

Time Management Tips for Salespeople



OR...

*How to Find
Time to Sell*



Brian Jeffrey

Whether you're selling on the road, selling over the telephone, or standing behind the counter in a retail operation, the one thing you don't have enough of, apart from money, is time. There is just not enough time in a day to do all the things that need to get done and that's why time management skills are critical if salespeople are to succeed.

Enjoy the read.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian J". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each name being capitalized and prominent.

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by Brian Jeffrey

Salespeople and time management go together about as well as oil and water — they just don't mix. It's not that we don't want to be better time managers, it's just not in our genes. I suspect our inability to embrace time management techniques is a birth defect afflicting most salespeople.

Having said all that, I recognize that the most successful salespeople are the ones who make the best use of their time, are the most organized, and who struggle to stay organized each day.

It's worth remembering that the most important factor in selling success is not being able to persuade the prospect to buy. It's finding the best prospects and talking to the largest number of these prospects. Not only must we find quality prospects, we must manage our time properly if we are to get in front of more and more of them.



We never have enough time to do what must be done, yet we have all the time there is!

An Average Selling Day

Recent statistics show most salespeople only do about two to three hours a day of true selling. The rest of the time is spent in sundry tasks including professional procrastinating and creative time wasting.

THE TIME TEST

How good are you at managing your time? Let's see how good (or bad) you really are. (Be honest, no one's going to check up on you!). Read each of the time management practices listed below and indicate whether you follow the practice *Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Seldom* or whether it's *Not Applicable* in your case.

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. I prioritize my daily work. | A F S S N |
| 2. I prepare for an group outgoing telephone calls. | A F S S N |
| 3. I analyze my time usage on a regular basis. | A F S S N |
| 4. My accounts are classified by either sales volume or profit. | A F S S N |
| 5. I set aside some time for creative thinking. | A F S S N |
| 6. When planning, I allow time for interruptions or emergencies. | A F S S N |
| 7. I am brief on incoming telephone calls. | A F S S N |
| 8. I plan my week in advance. | A F S S N |
| 9. I plan prospecting time into each week. | A F S S N |
| 10. I know my most important customers — at least the top 10%. | A F S S N |
| 11. I take time to do things right the first time. | A F S S N |
| 12. I complete projects on time. | A F S S N |
| 13. Before I make a sales call, I know what my objective is. | A F S S N |
| 14. I read my mail from the company and my customers every day. | A F S S N |
| 15. I am on time for business appointments. | A F S S N |
| 16. Most of my calls are made by appointment. | A F S S N |

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 17. My sales territory is organized logically and effectively. | A F S S N |
| 18. I have a system to call on current customers. | A F S S N |
| 19. I have an orderly filing system at home (or my office). | A F S S N |
| 20. I have everything I need with me when I make sales calls. | A F S S N |
| 21. I try at least one time-saving idea each month. | A F S S N |
| 22. I service some of my accounts by telephone or mail only. | A F S S N |
| 23. I make sure that I don't tackle too many tasks at one time. | A F S S N |
| 24. I say "no" to at least one person every week. | A F S S N |
| 25. I don't work late or take work home. | A F S S N |

Scoring: Always _____ x 4 = _____
 Frequently _____ x 3 = _____
 Sometimes _____ x 2 = _____
 Seldom _____ x 1 = _____
 Not Applicable _____ x 1 = _____

Sub-total _____
 Subtract 10 points for optimism _____
 Subtract 5 points for cheating! _____
 Total _____

86-100 *Suspiciously high score*
 71-85 *Excellent time management habits*
 56-70 *Not too shabby*
 41-55 *About average (not good, average!)*
 26-40 *Time management is a problem*
 25 or less *Major time management opportunity*

Time management is not a *problem*, it's an *opportunity* – an opportunity to organize yourself to have the time you need to do your job and to do the things you *should* and *want* to be doing, from both a business and personal point of view.

THIRTY TIMELY TIME TIPS FOR SALESPEOPLE

As you read through the following time tips, note the ones you *already do*, the ones that you *should do*, and select a few you *will do*.

1. Have a to-do list and prioritize your daily work.

This is a major principle of effective time management that you should regularly follow. Use the “ABC” system. “A” is for the *must do* tasks, “B” is for the *should do* tasks, and “C” is for the *do-if-you've-got-the-time* tasks. Make up tomorrow's list today. Review tomorrow's list before quitting for the day. You'll find that you sleep better knowing what you are to do first thing in the morning.

If your workload is such that daily to-do lists are inappropriate, consider a weekly list. The danger of a weekly list is we tend to pack five days with seven day's worth of activities. Only plan three day's worth of tasks, the remaining two days will fill up naturally with tasks that appear out of nowhere.

Already do Should do Will do



Time management is self-management.

2. Prepare for and group outgoing telephone calls.

Consider allocating a certain period of time at the end of the morn-

ing and afternoon to make outgoing calls. Then prepare your messages and be brief. Preparation and brevity are the best ways to make effective use of the telephone. If you're consistent with this policy, others in the office can tell callers when you're likely to call them back. You'll create the impression of being organized and efficient.

Another excellent technique is to set a call objective before you pick up the telephone. By having a focus before you initiate the call, you get to the point quicker and off the line sooner.

Already do Should do Will do

3. Monitor and analyze your time usage.

Try keeping a time log for a week or two. Record all the *major* activities you engage in during that period of time. Analyze the data to uncover the time wasters. Watch for how much time you spend travelling versus how much time you spend in front of good prospects. Do this once a year and watch your productivity skyrocket. (Contact us for a copy of our *Time Usage Log for Salespeople*.)

Already do Should do Will do

4. Classify your accounts by either sales volume or profit.

Eighty percent of your business usually comes from twenty percent of your accounts. It's important to know which accounts to spend your time and effort on. If you are faced with having to do something for two different accounts, knowing which is the most profitable may help in your planning. Know your top ten accounts and treat them well because that's where your income is coming from.

Already do Should do Will do

5. Set aside some time for creative thinking.

You can do this while commuting, in between meetings, or for a short period at a scheduled time each day. When you are traveling

alone in your vehicle, turn off the radio and turn on your mind. It will improve your creative capacity and will help you be innovative in your planning, scheduling, and sales activities.

If you've got a tough business problem that's causing you grief, try letting your subconscious mind solve it for you. Think about the problem briefly before going to sleep. Often you'll wake up in the morning with a solution. I call this creative sleeping.

Already do Should do Will do

6. When planning, allow time for interruptions or emergencies.

No matter how well you plan, the unexpected (problems, delays, etc.) will arise. There's no use trying to pack five pounds of sand into a two-pound bag. If you plan too tightly, the unexpected will throw your entire schedule off. Expect (and plan for) the unexpected! Leaving some breathing space in your schedule means that you can more readily cope with customer emergencies.

Already do Should do Will do

7. Be brief on incoming telephone calls.

Be polite, tactful, and helpful, but be brief. Avoid wasteful and unnecessary conversation. Remember, socializing is *not* selling! Don't bother asking about the weather. If you're really interested, call the weather office. Also avoid asking about their health ("How are you today?") unless you know the person and are really interested. That overworked phrase, in particular, has become an insincere time filler (waster).

Here's a technique you can use if you're having a challenge with an overly social caller: Prepare them for your good-bye. Say something like this, "Before I say good-bye, I've got one more question..." or, "Before I say good-bye, I'd just like to tell you..."

Already do Should do Will do

8. Plan your week in advance.

The old saying “plan your work, work you plan” has merit. The best time to do your planning for the next week is usually late Friday afternoon or on the weekend. Knowing what you intend to do first thing on Monday relieves a lot of stress and allows you to enjoy the weekend with your family or whatever.

The weekly plan doesn't have to be something fancy. As I noted in point one, the weekly plan may just be a prioritized to-do list.

Already do Should do Will do

9. Plan some time for prospecting into each week.

Remember, your customers are someone else's prospects and sooner or later you'll have to replace those lost customers. If you don't plan to prospect, you won't. If you don't prospect, you ultimately run out of people to sell to! Plan on contacting at least one new prospect every week or every day. Make prospecting a habit.

Already do Should do Will do

10. Systematize your work.

After you prioritize your daily tasks, spend some time thinking about the best, most effective way you can go about performing them. The fastest way isn't always the best way (remember the old saying, haste makes waste). Think ahead.

Already do Should do Will do

11. Take the time to do things right the first time.

People who don't have time to do things right the first time always seem to have time to do them over. Don't become one of them. It's true that we can learn from our mistakes. However, much time can be lost by carelessness or by taking dangerous shortcuts. You haven't the

time to make all the time-wasting mistakes yourself. It make a lot more sense to learn from other's mistakes — which is probably why you're reading this booklet.

Already do Should do Will do

12. Don't miss deadlines.

Missed deadlines are often a sign of an optimistic or poor planner — someone who doesn't realize that a two-hour project always takes a day and a half. They usually forget to plan for interruptions (see #6). When you accept a deadline, you put your reputation on the line. Miss enough deadlines and your credibility suffers. Who wants to buy from an unreliable salesperson.

Already do Should do Will do

13. Before you make a sales call, know what your objective is.

Whether over the telephone or face-to-face, knowing what your objective is will help you put your mind in gear before you engage your mouth. It will also keep you focused on results and minimize time wasting chit-chat. When you're driving to a call, turn off the radio and spend some time preparing for the upcoming call. Ask yourself, what do I want the prospect to do as a result of this call? Remember, luck is when preparation and planning meets opportunity.

Already do Should do Will do

14. Read your mail from the company and your customers every day.

It's important to keep current but don't do your reading during prime selling time. Getting into the office 15 to 20 minutes early for the express purpose of handling your mail is an excellent use of your time.

Already do Should do Will do

15. Never be late for business appointments.

Being late for appointments can create the impression of unreliability for both you and your company. A prospect may feel that if you can't show up on time, how will you deliver your product or service on time. Plan ahead for possible traffic and weather delays. It's better to be 10 minutes early than five minutes late.

If you're going to be late, call ahead if you can. A cellular phone can save a salesperson's reputation. If you think you're going to be 10 minutes late, call ahead and tell them you'll be there in 20 minutes and show up earlier than expected. It's better to under-promise and over-deliver.

Already do Should do Will do

16. Make most of your sales calls by appointment.

Having appointments whenever possible minimizes extended waits in lobbies or totally wasted calls where your prospect is out of the office. Consider sending a confirming fax to your prospect just in case he or she forgot about your appointment.

If you can't, or don't want to always make appointments, at least don't drop in empty handed. Use value-added selling techniques to make sure that you are a welcomed business visitor.

Already do Should do Will do

17. Organize your sales territory logically and effectively.

A well-organized sales territory minimizes travel time and expense, gives you better control over your daily activities, assists in your weekly planning, and allows you to cope with customer emergencies in a more organized fashion.

Divide your sales territory into three parts or areas and plan to spend a full day in each area. If your working area A and you get a call from a customer in area B, resist the temptation to drive over to see the

customer unless it's very important to do so. After all, you're going to be in the other customer's area the next day anyway.

If you divide your territory into three areas, you're never more than two days away from being in someone's area. Let's assume it's Monday and you're in area A and a prospect from area C calls. Why not say something like, "I'm going to be in your area on Wednesday and I can schedule an appointment for then or would you prefer to see me today." Seven times out of ten the prospect will make an appointment and wait. For the other three, you can hot-foot it over if the sale warrants it.

Already do Should do Will do



A well-planned territory
is simple to manage.

18. Have a system to call on current customers.

Use the "A-B-C" method to categorize your accounts and then devise a system to visit them on a routine basis. ("A" accounts are *Major* ones, "B" accounts are the *Minor* ones, and "C" accounts are considered *Marginal* accounts.)

For example, you may visit your "A" accounts monthly, your "B" accounts quarterly and your "C" accounts twice a year.

Don't forget your "D" accounts. These are the accounts that should be doing business with you, but aren't. We call them prospects! Make sure you visit your "D" accounts as well (see #9).

Already do Should do Will do

19. Have an orderly filing system at home (or office).

If you don't have a place for everything and everything isn't in its place, you probably have chaos. A disorganized salesperson can be a disaster. If you have trouble keeping yourself organized, get someone to help you.

Studies show that people can lose up to five hours a week just looking for stuff. That's time you could spend talking to prospects.

You don't have to get fancy. Neat piles on your desk may be a real breakthrough for some people. I like the three-pile technique, or three-basket approach: "In," "Out," and "DND." "DND" stands for "die a natural death." If I can't decide where to file something, I put it into the DND basket and every month I go through each item. If an item is still alive and I know what to do with it, I action it. If an item is still alive and I still don't know what to do with it, I put it back in the basket. If an item is dead, I throw it out. (Also see #28.)

Already do Should do Will do

20. Don't make sales calls without everything you need.

Make sure you have everything in your briefcase for the calls you intend to make. Don't find yourself having to make a second call or mailing something to a prospect after they have cooled off. Make a checklist of common items you want to keep with you. Get organized. Stuff your cards in all your business attire so you don't leave home without them.

If you're on the road a lot, keep your vehicle stocked with literature and samples. Years ago, as a manufacturer's representative, I used to drive around with banker's boxes full of literature. Not only did I always have literature but in the winter the extra weight helped with the traction.

Already do Should do Will do

21. Try at least one time-saving idea every month.

If you're not trying at least one time-saving idea or shortcut each month, you're probably not serious about improving. Use new ideas for at least 21 days before quitting or assessing the results. It takes at least that long to develop new habits. (Unless it's a bad habit, in which case it takes a lot less time!)

Already do Should do Will do

22. Service some of your accounts by telephone or mail only.

Not all accounts are made equal. Find out the ones that you can service either full-time or part-time by telephone or mail. You may find some of your "B" and "C" accounts don't really need to "see" you all that frequently and a phone call will suffice to maintain contact. Finding things that you can mail to your smaller or marginal accounts can often take the place of a face-to-face (and time-consuming) visit.

Do these things and your productivity and effectiveness will improve dramatically and your clients will be better serviced.

Already do Should do Will do

23. Make sure you don't tackle too many tasks at one time.

Most salespeople have several things going at one time. Know your limit and respect it. Tackling too many tasks at one time is usually the result of a failure to prioritize (see #1) and poor planning.

Already do Should do Will do

24. Say "no" to at least one person every week.

If you never say no, you'll be inundated with unnecessary work. It's nice to be nice but not at the expense of your sanity. Don't try to please everyone all the time, you usually end up pleasing no one. Find ways to *politely* say no. Prioritize, plan and schedule.

Learn who you can say no to. It's usually politically unwise to say no to your boss (at work or at home). However, if saying yes is going to have a negative impact, you can point out the consequences and negotiate a solution.

Already do Should do Will do

25. Rarely work late or take work home.

Selling is not a nine-to-five job but if you constantly take work home it's possible that you are overworked or out of your league. More likely though, this is a symptom of poor planning and an inability to say no.

Already do Should do Will do

26. Keep reading material with you at all times.

Keep a file folder full of things you want to read. Pull out a short article if you're stuck in someone's lobby or waiting at the airline terminal, etc. This is a great way to catch up on your trade journals. I will often destroy magazines by tearing out articles for reading at a later time. This way I can turn potentially wasted waiting time into productive reading time.

Some salespeople travel with a laptop computer and use it during waiting periods to dash off sales letters, do reports, update their contact managers, etc.

Already do Should do Will do

27. Maintain a personal organizer.

A good organizer is a salesperson's bible. It doesn't matter if it's a paper system, an electronic pocket organizer, or a laptop or palmtop computer. It's critical that you have some method and system to keep yourself organized. If you don't, failure is just around the corner.

Already do Should do Will do

28. Keep paper handling to a minimum.

Use the 5-Ds – Do, Defer, Delegate, Dump, and Don't Know – to quickly sort your daily dose of paper into five piles. Then sort your Don't Know pile into Do, Defer, Delegate, or Dump. Dump the Dump pile, schedule the Do pile, ignore the Defer pile and delegate the Delegate pile. If you don't have anyone to delegate to, put the stuff into the Defer pile. Check the Defer pile each week or month to see if anything can be moved to either the Do or Dump piles. Try it, it works.

Here's a novel way to keep the pile down that I learned from a manager I worked for years ago. Whenever something from head office arrived, he would read it and then throw it out. One day I asked him why he did that and he said, "If it's important, they'll send it again." Hey, it worked for him.

Already do Should do Will do

29. Whenever possible, delegate.

The three keys to time management are Plan, Prioritize and Delegate. Delegate doesn't mean dumping something on someone else. It means cooperatively giving them the responsibility for assisting you in your job.

The key to good delegation is clear directions, expectations, and authority. Make sure the person you delegate to knows he can come to you for information and guidance. If the other person is coming to you too often, you've delegated to the wrong person.

Already do Should do Will do

30. Overcome procrastination.

Planning and prioritizing will help overcome procrastination. When all else fails and you have an unpleasant task to accomplish, don't hesitate. Do the worst first. Get it out of the way and get on with your life.

If the sheer size of the project has galvanized you into inactivity, try breaking it down into smaller doable sub-projects and get on with the first piece. Remember you eat an elephant one mouthful at a time.

Already do Should do Will do

If you checked off ten or more *Already Do* boxes, congratulations – you’re well on your way to properly managing your time. Now go back and review your *Should Do*. These are the areas you feel will make an impact on your productivity. Get to them right after you finish your current list of *Will Do*.



You must invest some time each and every day if you are to master time management.

12 WAYS TO MAKE MORE TIME

Of course, we all know we can’t “make” more time. All we can do is manage ourselves within the confines of the 1,440 minutes each of us has every day (except the last one!). There are, however, some things we can do to improve on our use of these 1,440 minutes. Here are twelve.

- **Learn to say “No”.** Unless it’s your boss who asks, keep away from commitments that force you to spend time on low-priority items. Practise saying, “I don’t have the time.” If you have trouble saying no, consider taking some assertiveness training.
- **Forget low-priority items,** unless you’ve completed all your high-priority items for the day.

- ***Build time into your schedule for interruptions***, unforeseen problems, unscheduled events, etc. Allow for the reality that things often take twice as long as you thought they would.
- ***Set aside a couple of “quiet time” periods each day***. Use them to collect your thoughts and regroup your efforts.
- ***Keep a list of short, five-minute tasks*** that you can do while you are “between things”.
- ***Learn to do two things at once***. Organize an important letter while driving to work. Plan dinner while doing the vacuuming.
- ***Delegate low priority items***. Give them to your children, a co-worker, your spouse, your mother/father-in-law.
- ***Get up a half hour or an hour earlier*** during the weekdays.
- ***Discriminate in your television viewing***. It can be a great time waster. Use a VCR to time-shift programs to a more convenient time.
- ***Cut off non-productive activities*** as soon as possible; i.e. socializing on the telephone when there are things to be done.
- ***Throw away all the mail you possibly can***. Scan it once and dump it.
- ***Stop perfectionism***. Just get it done. Don’t be hard on yourself. Remember, everyone makes mistakes.

NO MAGIC ELIXIR

Sad though it is, there is no inoculation or magic elixir that we can give salespeople to make them better time managers. The same qualities that make a salesperson successful – desire and discipline – are the qualities you need to take control of time.

Good luck and good selling!



Don't just make a living –
MAKE A DIFFERENCE!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Jeffrey is a sales management consultant and former sales trainer with over 40 year's experience. He's the author of *The Sales Wizard's Secrets of Sales Management*, *The 5-Minute Sales trainer*, 18 ebooks, and over 100 articles on selling and sales management.

Brian provides sales management consulting, coaching, and mentoring to business owners and sales managers. He has had many sales successes (as well as a few spectacular failures) and has learned what works, what doesn't, and why — information he readily shares with others.

Find out how Brian helps companies maximize their sales at **www.Quintarra.com**.

