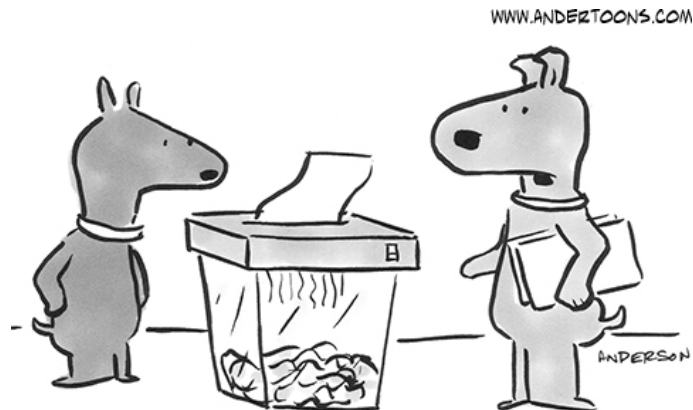# 6 tips for when you're overworked and underresourced

You're already juggling tasks like a circus clown when—surprise, surprise—you're assigned even more work. And at a time when resources are scarce, there's no extra help or budget to ease your burden.

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"I know it's unconventional, but there's only so much homework one dog can eat."

You may not be able to control the amount of work that's thrown your way. But you *can* take steps to get your most important work done with the resources you have— at a pace you can sustain.

1. Talk to your manager about your capacity and how to prioritize your work.

You don't want your manager raining down new tasks when you've barely got time for the ones on your plate. So get in sync with your boss about what you should be doing. To broach the subject, you might say something like, *"I'm working on a lot right now, and I want to be sure that I'm prioritizing correctly. Could we talk it through?"*

Then share what you see as your highest priorities and check for agreement with your boss. Ideally, you'll align on what's most important—and what you can delay or stop doing in order to attend to those things. (Remember, you'll need to realign regularly with your boss as circumstances change.)

If you struggle to get on the same page or your boss has an outsized view of what you can get done:

- **List out your responsibilities to raise your boss's awareness.** You manager isn't giving you so much work to be cruel—they may not have a good grasp of everything you're working on. You could say, *"I'm doing these six tasks for you and these five tasks for other people. I'm also in charge of planning the team offsite in February."*
- **Try the "Yes … and" technique to explain the tradeoffs required to do what your boss wants**. For example,
  "Yes, I can focus on project X. And if I do that, project Y will be delayed—or component Z will not be as polished as it could be."
- **Use "even over" statements to push your boss to choose among competing priorities.** For example, *"So this month, it's important for me to generate new sales leads, even over recording sales training videos. Is that right?"*

For more, see When your boss adds work to your plate, suggest a prioritization plan.

2. Identify things to stop doing (so you can focus on what really needs to get done).

When you have more demands than you can realistically handle, you have two choices: You can try and inevitably fail to do everything well while stressing yourself to the brink. Or, you can determine what won't get done. Hint: Go with the second option.

Strategically subtracting things is one of the most powerful ways to find time. So how do you choose what not to do?

- **Start keeping a not-to-do list.** Items should include tasks that don't help you meet the top priorities you discussed with your boss and that gobble up your time (like volunteering to work at another team's event or compiling weekly reports when they could be done monthly). If needed, run your list by your boss before you stop doing these things.
- **Try to minimize time spent in meetings.** Scrutinize meetings you lead to be sure they're useful, especially recurring meetings (this goes double for ones labelled "update"). For meetings you're invited to—as appropriate, ask the organizer to hold an asynchronous discussion instead, decline the invitation if people important to the agenda won't be there, or leave when your part of the meeting is done. For more, see 9 ways to spend less time in meetings.

Important: If changes you make to your work could affect other people or teams, let them know what you're changing and why to help reset expectations. And ask your boss to back you up if your saying no to a lower-priority task creates friction with your co-workers.

3. Make room for work that doesn't feel urgent but is important in the long-term.

It's easy to just battle the work that's in front of you (after all, it's a lot). But when you get caught in the whirlwind of doing only what's urgent, you might postpone things that are truly important—including tasks that could help you manage your workload better in the future, since they'll help you skill up, streamline a process, or change strategic direction. Things like learning new software or talking with another team about how to work together better, can yield a big payoff down the line, so be sure to include some in your top priorities.

Ask yourself questions like these to help you gauge the importance and urgency of items on your plate. For example:

- *If I do this, what's the payoff in a week? a month? a year?*
- *Which work will help me make the most progress long term?*
- *What's the right [ratio of proactive to reactive work](#) for me this week? this month? this quarter?*

For more, including an explanation of FranklinCovey's important vs. urgent time matrix, see [How to manage your time](#).

4. Try to negotiate the scope and timeline of your projects with stakeholders.

Project management experts talk about three variables you can adjust to make a project more doable: [deadline, scope, and resources](#). If resources (staff and budget) can't budge, could you adjust the other two variables in order to delay or downsize what's required from you?

- **Scope:** You might need to reject your inner perfectionist to consider what you could do less of and still technically succeed. For example, does every email in a new marketing campaign need a unique design or would a reusable template suffice?
- **Deadlines:** If you can't reduce your workload, could you at least spread it out? For example, instead of having every piece of a project done in two weeks, could you have the main components done by then, but complete the lingering pieces over the following week? Even a seemingly small change in the timeline could make a difference in your stress level.

5. Ask for help or call in favors from others.

Think back on times when you've helped others at work: Maybe you covered a shift for an overwhelmed colleague or volunteered to help with someone else's project. Cash in on some of that goodwill now. There's a good chance your colleagues will want to help or at least return the favor—building goodwill of their own.

To do it:

- **Ask to temporarily outsource work to someone less busy.** You don't have to shout, "Help! I'm drowning!" Frame your request in terms of larger priorities, and be specific about what you're asking the person to do. For example:
  - *"My top priority is dealing with support tickets—and I have a backlog of them right now, making it hard for me to get the weekly call reports done. I know that you have experience pulling call reports—could you cover that work for me next week?"*

- **Ask another person to reorder their priorities to buy you more time.** For example, you might ask a teammate, *"Your part of project X requires help from me that I just can't give right now. Could you work on Y first and X in two weeks?"*
- **Pool your resources where possible.** Even if other people are also stretched thin, you may be able to make progress on a challenge you can't overcome alone. Let's say you and a peer are hampered by an inefficient inventory tracking system. If you share the burden of streamlining the system, you could both save time and effort in the long run.

6. Make sure you take time to recharge.

Being underresourced can lead you to develop [a scarcity mindset](). You're so busy scaling the Mt. Everest of to-do lists that you barely have time to think—much less focus and make smart decisions. Taking a break or a day off might feel like the last thing you can manage, but you owe it to yourself to make room for rest—which ultimately builds mental capacity.

FranklinCovey leadership and inclusion consultant Daniel Martin gives his best advice for proactively thinking through your boundaries.

So, how can you ensure you're able to pace yourself and stay fresh?

- **[Set and communicate a work/life boundary]().** It could be time off, an end time to your workdays, or the flexibility to eat lunch away from your workspace three days a week. Talk to your boss and co-workers about your boundary to help reset their expectations of your availability and to get their support. You might even inspire them to set boundaries of their own.
- **[Manage your energy throughout the day]().** Block off time for deep, uninterrupted work and for restful breaks. And, to the extent you can, plan your meetings and what work you'll do when based on your energy levels (such as scheduling focused work at the beginning of your workday when you're fresh and lighter tasks later when you might be tired).

For more, see [3 steps to identify the boundaries you need when you're being pulled in all directions]().