

From *WORK LESS, DO MORE: The 7-Day Productivity Makeover* by Dr. Jan Yager (Hannacroix Creek Books, 2017)

From Day 6 “Handling Change, Interruptions or Distractions, and Deadlines

OTD (Out the Door)

Whatever the industry, a product's failure to get OTD—out the door—usually hurts a company, directly in terms of revenue and indirectly in terms of its image. Reports fail to get written, edited, and mailed out in time. Business function invitations, mailed out much too late, arrive after the event (causing embarrassment and frustration, plus untold overspending for food and services for guests who failed to materialize). Unrealistic deadlines, as discussed above, as well as trying to do too much, can sabotage efforts to get projects, e-mails, assignments, letters, and proposals OTD. If something gets out the door, but it arrives late, you'll have to deal with the consequences. To avoid these repercussions of failing to get something OTD, whether it's a project or yourself for a meeting or appointment, try the following tips:

- Track exactly how long it takes you to get from point A to point B or to go from task #1 to task #2. For example, you may drive from your home to the train station every day, but have you measured that commute precisely under a variety of conditions, such as rain or snow, heavy traffic, and at different times of day? A similar philosophy applies to getting ready in the morning or leaving your office to meet someone for lunch. Having a clear sense of how much time you need for each task will help you to plan better so you're not late.
- Reward yourself for being on time. Complete this statement: "If I'm on time for _____ I'll reward myself with _____." Treat yourself to some luxury you've wanted, make a phone call to a friend or relative you always put off because you didn't have the time, purchase tickets to a cultural event, and so forth.
- Free-associate on paper about why you think you're late as well as when you're typically late. Look for patterns in those answers. Keep a lateness diary for information that can help you address the problem.
- Try to understand what might be behind your lateness. Is the cause a mechanical problem, such as an alarm clock that doesn't work? Or is your lateness the result of an emotional issue, such as the need for the negative attention that lateness causes (the feeling of being noticed, even if it's being noticed in an uncomplimentary way). For some, being late is better than being ignored. Think of a quiet conference room, where you can hear a pin drop, with someone

presenting at the front of the room. The audience is hanging on the presenter's every word when all of a sudden the side door opens and in walks a latecomer, making noise, tripping over feet to get to that one empty chair all the way at the end of the room. All eyes are temporarily turned to that (annoying) latecomer.

- If you've gotten into the bad habit of consistently being late, begin by adjusting your self-concept. You need to shift your paradigm from seeing yourself as someone who's always late to someone who's occasionally late to someone who's on time. Each shift requires a corresponding modification in actual behavior to reinforce your new self-perception. For example, start by getting to work on time at least once this week, then at least three days out of five the following week, and then every day.
- Consider cultural views of lateness. In Latin America and Spain, for example, running 15 minutes behind schedule may not be considered late. In the United States, however, arriving even 10 minutes late for a meeting may have you dubbed late. Understand and adapt to the culture in which you find yourself.
- Have something important happen at the precise time you're supposed to meet someone; this helps reinforce the benefits of being on time. For example, throw your boss or coworker a surprise lunch and have everyone gather at a certain time, with the guest of honor arriving 15 minutes later. Have everyone call out "Surprise!" at a precise time, so if someone's late, the excitement of the event is gone and cannot be re-created.
- If possible, avoid answering the phone on your way out the door. This is a typical cause of lateness in getting to appointments. Let the call go to voice mail or have your voice mail direct urgent calls to your cell phone. Do activate caller ID, however, so you're careful not to ignore a call from the person you're supposed to meet, who might be calling to alert you that he or she is running late or even has to cancel.
- If your projects are not getting OTD in a timely fashion, consider what is causing this. Are you afraid of reactions to your projects, postponing the completion of those works so you also avoid any criticism of your efforts? If that is the reason, shift your imaging from seeing yourself getting negative feedback to your completed projects to an image of yourself receiving positive praise. Internalize and fixate on those positive images to help you get your projects OTD.

Work Less, Do More: The 7-Day Productivity Makeover by Dr. Jan Yager is available in e-book, print, and audiobook formats wherever books are sold.