

Quick Guide: Realistic 'To-Do' Lists

A 'to-do' list is a powerful way to organise yourself and to reduce stress. But if you've ever written one and never achieved what's on it, you need to consider if it's a to-do list or a "wish list". Being realistic with what you put on a 'to-do' list is key to being able to achieve it. So here are the **top ten tips** to help you do that:

- 1. When does it need to be done by** or when are you going to do it? Allocate each of your tasks against its deadline on your calendar or scheduler and do this every time a new task needs doing.
- 2. If a task is too large** to be done at one sitting, break it down to "next action" and schedule each of these against their relevant deadline.
- 3. Get specific!** Write the task in action terms, e.g. "speak to Adam to set up the review meeting" not "arrange client meeting". This will motivate you to DO the task at the appropriate time rather than worry about HOW to do it.
- 4. Before you go home at night**, print off or re-write the list of tasks which *must* be done the next day. Then decide which tasks *should* be done by you and which ones *could* be done by someone else, if push comes to shove.
- 5. Be truly realistic about how long each task will take to do**, and aim to do each task when you are at your best, and will therefore do it justice.
- 6. Get a running start.** If you do several tiny tasks first, you start the "Achieve! Achieve!" ball rolling. This motivates you to keep crossing things off your list as you work through them.
- 7. Block similar tasks together.** This makes you more efficient as you will be in 'telephone call' mode, or 'meeting notes' mode, etc.
- 8. Build in rewards for yourself.** Save that nice 'treat' task for after you have finished the routine or important task.
- 9. Turn it into a game with yourself.** Set up a points system for each kind of task so that you can see your daily or weekly scores. See if you can beat your high scores!
- 10. At the end of the day**, go home, relax and enjoy yourself, knowing that there are no outstanding panics and feeling great because you achieved today what you set out to achieve.

Compiled by Des Whitehorn