weekends, then Sunday evening may be a good time as well. Your weekly timetable will consist of activities such as:

- ✓ Quotes to send and recordkeeping
- ✓ Projects to handle; prioritizing by deadlines
- ✓ Calls to make to clients
- ✓ E-mails to respond to
- ✓ Website updates to make

These deadlines will be based on prior arrangements made with your clients. Be sure to factor in some "cushion time" for those inevitable glitches.

## 2. Create a MONTHLY JOBS worksheet.

Prioritize your jobs and assign a logical number for each set of notes and materials that correspond with the project. Use project management worksheets to keep track of the state of your projects and clients. I like to keep each project/client in a separate folder with a project worksheet attached to the front of the folder.

Customize your system according to your personal preferences and working style; it will help you to find things easily and quickly when you're under the gun.

Your tools for this can be a simple spreadsheet or a dry-erase board. Whatever you use, make sure it is easy to understand and easy to access. Your monthly jobs worksheet will go a long way in helping you manage client projects—going above and beyond your weekly system.

If you're really gung-ho (also during those times of famine), you can do this for long-term (3-month, 6-month, annually) projects.

### 3. Be **REALISTIC** about your clients' expectations.

Your clients will respect you more if you're honest and forthright with them about your workload. Don't over commit or overbook yourself— both for your sake and the clients'.

Be realistic about what you can do and how quickly you can do it. You may consider yourself to be a very quick and efficient entrepreneur, but life always seems to throw some curve balls, so plan for them accordingly. Give yourself a substantial buffer zone.

It is far better to let a client know that in order to give their project full attention, you will need three weeks, rather than compromise quality in order to do it as a rush job. Be confident, but realistic about your clients' expectations of what you can deliver to them and when.



### 4. Perform **WEEKLY ADMINISTRATIVE** tasks.

Try not to mix these activities with your project-related ones. If you try to do too many different tasks simultaneously, then you may end up with low-quality results for one or more of your clients. Keep administrative tasks together, and handle them on the day you have designated.

Set aside a specific day of the week to do all of your administrative tasks, which will include things such as:

- ✓ Invoicing
- ✓ Tending to non-project related e-mails
- ✓ Phone calls
- ✓ Quote preparations

A good way to keep these tasks separate is to use containers (folders, baskets, file, etc.) for these that are different from what you use for your projects. Label these items as administrative tasks (whether they are paper or electronic), and schedule an appointment on your calendar to tend to them.

### 5. **COMMUNICATE** regularly with your clients.

Once you have agreed to a deadline with a client, don't get so immersed into their project that you lose contact with them. Keep your clients abreast of their projects. It only takes a few minutes to send a follow-up e-mail or phone call to give them a periodic status or progress report.

You want to make your clients feel confident that you're doing a good job for them. One way to do this is to keep the lines of communication open. Don't fall off the radar screen, your clients will appreciate your initiative and consideration, and it will increase trust and reliability in your standards of service.

It is essential, as a creative entrepreneur, to manage your time properly and effectively; not just for your own sake, but for your clients' too. Take these tips to heart. If you're already doing them (or other time management tasks), then keep it going. You're creating productive entrepreneurial habits that will ensure success for you today, tomorrow, and for the future!



**Article:** A105. – Five Time Management Tips for the Creative Entrepreneur

**Category:** Time Management/Organization



By Donna M. Murphy

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Donna M. Murphy is an editorial specialist, a veteran writer and a published author who has written, edited, and designed extensive collateral and key solutions products for print and the web. Training manuals, operating procedures, business documents and content quality assurance encompass a large portion of her assignments. Donna is the creative force behind Summit Publication Design, LLC, and has specialized in content organization, quality assurance and publication design since 1997. Visit Donna's website at <http://www.summitpubdesign.com> for information on her comprehensive services, helpful resources, more articles like this one, and strategies to help you improve the quality and effectiveness of your publications.

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2655 Covington Court, Suite 2B

Fort Collins, Colorado 80526 USA

[www.summitpubdesign.com](http://www.summitpubdesign.com)

970-690-3850 tel

772-594-7688 fax

[info@summitpubdesign.com](mailto:info@summitpubdesign.com)

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