

# TEN TOP TRIED TESTED TIME TIPS

by  
**Jim Ewan**

“Do the stuff that works!”



This booklet has the power to change your life. If you will let it. Or, to put it another way, YOU have the power to change your life. If you will let you.

The problem is not time. The problem is you. You see yourself as someone who does not have enough time. You need to change your self-image. And that is not easy. Your time problems may be the way you ensure you are needed (or feel needed). They may fuel your sense of self-esteem. After all, busy people are important, aren't they, else why are they busy? Or maybe I'm talking nonsense. Whatever. But consider how much time you have (as much as any one else!):

If you live for 70 years, a not unreasonable expectation, you have

840 months

25,550 days (not counting leap years)

613,200 hours

36,792,000 minutes.

Surely that's long enough to do all you want?

So, you have enough time. All you need to do is to use it effectively. Try out the following ideas. But don't try them all at once. Try one for a week. If it seems useful, keep it up for a month. By then it will have become a habit and life will be better. But if it seems not to be very useful after that first week, dump it. It's not for you. And the last thing you need is some idiot giving you more time consuming things to do that don't work. Hell, you already have too many of those – that's why you're reading this booklet!

Good luck

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jim Swan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

## TIP 1

Make a list of the things you have to do. Do the things on your list.

Surely it can't be that simple? Of course it is. If we all did that, there'd be no problem. But we don't. We come into work, or whatever, at 9am and proceed to make a hash of the day.

We open the mail. We sort it. We put some back in the envelope (that's the bills usually). We look through it again and resort it. We put it into the in-tray. We wander off to find some coffee. We come back and look at the mail again. Then we search for the to-do list from yesterday. We read it and decide that some of it can wait until tomorrow. We start making out tomorrow's to do list. We look at the mail again. Better telephone Bill about the complaint letter. Oh no, Bill's out until after lunch. Put the letter back into the in tray. What's this on the to-do list? 'Phone Peter before 10am.' Oh, hell, it's ten past! Grab the phone and dial. Peter's voice mail answers; he's left the office already and won't be back. Well, might as well have another coffee before getting down to it. It's 10.45 and you've done nothing.

Sound familiar? All because you didn't look at your list first. You were seduced by those newly delivered envelopes. Maybe there will be a cheque in one of them. Maybe an order. Maybe you should do the things on your list! Opening the mail should be on the list, of course. Assuming that it is your job to open the mail. Which it probably isn't so why not leave it to the proper person? And do the things on *your* list!

I promise you this: Making a list and doing the things on that list will liberate more time than you can imagine. Try it. Just for a week. Then evaluate the results.

You probably won't need the other nine tips. But just in case .....

## **TIP 2**

Learn to say 'NO'.

Someone puts his head around the door and says, "Do you have a couple of minutes?" You *know* that this means half an hour wasted and yet you still say yes. Are you crazy or what?

Do you take on extra jobs because it is easier than saying no? I bet you do. Do you do things because it's quicker than showing someone else how? Sure you do, and you forget that it's only quicker the first time! And even 'one-offs' have a habit of reappearing, don't they?

Practice saying no. Human beings are helpful creatures (except during the teenage years, of course) and tend to answer requests in the affirmative. Resist your natural instincts! Train yourself to withstand your better nature. Use the scoot approach:

**Stop**

**Consider your own best interests**

**Offer an alternative (a helpful one!)**

**Open the door**

**Tell them to SCOOT!**

## **TIP 3**

Look for ways to save minutes.

Consider coffee breaks:

2 breaks a day x 20 minutes = 40mins

40mins x 5 days = 200 mins

200 mins x 42 weeks = 8,400 mins

8,400 mins ÷ 60 = 140 hours

140 hours ÷ 7(working day) = 20 days

So your coffee break is costing you 20 days of prime time each year! That's damn near a working month. What could you achieve if you had an extra month a year?

Now, I'm not suggesting you give up your coffee break. But if you cut it to 15 minutes, you'd save five days a year! What could you save by not lingering over your dessert at lunchtime?

Here's what to do; make a time log for a month. Note every activity and how long you spend on it. Especially note the non-essential activities and the wasted time at the start and end of an activity. Project these times for a full year and see just how much slack you have in your busy, rushed, stressed life. You'll be amazed!

#### **TIP 4**

Work in chunks.

One of the problems with jobs is that they take too long to complete. We get tired, bored, restless. This leads to inefficiency and jobs taking far longer to complete. One answer is to work on each job for a fixed, short period. Then move on to something else, then something else and finally back to the first job on your list. Ten minutes is not too short a time to do something useful. Put an alarm clock on your desk and set it for the period of your choice. Those jobs will be finished in a shorter total time and you will feel far less weary at the end of the day.

#### **TIP 5**

Reward yourself for your achievements.

Everyone likes a little recognition. So award yourself some! Maybe a chocolate bar when you complete that boring tax return. Or a night out for writing the big proposal. Rewards don't have to be major, they can be the equivalent of a pat on the back. And, by the way, if you have staff, a little recognition can make it a lot easier to

persuade them to take on the things you desperately need to delegate (see TIP 6)

Just knowing the reward is coming will help you to blast through that pile in the in tray.

## **TIP 6**

Practice delegating.

One of the major reasons for management failure has been identified as failure to delegate. No matter what the task, you should ask yourself two questions:

Does it need to be done?  
Does it need to be done by me?

Even if the answer *seems* to be 'yes' in both cases, you should still ask:

Could anyone else do it?

And if the answer to that one is 'no', consider training someone up so that you can delegate in the future.

Most experts agree that the ability to delegate is a major factor for success at just about anything.

## **TIP 7**

Hold meetings standing up.

I bet you've heard this one before. And I bet you said, "Hey, that's a great idea!" or something similar. And I bet you don't do it!

Why not? It really does work.

## TIP 8

Practice choosing.

It's time to face facts. You are never going to get done all the things you want to get done. Certainly not today. Your to-do list will have to carry over. The main thing is to complete as many of the important tasks as you can. Then you can go home with a clear conscience and sleep the sleep of the just.

Problem is, we all tend to do the things we like doing first. Or we do the easy stuff, or the quick stuff. What we need is a way of prioritising. So here is a really simple way that works like a dream.

1. Draw a four square grid (see picture)
2. Write your tasks in the appropriate positions (vital+urgent at top left, not vital+urgent bottom right)
3. Assign priorities to your tasks according to their grid positions.
4. You now have the report for the boss marked A1, getting your agonising toothache sorted as A2 and playing solitaire on the PC as D99
5. Repeat every evening before you go home. It will take around five minutes and save hours.

Don't forget to take action!

	Vital	Not vital
Urgent	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>
Not urgent	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>

## **TIP 9**

Touch each piece of paper only once.

I know – easier said than done. In fact impossible to achieve. But that doesn't mean it's not worth aspiring to. Remember the picture I painted in the introduction? Multiple handling of bits of paper is endemic in our offices and our homes. And mostly it is not necessary.

Only pick up a piece of paper when you are ready to take action with regard to it. Sometimes, of course, that action will be to move it to somewhere else for later attention. But I'd reckon that between 80% and 90% of the letters, memos, orders etc that come into your possession could be dealt with instantly. Mostly by dropping them into the bin.

One final point. Don't save stuff because it looks interesting. Or because it might come in handy one day. Throw it away. Yes, you'll regret disposing of the odd item. But if you keep everything that 'might' be useful, you'll never be able to find anything anyway.

## **TIP 10**

Always remember – it isn't that important.

So you failed to get everything done today. Don't worry; everyone else is in the same boat. And in 100 years, it won't matter in the slightest. To be brutally honest, it probably won't matter in a hundred days.

You have heard of the 80:20 rule, of course. 80% of anything useful comes from 20% of the effort. So only 20% of what you do is worth doing in the first place! It follows that if you get through more than 20% of your to do list, you are ahead of the game.

Remember also that you can only do one thing (effectively) at a time. Try to make sure that that one thing is part of the 20% rather than the 80%. You won't always manage it, of course, but do your best.

Take a look at the last twelve months. How many of the tasks that seemed so important are now definitely 80% tasks? Identify them for the future. These are the tasks you can stop doing, or delegate to someone else.

It isn't that important. Be happy.

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## **About the author**

Jim Ewan has spent the last forty-odd years dealing with people both one-to-one and in groups. As a writer, speaker and trainer he has encountered most of the problems of human communication and has run up against the time management conundrum more often than he would like to admit. His life, he says, is chaos – but organised chaos. And it is because of the organisation that he manages to get so much done.

A past President of the Simpletons (London's oldest independent speaking club) and past President of the Professional Speakers Association, Jim holds the LAMDA Gold Medal and Diploma for Public Speaking and is a past finalist in Toastmasters International speaking contests. His wide-ranging background in large and small businesses (from tea boy to director and even lower) makes him popular both as a business and after dinner speaker.

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