

It always seems to be a significant issue this time of year – managing all the end-of-term activities, summer balls and parties and keeping all relevant balls in the air at work! Come September I will have been working for 30 years and can reflect how there is increasing pressure to achieve more, faster now than ever before.

Therefore I consider it useful to reflect on top tips for getting the most from your time.

**1** Write down clear goals of what you want to achieve. This should apply to inside and outside work activities if you wish to maintain some sort of good work/life balance. Typically these goals should be a mixture of things that you wish to do to achieve and also things that you do to provide enjoyment.

**2** Recognise the choices that you can make when there appears to be too much to do. A good start is to prioritise effectively. What is really important and urgent – do these things now; what is important but not urgent – plan time in your diary to do these things soon. Often it is the latter which add real value but we don't get round to them.

**3** Consider the other choices including delegation. While we know that effective delegation can boost staff engagement and develop skills, it is an area where I spend a lot of time coaching managers to do more of it. By effective delegation I mean explaining why the task is important, briefing the person so they understand the results required, making sure they have all the right information and support, getting feedback to check understanding and setting up controls to make sure things are going according to plan.

**4** Working longer hours can be a strategy if applied sparingly; we recognise that work has a horrible habit of filling time available, giving us diminishing returns on an hour by hour basis. Also we can get burnt out and other aspects of our life can suffer.

**5** Do some things less well! This tends to be controversial;

## RACHEL BLACKBURN



however it is a strategy we need to deploy on occasions and decide when task has been completed so it's fit for purpose rather than perfect.

**6** Develop efficient systems so that all routine tasks can be tackled smoothly.

**7** Challenge if all the tasks you are doing actually need to be done at all; do they add real value? An example from my home situation is that my son, who is 18, never has an ironed vest and doesn't appear to be suffering from that. It's interesting to reflect how much time I could have spent on that task during the last 18 years to the detriment of achieving something more significant.

**8** Say no! Be clear about your role and responsibilities and, generally, it is better to say 'no' assertively rather than agree to do something and let the person down when you don't have time to complete it as promised.

**9** Manage time wasters; identify those tasks which eat into your day and steal your time. This may be being copied into unnecessary emails, dealing with conflicts with colleagues or getting frustrated when a process is broken which leads to poor customer service. Plan time in your diary to tackle these at the root cause to avoid them happening again and again...

**10** Finally, avoid procrastination – we could have tackled this earlier but I left it until last. Have strategies such as starting the day with a tough task or rewarding yourself with chocolate if you are someone who can leave unfavourable tasks when you really should have tackled them earlier!

■ Rachel Blackburn is director of US2U Consulting