

Laying the Foundations of a Successful Day or Life: It's All about Preparation

By Laura Stack

Preparation relates to how well you've planned and laid the foundations for your daily activities. The goals you set will focus those activities and provide direction for your life. An established direction, outlined with purposeful thought, ensures your life won't be governed by whim. These tips will help you set a direction and stick to it.

1. **Abide by a personal mission statement for your life.** Much like a corporate mission statement, your personal mission statement defines who you are, what you're all about, and why you're on this earth.
2. **Track your long-term goals and aspirations.** Future goals will give you a sense of purpose. It's not enough to set your mind to something; you must also plan your time around your goals. With them in mind, you can start logically preparing, instead of just letting things take care of themselves.
3. **Create high-quality performance objectives.** The greatest enemy of any plan is a lack of action. Goals become just wishful thinking unless you further define them as objectives with specific measurements, and act upon them.
4. **Define your specific job responsibilities and related tasks.** In order to create effective work objectives, you need to know where you're expected to invest your time, energy, talents, and company resources. This allows you to schedule your day and prioritize your tasks in a meaningful way.
5. **Maintain a list of projects to accomplish.** When you're ready to move an objective into the present and work on it, it's time to create a project plan. Break larger projects down into concrete steps that you can accomplish one at a time.
6. **Conduct weekly, monthly, and yearly reviews of your plans.** Regularly reviewing your objectives is the most important aspect of time management; in fact, it's the foundation of creating the best use of your time each day.
7. **Track your tasks, projects, and appointments effectively.** Whatever time management system you use, it has to satisfy the "HUG" criterion: it needs to be handy, usable, and garbage-free.
8. **Create and prioritize your "to-do" list each day.** Once you've put together a reasonable to-do list, try to identify the 20% of your activities and behaviors that are the most important to productivity, and concentrate on improving those.

9. **Schedule your day realistically.** Effective daily planning lets you realize more of your expectations and reduce your personal stress levels. Manage your day successfully, and consistently complete what you've planned.
10. **Determine the best channel of communication to convey your message prior to sending it.** For any given purpose, one medium will be more effective than another. Learn when it's better to email than to phone, and vice-versa.

Productive people devote a great deal of thought and time to planning their life goals. When you start with your personal mission statement in front of you as a guide, create personal and professional long-term goals, break them down into short-term objectives, create monthly plans, and then daily activities, you have direction and focus. Bottom line: you achieve your long-term objectives by focusing on today.

© 2012 Laura Stack. Laura Stack is a personal productivity expert, author, and professional speaker who helps her clients create Maximum Results in Minimum Time® and develop high-performance cultures. She is the president of The Productivity Pro®, Inc., a time management training firm specializing in productivity improvement in high-stress organizations and the 2011-2012 President of the National Speakers Association. Since 1992, Laura has presented keynotes and seminars on improving output, lowering stress, and saving time in today's workplaces. She is the bestselling author of five books: *What to Do When There's Too Much to Do*; *SUPERCOMPETENT*; *The Exhaustion Cure*; *Find More Time*; and *Leave the Office Earlier*. Laura has been a spokesperson for Microsoft, 3M, Xerox, and Office Depot. She is the creator of The Productivity Pro® planner by Day-Timer and has been featured on the CBS Early Show, CNN, and the *New York Times*. Her clients include Starbucks, Cisco Systems, Wal-Mart, and Bank of America. To have Laura speak at your next event, call 303-471-7401 or visit www.TheProductivityPro.com to sign up for her free monthly productivity newsletter.