

A Get-Real Guide

During this morning's keynote speech, fellow conference participants glare your way each time your cell phone rings (it's a co-worker calling with important budget questions). That's OK—they'll get over it. You have agreed to attend three meetings tomorrow morning. Not a problem—you'll zip from one to the next while you prepare mentally for an afternoon presentation. You carry work home. Regularly.

If you recognize someone near and dear in any of those scenarios, you're not alone. Everyone craves that elusive control over time. It's all about performance and productivity, isn't it? But before you emblazon that Superman (or Superwoman) S on your chest, realize that there's a fine line between gaining control of your time and losing it.

Take a breath. Slow down. Say no sometimes. Start planning, stop reacting, and prepare to get a grip on your time.

Ponder this: A recent survey commissioned by the Franklin Covey Company reports that 83 percent of Americans want to be more organized. Nearly half of the respondents say

can't slow it down or speed it up. All you can do is control how you show up in time." Understanding that, many people mistakenly try to get more done in less time. And that, she says, just leads to frustration and burnout.

There appear to be two major contributors to people's frustration with managing time. Mark Ellwood, president of Pace Productivity, says, "Time management has always been a core competency everyone should know. But time-related stress has been fueled by downsizings and technology. Clerical tasks have been pushed up in organizations, which is not necessarily a good thing."

For example, administrative staff used to handle airline reservations. Now, most people make their own. Sales reps design their own PowerPoint presentations—a task that used to be performed by a graphics staff.

Email, pagers, fax machines, cellular phones, laptops, PCs, and PDAs are as much a part of our workplace now as our watercoolers and coffeemakers. And that,

according to White, is the problem. She says, "Technology is a vital piece to helping you work less and make more money, especially if you're focused on saving

time. There's just one problem. New technology allows other people to reach us any time, any place, anywhere. We're bombarded with information every day. The fax is always ringing. We have to respond to 50 or more voicemails daily. Our emailboxes are overflowing."

By Donna J. Abernathy

It's about time—
yours, that is.

to Time Management

they feel guilty about taking time off from work. Sixty-two percent often eat lunch while they work. What's going on here?

Many people are convinced that if they could get more done at work, their lives would magically transform into a balanced union of family, career, and leisure pursuits. Not so, says success coach Jennifer White. "No matter what you do, you can't manage time. You

It's not enough to be busy. The question is: What are we busy about? — Henry David Thoreau

Says Ellwood, "Smart people use technology without being enslaved by it." Ask yourself whether you really need to carry your cell phone into restaurants. Do you have to record a new outgoing phone message every day? "There are a lot of absurdities that consume our time," he says.

Eileen Roth, who presented desk organization tips on NBC's *Today* show and organized a home on *Oprah*, says "We haven't become a paperless society. In fact, technology has helped us generate more. Information arrives at our desks in the form of mail, voicemail, and email until we become overwhelmed with everything that we have to do."

But let's face it: We're in an information age. Our unfettered access to information is a benefit on most days and a curse on others. A 1998 survey conducted by Reuters Business Information (www.reuters.com/rbb) reveals that most managers regard information as their most important corporate asset. In fact, an even higher number consider information to be mission critical. The majority of survey participants think that the information overload problem is improving, though.

Says White, "The sheer overload of information takes more time to sort through. The answer is to do less to achieve more. Learn to spend your energy on the best information, and get rid of everything else." You should focus on your work quality, not the quantity.

It's all about you

Ellwood is a time tracker. He invented an electronic device that measures how employees spend their workdays and has been using it to gather such statistical data for nine years. For example, his research shows that employees spend an average of 54 minutes weekly on training.

He quizzed independent consultants, speakers, and trainers about the things that impede their productivity and found that the "uncontrollable" work that gets in people's way includes paperwork, administrative tasks, domestic responsibilities, phone calls, and interruptions, to name a few. Things that get in the way of productivity that participants do have some control over include

So Much for Fridays

Which workdays are the most productive for employees? U.S. executives rank the days this way:

- Monday (17% of respondents)
- Tuesday 51%
- Wednesday 15%
- Thursday 5%
- Friday 1%
- Don't know 11%

Source Accountemps

- distractions and daydreaming
- poor time-management and organizational skills
- lack of focus and prioritization (doing too many things at once)
- procrastination
- paperwork and administrative tasks.

People realize that they can't control everything that influences their use of time—especially paperwork—but which work functions do they want help with? Trainer Kenneth Zeigler did research for the Hertz Corporation to find out. In fact, he bases his own time-management training program on these chief workplace offenders:

- interruptions

Training Resources

If you're looking for time-management training, here's a sampling of available tools and the contact information.

- Get Organized* interactive CD, American Management Association, New York: 800.262.9699, www.amanet.org
- Simplifying Your Work and Your Life* video, Business Advantage; West Des Moines, Iowa: 800.305.9004, businessvideos.com
- Time Management interactive* CD and user's guide, American Management Association, New York: 800.262.9699, www.amanet.org
- What Matters Most workshop, Franklin Covey, Salt Lake City: 888.754.1776, franklincovey.com

- multitask priorities
- office, desk, and file organization
- email management
- procrastination
- delegation
- meeting planning
- short-term goal setting.

Says Zeigler, "What we found is that people are looking for organizational skills so they can work more efficiently. They're looking for time-management skills so they can have a personal life and leave work on time every day."

Becky Stewart-Gross, president of Building Bridges Seminars, compares time management to dieting, in that you have to pay attention to the numbers and realize that what works for one person may not for you. She says, "There isn't one magic trick, and the best way to discover how to improve is to see how you currently spend your time. Most people are shocked when they do a time analysis of how they really spend their time at both home and work." Once they realize that they spend approximately 45 hours at work—there are 168 hours in a week—the big question is: What happens to the rest of that time?

- According to Stewart-Gross, some of the biggest "time thieves" at work are
- telephone calls
 - drop-in visitors
 - lack of necessary resources
 - personal disorganization.

Other time thieves include indecisiveness, an inability to say no, procrastination, paperwork, management by crisis, ineffective delegation, email, and voicemail.

Zeigler thinks that time-management skills translate best when they start at the top. He says, "I see upper-level managers sending [employees] to time-management classes when they, themselves, often have poor skills. In fact, I think they're a large percentage of the urgency problem. They don't have time to take a course, yet they keep killing the people under them with poor delegation skills, for example. Time management needs to go from top to bottom, not bottom to top. It's a waste of money for a company to send people at lower and middle management [to training] when

Hard work is often the easy work you did not do at the proper time. — Bernard Meltzer

It is those who make the worst use of their time who most complain of its shortness. — Jeane de la Bruyere

the people above have poor skills.”

If you're still adding completed tasks to your daily to-do list just for the satisfaction of checking them off, listen up. There are other options to increase productivity, and they're not about appearing to be productive. They're about working smart. Here's how you can energize your own time-management plan.

Up the planning ante

According to Ellwood, working smart is about creating a balance between your career, family, and community that will allow you to do more of what you want. The key is to focus on the things that really make a difference at work. He offers this approach to help you prioritize your work:

- A priorities. If you had nothing else (theoretically) to do today, what should you work on that would improve your productivity in one to four weeks?
- B priorities. What things must be done today?
- C priorities. What things should be done today or tomorrow?
- D priorities. What things should you not do at all? (Note: Time to delegate.)

Ellwood's time studies reveal that most people spend approximately 50 percent of their time on A and B priorities. Really successful people spend 60 percent on A and B. Says Ellwood, "If you spend four or five additional hours a week—an extra 10 percent—on high-priority activities, you're in the top-performing group." He says that his time studies show that people often end up doing "busy" work. "You can always do something on your A priorities," he says. "You won't have a job for long if you don't."

Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *First Things First*, agrees that planning ahead can help you stay on the fast track at work and still have a life outside its doors. In *First Things First*, he outlines a time-management matrix of four activity levels that consume our work time—those that are 1) important, 2) urgent, 3) not important, and 4) not urgent. According to research of high-performing orga-

Guerilla Time Management

If your power time-mastery repertoire needs a boost, here are some tips from several serious time managers.

- "I open and sort my mail while I'm standing by my trash can. I toss much of the unsolicited bulk mail, and since I'm standing I sort the rest very quickly." (Jeanne Baer, Creative Training Solutions, Lincoln, Nebraska)
- "Take your lunch hour at a different time than everyone else. That way, you can do your important work when other people are out of the office and can't drop in on you." (Lisa Comeau, Ontario Ministry of Health, Canada)
- "Take at least three vacations a year without taking any work with you. When you take time to rest, you come back refreshed." (Jennifer White, The JWC Group, Cincinnati)
- "Don't take on everything you could do or want to do. That's the only way to reserve resources for your key activities." (Tony Mayo, Mayo Genuine, Reston, Virginia)
- "Collect voicemail and email on the hour. Refuse the temptation to read messages or listen to mail the moment they arrive. No one will think you're a slacker if you get back to them within the hour." (Jake Edmondson, SAIC Systems, San Diego)

nizations, the most successful people spend 65 to 80 percent of their time on activities that are "important, but not urgent," claims Covey. Such activities include training, goal setting, and relationship building. The typical person spends about 15 percent of his or her time on those activities and much more (50 to 60 percent) on putting out fires for "urgent, but not important" activities such as interruptions and handling other people's priorities.

According to Franklin Covey's Leigh Stevens, the old metaphor for time management was, "How much can you cram into your life and how much more can

you handle?" The new metaphor is more like a "strainer," she says. You put all of your tasks in the strainer, pause, then let some of them fall out. And it's necessary to have a three-pronged planning perspective that includes consistent long-range, weekly, and daily planning to keep those tasks under control.

Zap your stress

Says Stewart-Gross, "When I talk about time management, the part that really hits people is how much stress management helps them handle their time management." She says that there's a definite overlap in our personal and professional lives when it comes to time management. "As an executive coach, many times I will first help a person learn to manage their household and personal life. It's amazing how much more effective they are at work." She offers some tips for managing personal time to get a grip on your work time and lower your stress.

- Develop positive self-talk.
- Review your values; know what's really important to you.
- Practice relaxation; take mini breaks.
- Adjust your lifestyle; build in the support of friends and family.
- Include leisure. Make a date with yourself, and keep it.
- Learn to say no to honor your *yesses*.
- Lower your expectations of perfection.

Richard Carlson, author of *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff at Work*, agrees that stress is a big time and energy robber in the workplace.

"Imagine, for a moment, how much energy is expended being stressed-out, frustrated, and angry over relatively minor things," he writes. "How about being offended and bothered, or feeling criticized? And think about the implications of worry, fear, and commiseration. What impact do these emotions have on our productivity and on our enjoyment of our work? It's exhausting just thinking about it! Now imagine what might happen if you could use that same energy—or even some of it—on being more productive, creative, and solution-oriented."

Carlson argues that because there's so much "small stuff" to deal with at work,

This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it. — Ralph Waldo Emerson

No one has enough time, but everyone has all there is. — Anonymous

there's a clear link between how you handle it and how it affects you and your co-workers. For example, if you handle small stuff with more wisdom, patience, and humor, you'll bring out the best in yourself and others and spend less time being annoyed and frustrated. And that leaves more time for creativity and productivity. Sure, you still have the same problems to deal with, but you turn them into positive events and lower your stress.

Here's some of Carlson's advice for minimizing stress at work.

Have some "no phone" time at work. The telephone can be one of the most distracting work tools. When you need some uninterrupted concentration time, turn off the ringer or, if you have voicemail, let it take calls for a while.

Take advantage of your commute. Whether you take the train or bus to work, commuting offers the perfect time to read magazines, books, and newspapers. If you drive, you can listen to audio books.

Get it over with. Take care of the most difficult or uncomfortable task of your day first—before anything else—for two reasons. One, it saves hours of stressful thinking. Two, you're usually fresher and more alert in the morning.

Spend 10 minutes a day doing absolutely nothing. It sounds impossible to do, right? But spending a few minutes doing nothing gives you a chance to regain your perspective and allow wisdom and common sense to sort out your day. Learn to delegate. Many high-achieving, talented people are poor delegators. They think that they can do the work better than anyone, so they do. The problem is that, sooner or later, high-achievers become scattered by attempting so many tasks that their work quality suffers. Learning to delegate helps you focus on what you're most qualified to do.

Get in touch with your inner time

There are, of course, more complex time-management concepts. One such idea involves inner time management. Steve Randall, founder of Results in No Time, has been researching time for 21 years.

Connections

Here's contact information for more about time management.

- Richard Carlson, c/o Hyperion Books, New York: dontsweat.com
- Stephen R. Covey, Franklin Covey Company, Salt Lake City: 800.655.1492, franklincovey.com
- Mark Ellwood, Pace Productivity, Toronto, Ontario, Canada: 416.762.3453, getmoredone.com
- Steve Randall, Results in No Time, Alameda, California: 800.845.8484, members.aol.com/rsrlts
- Eileen Roth, Everything in Its Place, Wheeling, Illinois: 847.541.8585, www.speaking.com/roth.html
- Leigh Stevens, Franklin Covey Company, Salt Lake City: 800.655.1492, franklincovey.com
- Becky Stewart-Gross, Building Bridges Seminars, Green Bay, Wisconsin: 920.497.1630, customseminars.com
- Jennifer White, JWC Group, Cincinnati: 513.351.1289, worklessmakemore.com
- Kenneth Zeigler, Zeigler Training & Development, Goodlettsville, Tennessee: 800.835.6839, kztraining.com

He combines conventional time management (planning what we do) with inner, or psychological, time management (how we do things). He claims that people in all jobs—even the most routine—can find a "productive zone" by combining the best of conventional and inner time management.

Says Randall, "Most conventional time-management seminars cannot resolve our problems with time because they don't touch the limits built into the linear time paradigm." Conventional time management focuses on goals, lists, and schedules. Inner time management optimizes the structure and quality of experience. In optimal work, we are so engrossed in the task that we don't feel time flow in a way that feels out of control.

Simply put, Randall believes that a linear view of time is a waste of time because it scatters our energy and awareness. "The feeling that there isn't enough time, that work is endless or overwhelming, or that time is going too fast or too slowly is always accompanied by a linear view of time. It's never a part of a timeless, peak perspective," he says.

Keep it simple

Inner time management is interesting stuff. But don't forget the simpler solutions. Says Roth, "The most important [time-management tip] may still be to organize a good filing system—to find what you want when you want it by putting everything in its place." Says Ellwood, "Balance is a huge issue, too. If you look at studies of how people spend their time, there are about 40 hours left over in a week after work, meals, commuting, and the like. The average North American spends about 25 hours a week watching television. It's a big time hog." His best tip for a work-life balance is no surprise: Turn off the TV.

And remember everyone's favorite—the to-do list? According to Stevens, you can simplify such lists by assigning a value to each task, such as A (vital, must do); B (important, should do); and C (optional). It's also important to keep one list and to keep it simple.

Time management is personal. It's not about being force-fed another person's pet method. And it's not about trying to please everyone by giving them bite-size—often empty—morsels of your time. It's about knowing how you work (behavior) and what you value (attitude) so that you can make meaningful changes that return some sanity to your day.

Relax and simplify: Take time to plan your work instead of reacting to emergencies every day. Select and concentrate on a couple of management techniques that help you do that, and you're on your way to working smarter, getting the important stuff done, and having quality time for life after work. □

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Until one knows how one spends one's time, one cannot hope to manage it. — Peter Drucker