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on PRODUCTIVITY

## BLOCK TIME OR RISK BLOCKING PROGRESS

Many of my clients ask me if time blocking works. They ask if reserving time in their calendar is an effective way to manage their tasks, their projects, their e-mail or returning calls. "Does it really work?" they ask, "or is it just a phrase that people are throwing around?"



I won't say that it depends on your personality or your industry or the type of job or career you have. If you have an office and you sit behind a desk for part or all of your day, then time blocking can work for you, no matter what. And the only two things that will differ from person to person is the amount of time that you designate for any particular task and for which tasks you feel you need to block time.

Time blocking is not just being able to mark time on your calendar for a half hour or an hour. You must be able to manage distractions and interruptions during this time. Time blocking can work if what you want is clear, focused and uninterrupted time to get something accomplished. Without setting ground rules for yourself and for others in your office, time blocking will be a failed attempt at getting things done.

Besides the interruptions of people and the phone, the biggest thing that consistently gets in the way of productivity or time blocking is the e-mail alert. E-mail alerts are so distracting that most people can't help but stop what they're doing and check it out. I highly recommend that you turn off the chimes, the bells, the blinking cursor and the pop-up box that tells you that you now have one more e-mail. (For how to disable the alert, visit [www.productiveday.com](http://www.productiveday.com).)

## 3 WAYS TO USE TIME BLOCKING

- 1 To accomplish a task. If you are planning to spend at least a half-hour working on something and you don't want to keep pushing it off or risk getting interrupted, plan time into your calendar. Make an appointment with yourself and don't let anyone take it away. Try not to allow yourself to steamroll over it, either.
- 2 To return phone calls. This is when you're not looking at new e-mail or addressing anything else except the person on the other end of the line. Your door is closed and others know that you are not to be interrupted, and for how long.
- 3 To process e-mail. If you turn off the e-mail alerts, this will mean that you are focused on other priorities while e-mail is silently coming into your inbox. You can scan the inbox quickly throughout the day to see if anything urgent has come in and if not, get back to your priorities. Then schedule a block of time or two within each day to actually process your e-mail. Bear in mind that the number of e-mails you get per day will determine the number of time blocks you may need, as well as the length of each block of time. Some folks can look at e-mail all day long and not lose track of priorities. Are you one of those people?

If you stop the e-mail alerts and control distractions and interruptions, then you have a higher chance of success using time blocks to get your priorities completed. A word of caution: Don't divide your whole day into time blocks. Depending on how many meetings you must attend per week, you'll need to have plenty of flexible time in your schedule.

Leslie Shreve is a productivity consultant and founder and president of Focus, a consulting and training company specializing in office productivity and information organization. [www.productiveday.com](http://www.productiveday.com).

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