7 dead-aim tactics for meeting deadlines

Experience, Human Nature

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I don’t believe there is anyone among us who doesn’t begin each job with high hopes and good intentions. We get excited at the opportunity to take on a new project, excel and deliver it ahead of time to great fanfare.

So where does all that energy and enthusiasm go when we actually work on the project? And what happens when life gets in the way? Why do most of us seem to work feverishly at the last minute to make a deadline?

The answer could simply be a matter of managing a project better, from beginning to end. Here are seven strategies that will help you schedule and meet deadlines more easily:

1. Create a system.

As soon as a job comes in the door, schedule it into your calendar, with checkpoints and due dates clearly indicated. Then set your deadline a week ahead of its due date. Create templates and automation for tasks you

repeat, such as email responses, forms and invoices. Use task-reminder apps like , and live by your calendar daily.

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2. Use your experience to schedule.

If you have been doing a particular job for a while, you probably know how long things take. Use this calculation when scheduling, and always add in a buffer period for unexpected events. Some people double the time and use that extra time to come in early on a project. If you don’t know how long something takes to accomplish, use an app like to track time spent on projects.

3. Create checkpoints.

When you feel like you have all the time in the world, you lose a sense of urgency on the project. To keep the energy flowing, create smaller checkpoint deadlines along the way that keep you accountable, including progress reports with your client oraccountabilitypartner, and weekly meetings with your staff.

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4. Schedule time blocks.

Block off distraction-free hours to concentrate on the task at hand using the – 20 percent of your invested input is responsible for 80 percent of your results. You’ll be amazed how much more you can accomplish with a concentrated time block than if you linger over the job all day. Get the most

important tasks done first thing in the morning, then as the afternoon goes on, do the things that take less time and mental effort.

5. Remove distractions.

According to a *Time* , the average person checks their phone 46 times a day, and with each distraction taking up to 20 minutes to regain your concentration, your day can be easily gone. When you work your time block, put your access tosocial mediaout of reach, out of sound range, and out of sight. Turn off the phone ringer and remove all other work, tasks, unpaid bills and other distractions from your workspace so you can focus on one thing at a time. Completely clean off your desk if you have to in order to focus on the task at hand.

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6. Hire the help you need.

If the job is too big for you, or you need the assistance of an expert, hire contract workers for specific tasks that could include working on the project or helping you with your regular office management. Getting the job turned in on time will be well worth the extra expense, and will pay off in glowing reviews and future work from this customer.

7. Reward yourself.

A sure way to drag a project along is to try to force yourself to complete it all at once. After you have put in a good chunk of hours on a project, take a break to eat, stretch and clear your mind. Get out of the office if possible so you can come back to the job refreshed. Reward yourself when you complete

stages of your project. A hot fudge sundae may just inspire you to finish something you're putting off.

The next time you find yourself pushing a deadline, look back and see where you could have put these strategies into play. Each time, you'll get better and better at managing projects – and meeting deadlines.