



## ASK THE EXPERT

# How to Stop Wasting Time

SYDNEY FINKELSTEIN | STEVEN ROTH PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT, TUCK SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Professor Finkelstein—a.k.a. “Dr. Syd”—knows a few things about maximizing your daily productivity. In addition to his primary responsibilities as a professor and researcher at Tuck, Finkelstein also manages to find time to be a prolific blogger, podcaster, best-selling author, member of various professional boards, husband and father. What’s his secret? “Stopping yourself from wasting time isn’t rocket science,” he says. “The biggest reason you keep running out of time is because you’re not treating the hours and minutes as the precious resources they are. If we wasted food the way we waste time, we’d all be malnourished.” Here is Dr. Syd’s prescription to help boost your time management skills and get more done each day.

## CURB EMAIL

“Don’t just close out the program on your laptop, but also on your mobile phone, your iPad and whatever electronics are within earshot. How could it possibly be a good idea to surround yourself with irresistible distractions that are sure to disrupt? Instead, set aside time to go through those emails two or three times a day all in one shot. And remember the ‘one and done’ rule that applies to most email messages: Deal with it right away, don’t save it for later—and delete often.”

## MINIMIZE MEETINGS

“The mere thought of meetings is enough to trigger horrible memories of countless hours wasted. While I can’t ban meetings from your life, I do have two suggestions to help you pay a lower ‘meeting tax.’ First, stop going to meetings because you think you need to be there. Either you definitely do or you definitely don’t. Second, for those meetings you’ve got to go to, try to schedule them back-to-back, leaving time at the end of each meeting to quickly take some notes to remember the key takeaways.”

## BE REALISTIC

“I know sometimes everyday work gets in the way of efficiency. There are ebbs and flows of various projects, and you definitely can’t control people around you. But you can try to get more control over yourself and how you do your own work. When you finish one task, move on to the next. Or, if one project hits a roadblock, move on to the next and come back to it when you’re fresh. Try to wrap up for the day at a point that will be easy to pick up the next day.”

## EVALUATE YOURSELF

“At the end of each month, take a cold, hard look at your calendar and how you spent your time over the previous four weeks. Are you proud of how you used your time? Did you get a solid return on investment from what you chose to do? Even the best intentions aren’t enough to break old habits. If you’re serious about this, monitor how well you’ve been doing. It’s one of the best ways to get anything done. Don’t just say you’re going to stop wasting time or assume that you are, but check and make sure.”