



8 WAYS TO ACHIEVE MORE BY USING DEADLINES

From the *Reaching Your Goals Series*

By Jeff Davidson

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Do you hate to face a deadline? Many people do for a variety of reasons among these:

- * The deadline has been imposed by someone else.
- * The deadline is unrealistic.
- * The deadline is unrelenting.

What is your relationship with deadlines? Have they stifled you in the past? Believe it or not, you actually can use them to accelerate your progress.

If you're employed in an industry or profession, imposed continual and rigorous deadlines can be nerve wracking and seem pointless. Suppose you're a newspaper reporter covering a local beat. You may have to turn in a column each or every few days in words that conform to certain style guidelines, and meet the approval of your editor, publisher, and subscribers.

In nearly every American city, within a block or two of a city's major newspaper, there's a familiar watering hole where reporters head out after work on Fridays. If you've ever been in such a place, you may be aghast at these hard-boiled, nicotine and alcohol swilling types who seem to voluntarily poison themselves to deaden the effects of meeting demanding and gut-wrenching deadlines. Whether you are a reporter facing daily deadlines, a sales representative facing a weekly quota, or any other type of white or blue collar professional who has to complete so much by some imposed time interval, there are ways to make the deadline work for you.

Here are eight techniques and action steps to help

you both maintain control and better harness the power of meeting deadlines:

Maintain Balance in the Face of Deadlines

If you're in an occupation where you continually have to meet a deadline, the first order of business is to recognize that there is no use in pretending it's any different. Then, ask yourself these questions:

- * To what degree do I seek to attain balance in my life and work?

- * Do I give myself a good eight hours of sleep each night?

- * Do I eat a balanced meal or two each day, or do I load up on fast food and short-term energy boosters that leave me drained?

- * Do I take vitamins and nutritional supplements regularly?

- * Do I maintain balance on the job?

- * Do I frequently stretch, take walks, and simply take breaks?

No matter how rigorous and restricting your deadline is, there are umpteen ways in which you can maintain some semblance of balance in the midst of the fray.

In the most challenging occupations, there are people who maintain their fitness level and weight, take regular and strong deep breaths, leave work at the end of the day with enough energy to enjoy their evening, and actually prosper. You have the tools and the plan to do the same.

Maintain Relative Simplicity in the Face of Deadlines

Suppose you're in an occupation with imposed

deadlines that are complex, multi-faceted, and downright tricky. How can you maintain relative simplicity in such a scenario? The first thing to do is look at the most successful people in your line of work.

- * How do they conduct themselves?
- * What time do they arrive?
- * What time do they leave?
- * What equipment do they use?
- * What are their work habits?
- * When and how often do they take breaks?
- * What other resources do they employ?

Another step toward achieving relative simplicity which is ignored by too many people is to identify what is not necessary to meet your deadline. Look around your office and literally determine everything you have that doesn't support what you need to accomplish your goals. These items could be equipment, furniture, books, files, information, or desk items.

Manage Your Turf

The more effective you are in managing your surroundings, particularly flat surfaces in your office, home, or car, the more effective you'll be overall. It's too easy today to be awash in material things. Evaluate, sort, and filter your surrounding items so you can work more effectively.

What about simplifying your communications? Do you have three different e-mail accounts when one would do the trick? Do you dispense your cellular phone number to everyone when only a few key people need to have it? Do you try to get your best work done in the middle of a hyper-hectic office that makes the New York Stock Exchange look like a pastoral setting? If these or other aspects of your work situation prevail, then you may be

operating in an environment that is more complex than necessary.

Systemize Whatever Can Be

To achieve relative simplicity in pursuit of a continual deadline, systemize work elements that lend themselves to such a process. For example, consider the following:

- * Do you find yourself having to frequently enter text onto your screen that is derived from other sources? If so, perhaps you can simply buy a scanner that reads the text and converts it to your word processing system.

- * Do you regularly need to send information to the same parties by snail mail? If so, prepare a healthy supply of addressed, stamped envelopes to the regular recipients.

- * Can you produce a chronological or functional checklist to aid you in your performance?

- * Are there modular elements to what you do? If your work involves assembling component elements on a recurring basis, is there a way to systemize that?

Re-employ What You've Already Done

Are there ways to draw upon what you've already done in meeting past deadlines to meet the current deadline? For example, suppose you're a management consultant who develops a financial report at the end of each engagement. These reports usually extend 20 to 30 pages. Are recommendations you made for a previous client applicable with slight modifications?

If you have to write management reports in general, are there four to five page stretches within previous reports that are relevant or critical to what you're currently working on? If so, you have a wonderful opportunity to make your

work count twice.

Assemble What You Need

Perhaps the single most important observation is this: The way to meet your deadlines and still have a life is to ensure you meet them with the appropriate level of resources. As an equation, it looks like this: Challenges faced = Resources allocated

This is as simple as it gets. By using this equation, you never need to find yourself in a time deficit again. Look at the situation you're facing, determine what's required, leave work on time, have a life, come back, and do it again.

First, identify the challenge you face. You may laugh this one off and say the challenge you face is obvious. Is it, however?

In your career, up against deadlines, can you specifically define what is required of you? Is it simply turning in a report every Thursday by 4 p.m., making 10 calls each morning before noon, or handling all the items in the lot by the end of the day? Without knowing specifically what you do, here are other likely elements you might want to consider:

- * Handling your work with flair – Putting a little pizzazz into your work so the customer, client, or end-user gains a little something more than a timely delivery.

- * Troubleshooting as you go – Ensuring that there won't be future problems because you were so rushed to meet the deadline that you didn't handle important details.

- * Completing all the internal reporting – In addition to delivering the goods or services on time, there are usually many other kinds of procedures that also need to be completed. Perhaps you need to complete a time log. You may have to update a file folder. Perhaps there's something

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The actual eBook contains many more content pages.