



STEPHANIE
AITKEN



STRATEGIC TIME MANAGEMENT WORKBOOK

For women leaders at work

INTRODUCTION

One of the most common complaints I hear from my coaching clients is that they feel like they never have enough time.

They're constantly chasing their tail, going from meeting to meeting with barely any time to get their own work done. Consumed by firefighting urgent tasks, and reacting to those who scream the loudest. As a result, they're rarely able to nurture the long-term plans and projects which are critical to their role. Overwhelm is a regular occurrence. They know that burnout is lurking on the horizon.

Can you relate?

If so, you're probably also aware of the cost to you.

You're not as efficient and effective as you could be. You know this means you're not always hitting your performance objectives. And if you are, the effort to do so is exhausting.

You're pulling long days with few breaks, leaving little to no time for the important things outside of work. The sorts of things that replenish you, and are so important for your wellbeing.

What's more, other people around you are left with the impression that you're not coping. Naturally, these perceptions affect your reputation and promotional opportunities. And so the cycle continues...

You know something needs to change, and fast.

However, you might not know where to start. It might seem like an impossible task. After all, if you don't know where to start, how can you know which direction to take? You may be thinking, ok, it's just the nature of my job. I can't really do anything about the volume of work I'm getting. And anyway, everyone else is in the same boat, right?

Whilst some of that may be true, there are still lots of things you can do to with your time management. The sorts of things that mean you can realise different and more positive results.

That's what you get with this workbook.

You'll be guided through a simple practical process that will help you get a better handle on your work. You'll discover ways to be more strategic about how you manage your time. You'll become more productive, experience more spaciousness, and enjoy a greater sense of wellbeing. All positive things – for you and your career.

This workbook is an editable PDF. You can either type your notes directly into the digital workbook as you go, or print it off and write your notes on the paper version.

I would recommend setting aside an hour when you feel relaxed and can go through the process without being interrupted. I understand that given your lack of time this may not be easy to do! However, I promise you that this 1 hour invested will mean you win back far more time than that each week.

Be mindful of the part of you that thinks, "I already know this" and resists the process. It only gets in the way. Far better to keep an open mind and follow the techniques so that you can experience a transformation in this area. After all, that's your true desire, isn't it?

Let's get started...

STEP 1 – PREPARE

Before you start, here’s something to ease you into the right frame of mind. It’s a short guided process that will help you focus on the activity. Simply click the link to be taken to the page to listen (or type the URL into your browser):

www.stephanieaitken.com/focusprocess

STEP 2 – IDENTIFY YOUR TIME THIEVES

Before we look at the tactics, we first need to take a look at how you might be contributing to this problem. In my 20+ years of working in the corporate world, I’ve observed many women have recurring working habits which make their roles more demanding than they need to be. These unhelpful habits are your **“Time Thieves”**.

It’s so essential to address your Time Thieves. Otherwise any time management system you put in place will be like you trying to bail water out of a boat with gaping holes. Pretty ineffective, and only going to end in one way.

As you go through this list of Time Thieves, just be really honest with yourself. First, identify any you have a habit of doing. Then rate each Time Thief out of 10 for how prevalent the habit is for you (10 = the highest i.e. “I’m doing this all the time”; 0 = the lowest i.e. “I never do this”).

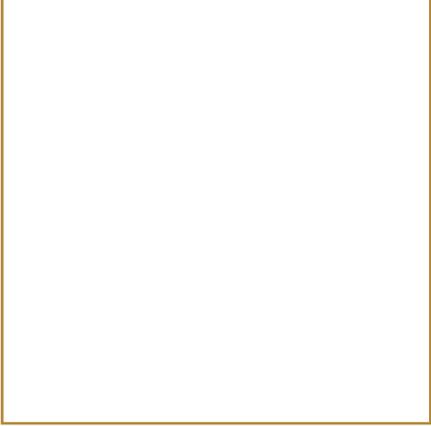
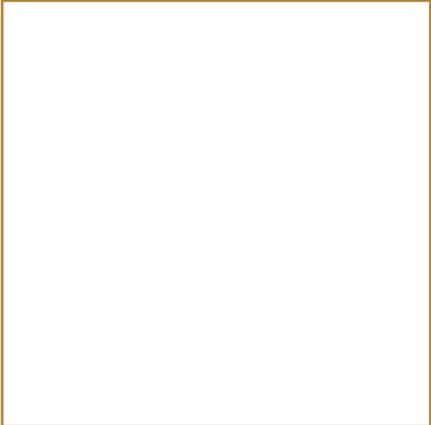
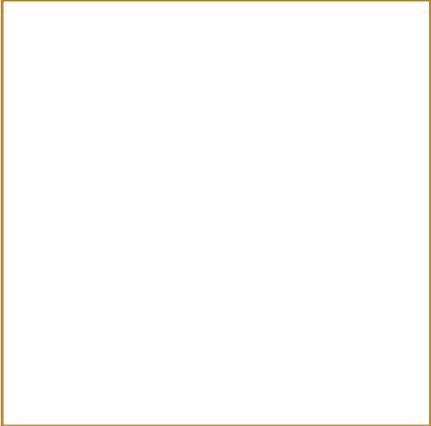
For any Time Thief you score 5 or above; write down in the blank box next to it what you are going to do to change this habit.

Some solutions to the Time Thieves will be provided in this workbook. However, others may require deeper work on your mindset, perhaps with a coach or mentor to properly resolve (you can contact me if you’d like to talk through how I may help you achieve this).

Also, please don’t be self-critical and judge yourself for doing these things. They’re listed because they’re so common! Instead, just be curious – this self-awareness will fuel your motivation to make positive changes moving forward.

<p>1. Saying “yes” is your default answer to people’s requests</p> <p>This usually happens because you want to be seen as nice/helpful/capable. It means other people’s needs take priority over your own. You risk becoming a dumping ground for other people’s unwanted work.</p>	<p>SCORE OUT OF 10</p> <input data-bbox="852 1621 963 1722" type="text"/>	<p>What you’ll do differently:</p> <div data-bbox="1011 1541 1442 1966" style="border: 1px solid #c08040; height: 190px;"></div>
--	---	--

<p>2. Not being strategic about how you prioritise your work</p> <p>You're on the merry-go-round of doing work for those shouting the loudest. You're letting others hijack your diary with unnecessary meetings. You're in reactive mode rather than directive mode, feeling like a crew sailor rather than captain of your ship.</p>	<p>SCORE OUT OF 10</p> <input data-bbox="853 313 965 414" type="text"/>	<p>What you'll do differently:</p> <div data-bbox="1002 228 1433 654" style="border: 1px solid #c08040; height: 190px;"></div>
<p>3. Over-preparing / over-working</p> <p>Taking way longer than needed to complete tasks, triple-checking work (you know when you're overdoing it). This can be passed off as perfectionism or having high standards, but usually it's a fear of making a mistake or not feeling good or experienced enough. This can be magnified when you're a woman in a male-dominated space, where you feel a greater need to prove yourself and be respected.</p>	<p>SCORE OUT OF 10</p> <input data-bbox="853 884 965 985" type="text"/>	<p>What you'll do differently:</p> <div data-bbox="1002 795 1433 1220" style="border: 1px solid #c08040; height: 190px;"></div>
<p>4. Not delegating enough</p> <p>You might be worried that others won't do things to a good enough standard, or whether they'll be fast enough. You may not want to overload an already stretched team. Perhaps deep down you want the recognition of doing the work yourself! Meanwhile you're wasting valuable resources doing work that is too junior for you. You're also possibly stifling others' growth.</p>	<p>SCORE OUT OF 10</p> <input data-bbox="853 1534 965 1635" type="text"/>	<p>What you'll do differently:</p> <div data-bbox="1002 1444 1433 1870" style="border: 1px solid #c08040; height: 190px;"></div>

<p>5. Micro-managing</p> <p>You may be very used to being a “worker bee” who’s in control. So it feels unnatural to let go of that control. You may fear the other person will do something wrong, tarnishing your or their reputation. You might be overly protective of them, or even enjoy feeling needed by them. However, without true autonomy they’ll struggle to tap into their own creative thinking and confidence.</p>	<p>SCORE OUT OF 10</p> 	<p>What you’ll do differently:</p> 
<p>6. Lack of self-care</p> <p>Not taking care of your core wellbeing needs. And then making up with bad habits, such as no proper breaks during the day, over-caffeinating, too much sugar, Netflix binges, wind-down wine. As a result you’re continually tired and depleted. In turn you’re slower, more easily distracted and less inspired or inspiring.</p>	<p>SCORE OUT OF 10</p> 	<p>What you’ll do differently:</p> 
<p>7. Passive collaboration</p> <p>You ask others for their opinion but then wait ages for their response. Or you chase them up, but weakly because you think they’re too busy or more important than you. As a result, you allow them to determine your projects’ timing, instead of you driving things forward at your preferred and optimal pace. Naturally, this slows you down and creates an unwanted bottleneck in your activity.</p>	<p>SCORE OUT OF 10</p> 	<p>What you’ll do differently:</p> 

<p>8. Being a martyr</p> <p>Jumping in and offering to do work for others to help out. Sometimes without them even asking you. It could be the over-nurturing mother part of you, wanting to “rescue” them (and possibly even have them feel like they need you). Or it could be your over-zealous pleaser taking the reins. Either way, you end up a martyr who feels burdened. And resentful when your generosity is not reciprocated (even though you’ve only got yourself to blame!).</p>	<p>SCORE OUT OF 10</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 10px auto;"></div>	<p>What you’ll do differently:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 260px; height: 190px; margin: 10px auto;"></div>
<p>9. Procrastinating and leaving things to the last minute</p> <p>You like to work under the pressure of an imminent deadline. In fact, it may be the only thing that gets you out of procrastination and into gear. Here’s the thing though: It also creates unnecessary stress, relegates other important work, and negatively impacts others who may be involved.</p>	<p>SCORE OUT OF 10</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 10px auto;"></div>	<p>What you’ll do differently:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 260px; height: 190px; margin: 10px auto;"></div>

STEP 2 - STRATEGICALLY HONE YOUR WORK ACTIVITIES

The Pareto Principle says that 80% of your results come from 20% of your efforts. So now we’re going to make sure that you are spending your effort on the right things.

Make a list of all the different work activities you currently have on your plate. Be sure to include one-off tasks and recurring responsibilities. You can either type this list into the page headed “Activity Lists” at the end of the workbook, or write it on a separate sheet.

Once you’ve completed your list, it’s time to take a moment for yourself. Zoom out your thoughts, and get ready to look at the long-term, and the big picture.

Take a moment to think about your role and then answer the following:

What are the big picture goals that you want to achieve in your work?

What big picture goals do senior people expect you to be achieving for the organisation?

What are the most important areas you should be devoting your time to?

Is there a change initiative you would like to spearhead within your organisation or industry?

--	--

OK, all done? Now it's time to get selective, and brave. You're going to move through each item on your list of activities, and identify what needs to be done. Next to each item, write or type your answer (in capitals) to the below questions:

- **What should be delegated to someone else?**
Think about things that are too junior for you, or where other team members would gain experience to develop.
- **Where can you relax control of delegated tasks, and give people more space and autonomy?**
Lean into the possibility that their way might even enhance the outcome!
- **What low-stake activities are you spending too much time on?**
Where can you adopt an "it's good enough and we can iterate as we go" attitude?
- **Where should you be saying "No" to other people's requests, and laying down boundaries about what you will or won't do?**
Can you suggest alternative ways for them to get the support they need, so you don't leave them in the lurch?
- **What "nice to have" (but not essential) activities are eating up too much of your precious time?**
Can you pause them, drop them, or delegate them?
- **What is missing from your list of activities?**
What strategic activities and projects should you be devoting time to? The ones that will mean you realise your big picture goals, and meet organisational expectations of your role?

Now you've made these important decisions about your workload, it's time to put them into action.

Create an action plan with deadlines for when you are going to fulfil each of the commitments you've made. Put this action plan into your diary.

Maintain those thoughts and insights you gained when you put together your list. You can use these to help you triage your work as it comes in.

STEP 3 - GROUP TOGETHER SIMILAR TASKS

Now that you can be clear on what to focus on, you can also benefit by systemising things.

In any given day you may go from a team catch-up meeting, straight into a client pitch, followed by a performance review. All peppered with random conversations in between.

These are all very distinct activities. You're required to rapidly and continually switch modes of thinking and energy states, often without any break in between to help you. This constant switching is more draining than you may realise. It can leech focus, productivity, and stops you mentally firing on all cylinders.

Compare this to when you stay in the same type of thinking, or focused on one task, at a time. You can be much more efficient, with less "friction" because you're not jumping between different tasks. You conserve more cognitive resources throughout the day.

This part of the time management process is about organising your weekly schedule into recurring blocks in your diary. Where you group together activities that take a similar energy or type of thinking.

Decide groups

First, decide what sort of groups you need, based on the type of work that you do. Here's an example of a set of groups used by several of my clients:

1. Team management - group and one-to-one meetings; performance reviews
2. Strategic work – long-term planning; finance projections; exec meetings
3. Day-to-day tasks and internal meetings / conversations
4. Externally facing meetings and calls
5. Replenishment breaks to manage your energy and maintain clear focus

Given the nature of your work you might have different groups to those set above. The main thing is to make sure you don't have too many groups. It's a case of less is more, otherwise things get too complicated to implement.

List your groups:

--	--

Place blocks in your diary

Decide the day of the week and the time slots you'll dedicate to each group. Then create the blocks in a master version of your calendar.

It could look this:-

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
GMT+01					
9 AM	Email Check, 9am	Email Check, 9am	Email Check, 9am	Email Check, 9am	Email Check, 9am
10 AM	Strategy / leadership 9:30 – 11am	Team management 9:30 – 11am	Daily work 9:30 – 11am	Open 9:30 – 11am	Weekly planning/ brainstorming 9:30 – 11am
11 AM	Replenishment break, 11am	Replenishment break, 11am	Replenishment break, 11am	Replenishment break, 11am	Replenishment break, 11am
12 PM	Strategy / leadership 11:30am – 12:30pm	Team management 11:30am – 12:30pm	External 11:30am – 12:30pm	Daily work 11:30am – 12:30pm	Team management 11:30am – 12:30pm
1 PM	Email check, 12:30pm	Email check, 12:30pm	Email check, 12:30pm	Email check, 12:30pm	Email check, 12:30pm
2 PM	Lunch 1 – 2pm	Lunch 1 – 2pm	Lunch 1 – 2pm	Lunch 1 – 2pm	Lunch 1 – 2pm
3 PM	External 2 – 3:45pm	Open 2 – 3:45pm	Daily work 2 – 3:45pm	Strategy/leadership 2 – 3:45pm	Daily work 2 – 3:45pm
4 PM	Replenishment break, 3:45pm	Replenishment break, 3:45pm	Replenishment break, 3:45pm	Replenishment break, 3:45pm	Replenishment break, 3:45pm
5 PM	Daily work 4:15 – 6pm	Daily work 4:15 – 6pm	Open 4:15 – 6pm	External 4:15 – 6pm	Daily work 4:15 – 6pm
6 PM	Email check, 6pm	Email check, 6pm	Email check, 6pm	Email check, 6pm	Email check, 6pm
7 PM					

The above schedule is just to illustrate what your blocks “could” look like not what they should be.

The intention is for you to schedule activities you have control over, using one of the blocks you’ve created. This is particularly important for any recurring meetings.

So, instead of others deciding when you engage with them, you tell them when you’re available based on your diary blocks.

For example, imagine you have recurring one-to-one calls with your team members dotted around the week. Rearrange the calls to take place on Tuesday morning in the first “Team management” block.

Then imagine a client wants to speak about an ongoing project. You can suggest some times in any of your “External” blocks.

Now imagine you need to write a presentation. Let’s say you know you’re most creative in the mornings. Schedule this on a Wednesday morning, during a block you’ve allocated for day-to-day work.

You could even lock some of these blocks away. Where people can’t put time into your diary without your consent.

In the example above, you’ll notice blocks labelled as “open”. These are for dealing with anything unexpected that may crop up. You could also leave these blocks open for people to enter meetings.

Of course, there's always a part of your diary that you simply can't control. Those times when you have to bend to the will of others. Maybe to cater to those more senior to you, a client's specific needs, or a sudden emergency.

Here's when you can see your weekly blocks as your "ideal". Where you do what you can to maintain control, but you also know you can't always stick to them. Don't be hard on yourself – after all, you know being flexible is part of working within an organisation.

Maybe you work in an industry where your speed affects how much you are paid. In this scenario, managing your time becomes really crucial.

Here's where it's worth identifying a small number of critical groups which are your "non-negotiables". Block these in your diary as a recurring event, at a time when they're least likely to be disrupted. Do what you can to keep them for you, or only to be used for emergencies.

A word about emails...

Emails are a quick way to lose your time and focus. Imagine you're focusing on a piece of work, and then you stop to check an email. Studies have shown it can take 15–20 minutes to regain the focus level you had before! And how many times a day do you do this?

This is why implementing email blocks is a game-changer.

These are set by you, and are the only time during the day when you check and respond to emails. In between these email blocks you can then focus fully on whichever activity you've allocated for that time.

Turn email notifications off, so you don't get distracted by the pings and get tempted to peek at your inbox. You may need to shift the timings of your email blocks depending on the day. As long as you only check your emails after completing a meaningful chunk of work.

STEP 4 – MAKING THIS SUSTAINABLE

Organising your time and workload is a journey, not a destination. You're going to be managing your time on an ongoing basis. Otherwise you'll end up in the same position as you were before you started.

The good news is that by doing the process in this workbook you've done the heavy-lifting already. It won't take much to keep on top of things. Treat it as a case of "little and often".

Pick a specific time, at the start or end of each week when you will review your workload. Set aside at least 30 minutes and put this in your diary as a recurring "planning" block.

Monthly

At the start of every month, use your planning block to look at the important projects you need to progress or complete in that month. Diarise time to do this work in the relevant block. Give yourself ample time to do this well in advance of any deadline!

Be realistic about how long it is likely to take, then allocate enough time. Consider splitting the work over a few different blocks, instead of one long block. This can help you stay fresh and productive.

Weekly

Each week, look at the activities you have coming up in the next 7 days. Prioritise them in terms of importance and urgency. Then you can allocate them to the relevant block for that week.

Daily

At the start of each day, take 5 minutes to review the tasks you've allocated. Look out for those which have cropped up since your planning session, and need to be tended to that day. Then prioritise all the tasks for that day.

You may have several competing important or urgent tasks in one day, even in a particular block. This is when you ask yourself, "What's the one thing I can do that makes everything else easier or unnecessary?" Whatever the answer, do that first. This question is from the book "the One Thing" by Gary Keller, which really helps you hone in on what's most important.





FINAL NOTE

Well done for completing the process!

You should already be feeling more calm and in control. Just wait until you start reaping the benefits of being more strategic with your time and workload. Get ready to experience the positive ripple effect that it brings!

As you implement this time management system, do remember the adage “progress not perfection”.

You may not be able to stick to this perfectly all of the time. That’s fine. Make a commitment to your process and be as consistent as you can be. If you hit a ridiculously busy period and it all falls by the wayside, don’t worry. Simply start again as soon as possible.

Perhaps you’ve gone through this process and haven’t been able to stick to it.

Even though you have the best intentions. In this case, maybe there’s some subconscious mindset issues that are sabotaging you. This can require deeper work, best done with the support of an experienced coach or therapist.

You can email help@stephanieaitken.com and I’d be delighted to have a conversation, to explore how I might be able to help you.

And do please reach out to let me know about your successes with this process! I love hearing your stories and knowing that you’ve received value from what I share.

Stay well

Stephanie

LIST OF ACTIVITIES

--	--

EXTRA NOTES

