

VISTAGE



The Time Management Toolkit for Busy CEOs

How to make the most of your time,
when it feels like you have none.

In this toolkit...

What the research says

- How CEOs spend their time

What the experts say

- Plan and prioritize first
- Make the most of meetings
- Get a handle on email
- Delegate more
- Read and run efficiently

What the whole leader needs

- Meditation and mindfulness
- Routines for health and wellness
- Support for making tough decisions



How CEOs spend their time

Long workdays, grueling schedules and interrupted vacations are the norm for CEOs, according to a 12-year study by Harvard Business School. How does your schedule stack up against these averages?



CEOs spend most of their time on:

61% Face-to-face interactions

24% Electronic communications

15% Phone and written correspondence



Their days are a balancing act :

43% Activities furthering their agendas

36% Reacting to unfolding issues

11% Routine duties



Outside of work, CEOs spend their free time:

6.9 hr/night Sleeping

45 min/day Exercising

2.1 hr/day Downtime activities (e.g., hobbies, watching TV)

Source: "How CEOs Manage Time," Harvard Business Review - 2018

Expert Time-Tactic #1

Plan and prioritize first

How do you start your workday? Setting your priorities should come first if you want to make the most of your time.

If you think you don't have time to plan, consider this: "One hour of planning can save you approximately six to eight hours on the backend," says productivity expert and Vistage speaker Jason Hartanov.

Here are three tactics to structure your day

1. Pick three to-dos. Identify three critical tasks that you want to achieve today. What does a "winning day" look like in your book? What top-three things would you like to accomplish? Limit yourself to three tasks to prevent yourself from feeling overwhelmed.

2. Write them down. The act of writing down your priorities will help solidify them in your mind. Many of the CEOs we surveyed advise putting them on a whiteboard or in a desk planner where you can see them all day.

3. Limit your bookable time to a few hours a day. That will condition your staff to meet with you only on the high-impact problems and initiatives of the business, freeing up hours of valuable time for strategic thinking.

4. Time-block your calendar. Make an appointment with yourself to complete an important project or give yourself uninterrupted time to contemplate important decisions without interruption. Make these time-blocks non-negotiable.



"When I was a newcomer to the C-Suite, I didn't allow myself the time and space to tune out the noise and fully process a decision.

I have since learned to slow down and designate time to process decisions without interruption."

— Sam Reese, CEO, Vistage

Expert Time-Tactic #2

Make the most of meetings

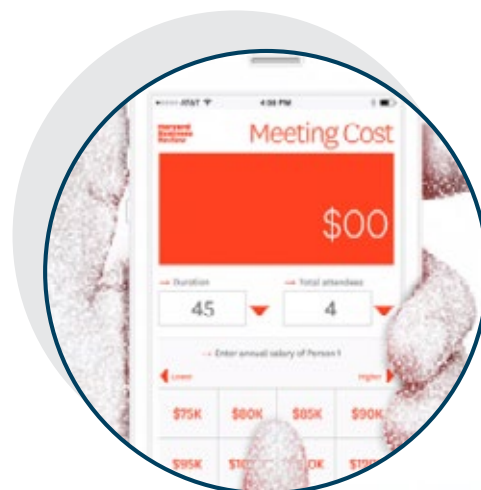
A study by Harvard Business School found CEOs spend 72% of their total work time in meetings and attend 37 meetings, on average, every week.

- 1. Get clear.** Before you enter the room, know the meeting's purpose, agenda and desired outcomes.
- 2. Be present.** Don't multitask during a meeting. If you stay present, you are more likely to be productive.
- 3. Limit time.** Meetings last as long as you allow them. Shorter meetings force everyone to stick to a tight agenda. Make a list of new topics raised that can be revisited another time.
- 4. Question whether a meeting is even necessary.** Are you having a meeting to debate a topic, conduct a brainstorm or meet someone new? If not, consider whether the goals of the meeting could be met another way, such as with a report.



Meeting Calculator Tool

This calculator* estimates the cost of a single meeting.



* bit.ly/hbr-time



Expert Time-Tactic #3

Get a handle on email

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Staying responsive to email while staying productive requires discipline. Rather than passively responding to email throughout the day, try approaching it in a structured way. These techniques can help.

- 1. Clear the junk.** First, unsubscribe from everything you can. Then, scan the title and subject matter of every email. If any of the messages are repetitive or unimportant, immediately delete them.
- 2. Consider whether it's necessary to reply.** Too often, CEOs are included on group emails that don't require their response. If you do respond to a group email, don't feel like you have to hit "reply all" every time. Respond to the key individuals who you would like to task with moving the issue forward.
- 3. Delegate reading and replying.** Consider having your personal assistant read emails on your behalf. Ask them to flag the important emails that you must respond to personally. Have them respond to the other ones.
- 4. Few messages are urgent.** It's not necessary to treat every email as urgent. Give yourself permission to put your email to the side and read it later — even after work hours. You might also ask your staff to text or call you if they have an urgent request.

“Email is a time suck. The best thing I ever did for email was to have my personal assistant read and respond on my behalf. I now only read the starred emails.”

— Jesse Mecham, CEO of You Need a Budget and Productivity Expert #4 in Best Small & Medium Workplaces of 2019 in Fortune's Top Places to Work

Expert Time-Tactic #4

Delegate more

For some CEOs, delegating is hard. They either want to be involved in everything, deepen their sense of ownership or earn the respect of their employees. But if you keep a close grip on every task, you will burn out and your business will suffer. Your employees will think you don't trust them, too.



“If you want to have time to do what is most important every day, you need to learn one very important skill: How to say ‘no’.

Set some boundaries and allow your team to set boundaries as well.”

— Nora Paller, Executive Coach
and Vistage Chair

Delegating is a skill that gets better with practice. Here are a few ways to improve your approach.

- **Recruit and hire people you trust.** Build a referral culture where employees help bring top talent.
- **Set standard operating procedures.** Equip your staff with the knowledge they need to make decisions independently.
- **Start small.** Delegate a few small projects you know you can't get close to.
- **Clarify what needs to get done and why it's important.** Provide expectations for deadlines and outcomes. Allow your team to ask questions.
- **Have a mid-flight review.** Ask your team to report back in the middle of a project. Revise goals and metrics as needed.
- **Get buy-in.** Ask your project leads to share their priorities and suggest their own metrics for success.
- **Don't delegate things that put people in compromising positions.** This might include giving tough news, managing vendor issues or solving customer complaints.
- **Let them find their way.** Set the outcome and then let your employees achieve it on their own.



Expert Time-Tactic #5

Read with intention

If you want read more, you may need to change how you do it. Next time you pick up an article, try this exercise from Vistage speaker Bob Pozen, author of "Extreme Productivity: Boost Your Results, Reduce Your Hours."

Step 1: Identify your purpose for reading. Continue to remind yourself of that purpose while you're reading.

Step 2: Read the introduction and the conclusion first. This will give you a good sense of the article's theme and organization.

Step 3: Based on what you learned in Step 2, evaluate whether you should keep reading. Ask yourself, "What is this article saying? Is it important to me?" If it isn't important, read something else.

Step 4: Read the top of each paragraph and look for themes. Again, consider whether the paragraphs contain something relevant to you.

Step 5: Instead of reading chronologically, scan the rest of the article for information most useful to you.

tip:

Before you start reading, set a timer so you don't need to worry about the clock.

Time-saving tools check-list

Tom Cuthbert, Vistage Master Chair, is an expert on productivity for CEOs. He shares his favorite tools for running efficiently all day long.

- ✓ To plan and schedule time to work on email, use [Spark](#) and [FollowUpThen](#).
- ✓ To communicate with individuals or teams, use [Voxer](#).
- ✓ To store notes, images and ideas, use [Evernote](#).
- ✓ To remember things on-the-go, use [Braitoss](#).
- ✓ To open windows so people can schedule time on your calendar, use [ScheduleOnce](#).
- ✓ To keep tasks and notes in one place, use [Bullet Journal](#).
- ✓ To track your sleep, use [AutoSleep](#).



Expert Time-Tactic #6

Mindfulness and meditation

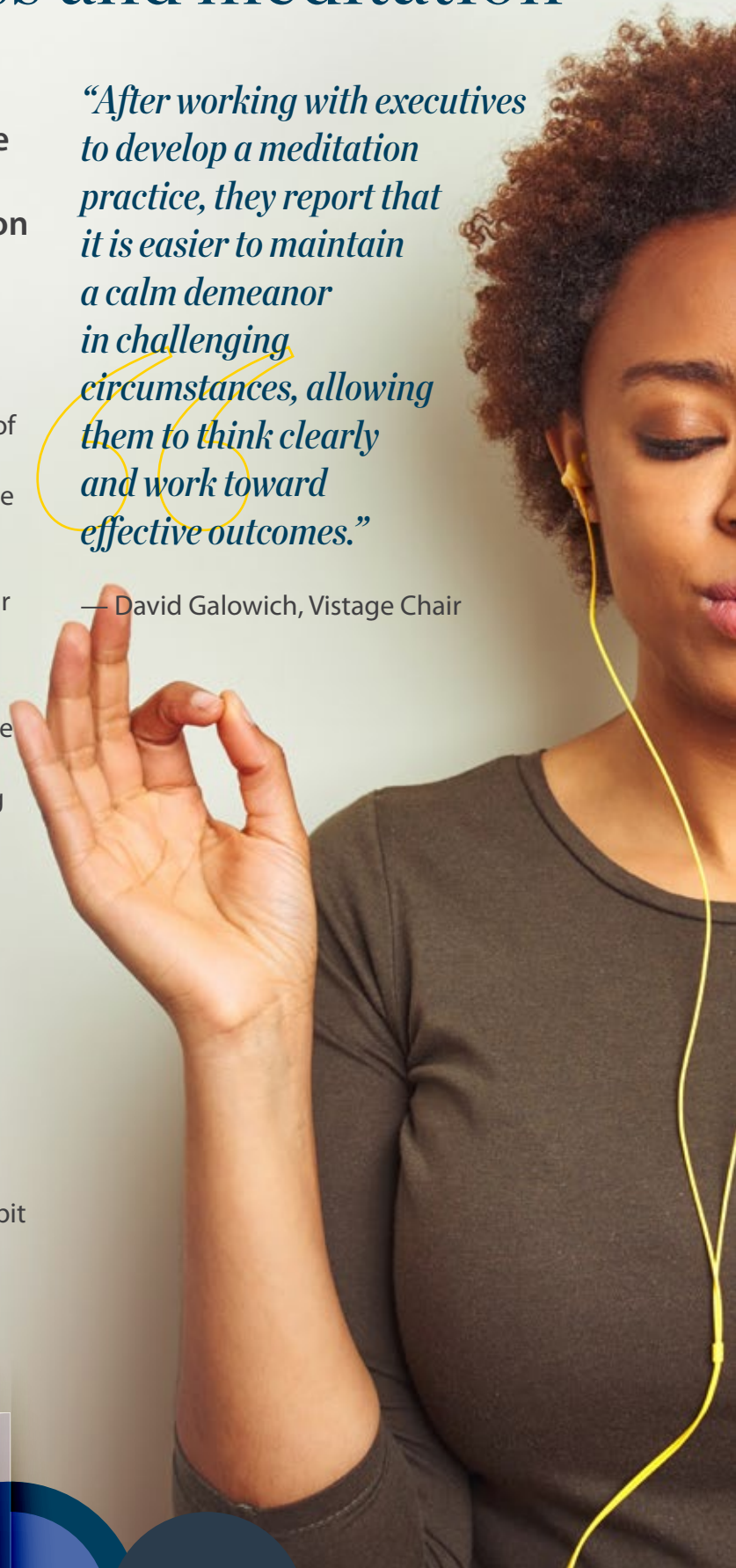
Research indicates that practicing mindfulness and meditation can improve your focus and attention while reducing stress and anxiety. One reason: Meditation grows the neural network in the mid-prefrontal cortex, which is the area CEOs rely on for higher-order functions.

If you haven't made mindfulness or meditation part of your daily routine, here are a few simple ways to get started from Vistage speaker Amy Sandler and Vistage Chairs David Galowich and Cindy Mascheroni.

- 1. Use a meditation app.** Some of the most popular apps for beginners include Headspace, Calm, Happify or Simple Habit.
- 2. Take three, slow breaths.** Try this throughout the day — for example, before you go into the office, when you first sit at your desk or before returning home before work.
- 3. Bring awareness to one of your regular activities.** For example, try to be mindful when you're drinking your first cup of coffee.
- 4. Practice self-compassion.** If you get distracted during a meditation, gently leave the distraction and return to your focus.
- 5. Focus on the habit, not the time.** At first, it doesn't matter how long you meditate; what matters more is how often you do it. After the habit is formed, aim to meditate for 20 minutes a day.

“After working with executives to develop a meditation practice, they report that it is easier to maintain a calm demeanor in challenging circumstances, allowing them to think clearly and work toward effective outcomes.”

— David Galowich, Vistage Chair



Practice a wellness routine

Lack of rest and relaxation leads to diminished focus, productivity and the likelihood of burnout. Consider these wellness practices to maintain your health and boost your energy.

✓ Exercise

Discover Strength CEO Luke Carlson recommends:

- Focus on strength or resistance training twice a week for 30 minutes. This workout routine maximizes the health benefits of exercise in a short amount of time.
- Perform 10–12 repetitions of exercises covering the major muscle groups. Use machines or free weights.

✓ Diet

Vistage Speaker Dan Miller recommends:

- Eat like an animal. Choose natural, unprocessed foods and avoid anything synthetic, such as artificial sweeteners.
- Drink water more than any other beverage.
- Avoid soda, smoothies and other drinkable forms of sugar. Processing liquid sugar puts undue stress on your liver.

✓ Rest

Vistage Speaker Giles Watkins recommends:

- Sleep for 7.5 to 8 hours a night. On nights you get less sleep, take a nap before 3 p.m.
- Reduce your caffeine intake. Ideally, avoid caffeine after 2 p.m.
- Give yourself an hour at the end of the day to wind down and quiet your mind.

Daily routines of time-management pros

“I keep a daily gratitude journal. As soon I get out of bed, I write down three things I am grateful for, three things that would make today great and my daily affirmations. It only takes five minutes and keeps me connected to my purpose.”



— Brian Davis
Vistage Master Chair



Expert Time-Tactic #8

Get out of the office

If you're grappling with tough decisions, give yourself time and space to make them. Disrupt your daily routine and change your surroundings.

Greats like Bill Gates attest to the breakthrough power of getting outside of the office. He hatched his vision for Internet Explorer in 1995 during one of his famous "think weeks" in the Pacific Northwest forest.

Although it may seem counter-intuitive to leave the office, taking at least one day a month to leave the office and work on your business, instead of in your business, can make you more efficient and effective as a leader.

Productive decision-making needs perspectives

Just as space improves decision-making, so do diverse perspectives. From coaching more than 100,000 CEOs and business owners over 60 years, we've learned two vitals for gathering perspectives:

1. You need high-performing peers. They've faced the same challenges and can offer objective advice based on their experience.
2. You want non-competing industries. You want peers who do not share the same institutional mindset. This allows for candid (and confidential) conversations.

These outside perspectives can help you arrive at decisions more efficiently and accurately. This is key. As a leader, the outcome of your decisions is how you measure your success.



Vistage is the world's largest and most comprehensive approach to executive coaching for small and midsize businesses. For more than 60 years, we've been helping CEOs, business owners and key executives solve their greatest challenges through confidential peer advisory groups and one-to-one executive coaching sessions with accomplished business leaders. Today, more than 23,000 members in 20 countries rely on Vistage to help make better decisions for their companies, families and communities. The results prove it: Vistage member companies grow 2.2 times faster than average small and midsize U.S. businesses, according to a 2017 study of Dun & Bradstreet data.

Learn more at [vistage.com](https://www.vistage.com).

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