Making the Most of Your Minutes

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Small business owners usually have more on their to-do lists than there is time in the day. If becoming more productive is one of your New Year's resolutions, we have a suggestion for you that could be a game changer.

One of the biggest productivity challenges is interruptions. But as a small business owner they’re practically in your job description! You never know when someone will walk in or call. And while you want potential customers to do this in abundance, interruptions impact what you accomplish during the day.

One of the best ways to remain productive through interruptions is by planning. While you can't plan interruptions, you can create a list of things you need to do sorted by the amount of time it takes to do them. Whether you realize it or not, your day is filled with small pockets of time. Even when you feel at your busiest, you likely have a handful of minutes that you aren't maximizing currently. Creating this list will help you use every minute of your workday in the most efficient way.

Most to-do lists are organized around large demanding activities—the things with a noticeable deadline. Those kinds of to-do lists are still very valuable, but the *“Mystery Minutes” To-do List* will help you with all the time in between your large to-dos.

## How Does a “Mystery Minutes” To-do List Work?

First, make a list the things you *must* do for your business that don't have pressing deadlines or have deadlines months away that you need to work on bit by bit.

Next, organize it by the amount of time each item takes. For instance, if your to-do List contains “clean out the back storage room” the time assigned to that task might be something huge like two days (depending on the size of the area). If you’re like most small business owners, you don’t have two days to work on organizing your storage closet. You either need to hire or assign someone to do that or you must do it when you’re off/closed.

However, if you break the task down into manageable smaller jobs, you can assign each a shorter timeframe. For instance, imagine you have three boxes on the floor in your storage room that you need to unpack and organize. If you write that as a standalone task, instead of lumping it in with the entire room organization project, that job can be completed in a few minutes.

If you have large tasks break them up into smaller components. List each component on your to-do list. While this will make your to-do List longer, it will also make it more “do-able.” Plus, this to-do list isn't something you're going to finish today or even later this week. A Mystery Minutes To-do List is one that uses downtime effectively whenever you have it to ensure projects get completed a little bit at a time.

Next, organize the list by shortest activity to longest based on time increments. Your list may have several 5-minute activities, 10-minute activities, 15-minute activities, and so forth.

Then take each task within the category and sort it by importance or upcoming completion date. For instance, if you have three 5-minute jobs with one of them coming due next month (and the rest of them not being deadline specific), place the task due next month at the top of your 5-minute category.

Throughout the day you'll have time to work on your prioritized to-do list. You may not always realize whether you're going to have five or ten minutes at your disposal. So, for those times when you're not sure how much time you have, you can either choose the shortest activity on the list or you can select a longer activity knowing you will need to break it into multiple sessions. There are some occasions where you will know that you have ten minutes such as before a meeting, phone call, or event. Make the most of that time.

It's easy to allow ourselves to get bogged down in business. When business is nonstop and we have a few moments, we tend to use that time to catch our breath and don't use it efficiently. However, if you have a list of quick wins that you can conquer in a matter of minutes you not only will get more done, but you’ll also feel better about your day and what you've accomplished.

[*Christina Metcalf*](http://www.christinargreen.com/) *is a writer/ghostwriter who believes in the power of story. She works with small businesses, chambers of commerce, and business professionals who want to make an impression and grow a loyal customer/member base. She loves road trips, hates exclamation points, and believes the world would be a better place if we all had our own theme song that played when we entered the room. What would yours be?*

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