

## **Getting Things Done: The ABCs of Time Management** by Edwin C. Bliss summarized by Cam Howey

Bliss' book was first published in 1976, and was updated in 1993. His ABCs are 'right on' and provide ways to better manage our precious time. Each day, we have 24 hours; time wasted in meetings, on the phone, and watching TV is lost forever.

We're all busy managing different tasks and priorities. By using the tools in this book, they will help improve performance and get the right things done.

### **BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION**

To optimize time management skills, we must change some of our habits in order to improve performance. Research shows that a positive reward for success is much more effective in changing behaviour, rather than punishing yourself for failure. An example might be picking up flowers on the way home for a clean desk all week.

### **BOTTLENECKS**

A bottleneck can occur in any organization when a key person fails to take essential action dealing with issues like a report, project approval, decision-making, or purchase requisition. Bottlenecks are major problems as they hold up an entire group of people. If you are a victim of a bottleneck, here are five suggestions:

1. **Be a Squeaking Wheel** - Remind, hint, cajole, write memos. Stop muttering and take action. Getting things done means not giving up, ask a second or third time.
2. **Bypass the System** - Look for other ways to accomplish the task. Sometimes it's easier to beg forgiveness than to get permission.
3. **Announce That You Will Take Action "Unless..."** Write a memo saying, "Unless I hear from you to the contrary, here is what I plan to do...".
4. **Make it a Matter of Honour** - When someone promises to get a task done by a certain date and you suspect they won't, just ask "Can I have your word on that?" Having their word, increases the sense of obligation they otherwise wouldn't have.
5. **Use Positive Reinforcement** - Thank people when they do move - of all the techniques for changing behaviour, this is the most powerful and the least used.

### **BREAKS**

Working long periods of time without taking a break is not effective use of time. Energy decreases, physical stress and tension accumulate when a person stays with one thing too long. Irritability, fatigue, headache, and apathy are some of the impacts of not providing a change of pace in the working day.

A break need not be a rest, switching to a different kind of work can often provide as much relief as simply relaxing. Walking around the office or out to the plant can serve as a quick restorative break.

### **BRIEFCASE**

*The first grader asked his mother why Daddy brought home a briefcase full of papers every evening. She explained, "It's because Daddy has so much to do he can't finish at the office and has to work nights." "Well, then" said the child, "why don't they just put him in a slower group?"*

As a manager at times you will have to take work home, that's the price you pay for the job. If you find yourself doing it on a regular basis then something is wrong; either you're trying to do too much (see "Delegation") or you have failed to organize your time to work effectively. A third possibility is that you may be suffering from the martyr complex.

## CATEGORIES OF TIME USE

Tasks can be broken down into five categories:

- Important and Urgent
- Important and Not Urgent
- Urgent but Not Important
- Busy Work
- Wasted Time

**Important and Urgent** - These are tasks that must be done immediately or in the near future. Examples: your boss demands a certain report by 10 a.m. tomorrow, and your engine blows a gasket. Unless they both happen at the same time, you can handle them. Because of urgency and importance they take precedence over everything else.

**Important and Not Urgent** - Attention to this category is what divides effective people from ineffective ones. Most of the really important things in our lives are not important. They can be done now or later, or be postponed forever, and in too many cases they are.

**Urgent but Not Important** - The ones to avoid! Tasks that are urgent but add little value such as attending a poorly planned meeting, writing a routine monthly report, or answering the phone.

**Busy Work** - Low priority tasks that add little value but often make us feel good "...we've been busy."

**Wasted Time** - Very subjective, but things like watching most TV, surfing the Internet just to look, some meetings, wordsmithing a report that is already 95% there.

## CLUTTER

A cluttered desk is a waste of time: lose time looking for an important file; waste time handling at "junk" mail that should have been recycled. Distraction of different items in your view, affecting your train of thought. You can only concentrate on one thing at a time, having six urgent files open at once only ensures you won't give your full attention to any of them!

Take 5 minutes at the end of the day to clear your desk, put files away, and recycle that day's junk mail.

## COMMUNICATION

A frequent cause of wasted time is lack of clear, direct communication between people. A clear statement of what is expected can save a lot of time and effort for everyone. Make it clear to staff and supervisors that you are serious about making the best possible use of your time and need their help.

## COMMUTE TIME

Commute time might vary from 10 to 60 minutes. After work and sleeping it might be your second or third largest time chunk. Choosing a home 30 minutes out instead of 15 does not seem like much but will add up to 6,000 minutes in a year - over 4 full days or 10 working days. Not to mention the extra wear and tear on the family car. You might spend 6,000 - 24,000 minutes in the car each year traveling to work. Use them well, listen to self-improvement tapes, use audio books.

## CONCENTRATION

Of all the principles of time management, none is more basic than concentration. In counseling people with time management problems, Bliss found that they were invariably trying to do too many things at once. The amount of time on a project is not what counts, it's the amount of uninterrupted time that counts. Each time we restart a project, we must gather files, refocus, and often repeat work we've already done.

## CONFERENCE CALLS

Simple way of holding a meeting, often saving time by avoiding travel (10 minutes or 2 days), limit number of people attending and often avoiding the ramble-on aspect of some meetings.

## COPIES

*Excessive record keeping is a sign of insecurity.* Figure out how often you use the various kinds of material you file. Ask yourself, "what is the worse thing that would happen if this file didn't exist?" Most of the time the answer is "Nothing." If you really need it, likely it could be found elsewhere in the company. Ask yourself how much time is spent filing newsletters, other people's memos, information letters and so on. What would happen if the time were spent working on projects related to your primary goal?

## CORRESPONDENCE

Short list - see the book for all thirteen: Handle each letter once. Avoid paper shuffling. Do what has to be done (checking, forwarding, phoning, and replying). Use the 3-Ds: do it, delegate it, or ditch it. If a brief reply is possible, write it on the incoming mail and fax or return the letter. Use form letters for routine correspondence. Use electronic mail, voice mail, or a phone call instead of paperwork where possible. Don't make frequent revisions. Avoid unnecessary copies, they waste someone else's time to read, distribute, or file.

## CRISIS

Whenever you are faced with a crisis, ask yourself, "What can I do to prevent this

crisis from recurring?" Many crisis result from the failure to act until the matter becomes urgent, with the result that more effort is required to do the job, and the chance for a mistake increases. Failure to start early enough is one cause; others include poor communication, failure to follow through after delegating, lack of tracking, and lack of contingency plans. Analyze each crisis and try to devise ways of preventing a repetition.

## **DAY'S END**

Tidy up. Take 5 minutes to clear the desk. Evaluate the day. What worked, what didn't, what would I do differently? Plan tomorrow. Check meetings, jot down the key items, or any carry-over items from today.

## **DEADLINES**

Non-time targeted tasks don't get done! Give every task a deadline. Until you set a deadline for a project, it's not an action item, it's closer to a wish. The problem is that "someday is not a day of the week." Remember Parkinson's Law: "Work expands to fill the time available for its completion." It follows that an assignment to yourself or others should never be open-ended.

## **DELEGATION**

Failure to delegate is a major cause of failure and burnout. Delegating work allows staff to grow and gain valuable experience. Delegating jobs that neither you nor your staff want to do isn't delegating, it's dumping. While it may be necessary at times, it doesn't help them develop and turns them off rather than on. Delegating with strings attached is self-defeating. If you ask someone to investigate a problem but tell him or her every step to take, it's self-defeating. People do a better job and take pride in it if they can make their own choices. The key to delegation is the word entrust. When you delegate, you entrust the entire matter to the other person, along with sufficient authority to make necessary decisions.

## **EFFICIENCY VERSUS EFFECTIVENESS**

Efficiency is worry about how to do a task more efficiently, using less effort. Effectiveness opens the door to delegation, questioning if the task even needs to be done. Sound time management involves thinking about effectiveness first and efficiency second. Who would worry about polishing the silver as the Titanic was going down?

## **EXERCISE: THE TIME FACTOR**

The good news, doing a little does a lot. Research shows that moderate exercise has a dramatic reduction on death rates from heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and other diseases. A brisk walk for 30 minutes, at least every other day, makes a big difference on mortality. Exercise improves performance, if you're healthy and fit you're are much more able to deal with the pressures and stress of modern life.

## **FILES, PROLIFERATION OF**

The reason files get out of hand is that we ask the wrong question. We ask, "Is it conceivable that I might want to refer to this file in the future?" The answer is always yes, so we file everything. Instead we should the question, "If I wanted this

item again someday and didn't have it, what would I do?" Usually you'll get along just fine without it. Excessive filing is the breeding ground of bureaucracy. The focus should be on where you're going, not preserving records of where you've been.

## **FLOWCHARTS**

A map increases your chance of reaching your destination. Similarly, a flowchart increases your chance of reaching your objective. Like a map, a flow chart shows you what lies between you and your goal, and helps determine the best way to get there. Most flowcharts, are variations of the PERT charts developed by the US Navy for the Polaris submarine project. They allow the relationship between the many tasks to be graphically presented, allowing progress to be easily tracked and critical path to be identified.

## **FOLLOW-UP**

Follow-up is absolutely critical to getting things done. Checking on progress, asking if help is needed, providing positive reinforcement when things are completed on time. While some follow-up is essential, if you find yourself spending too much time checking up on people, something is wrong. Ask questions like: Am I making myself clear? Do I set a deadline whenever I give a task? Do I confirm important requests in writing? Do I encourage my staff to give me status reports, so that routine follow-up is not needed? Do I encourage others to speak up, when they question the value of a task?

## **GOALS**

If you want to manage your time better, the first step is to ask yourself: "Exactly what are my goals?" What are your personal lifetime goals, when you're eighty what do you want to have accomplished? Not general things like being happy, but specific things like a vacation home, a canoe trip down the Nahani, volunteering at the Red Cross, or teaching your grandchildren to paddle. Now list your professional goals. Again, be specific: promotion to a specific job, or election to a specific office in a professional society. Then make a list of short-term goals, things you would like to accomplish in the next six months. Besides being specific, goals should be attainable and authentic. Things you really want and are willing to work for. Now analyze your lists. They likely contain more things than you can reasonably expect to do, so assign priorities. Select three to four important goals in each category that you consider most important and write them down where you will see them every day. Memorize them. A hundred times a day, ask yourself, "Is what I am doing now moving me closer towards one of my goals?" If the answer is no, figure out a way to eliminate the task or delegate it to someone else.

## **INFORMATION OVERLOAD**

Sherlock Holmes compared the mind to an attic: "You have to stock it with such furniture as you choose." he told Watson. "A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out." Information flows at us continuously from the copier, fax, e-mail, voice mail, meetings, cell phones, mail, magazines, books, newspapers, Web, TV.... We have to choose carefully what information we keep and what we toss. While we have many more sources of information, no one has come up with any way of increasing the human brain's capacity to absorb more information. You can

cope with the deluge of printed material and junk mail by liberal use of the wastebasket as you open the mail.

Two of the most common reasons for excessive internal communications are:

1. **Failure to delegate completely.** If staff feel they don't have the authority to handle problems, they invariably pass the buck to their managers, waiting for the decision to be made.
2. **Management by procedures rather than by objectives.** When people are judged by how they comply with directives rather than how well they meet objectives, paperwork multiplies as memos and reports get created to show compliance.

## INTERRUPTIONS

You can't eliminate interruptions, but you must work to minimize the number if you are going to work effectively. One hour of concentrated work is usually worth more than two hours of interrupted work of 10-15 minute segments. It takes time to warm up your mental motor after an interruption, especially if you return to the project hours or days later.

**Block your time** - answer phone messages and e-mail in blocks through the day. Don't destroy your concentration every time the message light comes up on the phone, or as every e-mail comes in.

Set the tone at the start of the conversation. Beginning with "What can I do for you?" sets a much different tone than "It's sure good to hear from you, how are things going?" Always be courteous and polite; setting a businesslike manner helps limit the length of the conversation.

Set aside time for phone calls and consultations. Let staff and co-workers know what times you are available and what times you prefer not to be disturbed. Creating blocks of time morning and afternoon for major project work helps to improve productivity. Of course, make it clear that if there are major issues, they should be brought to your attention immediately.

If most of your interruptions come from your boss, don't assume you have to put up with them. Suggest that you are trying to improve your performance, and set mutually convenient times each day to check on routine matters. Chances are your boss will appreciate your interest.

## LAZINESS

Laziness can be overcome. You must stop thinking "I just can't make myself get to work on this task." Change your self-talk to "I can do this task, and I will." Visualize yourself doing it. Images or mental pictures of ideas tend to produce physical conditions and the external acts that correspond to them.

## LEVERAGE

Leverage is what makes it possible for a hundred-pound jack to lift a ten-ton truck. It can also make a small investment of time produce tremendous results. To leverage time you must recognize that not all items on the "To Do" list are of equal value. Some are infinitely more valuable than others. The Pareto rule that 80% of

the results are related to 20% of the inputs applies to time management as well. About 80% of the payback of your daily "To Do" list will relate to 20% of the things listed - often just a single item. To leverage your time you must focus your effort on that task, even though it might lack the urgency, as it often does. As questions like: Which will matter most five years from now? Which is directly related to my goals? Which will alter the bottom line?

## **LISTS**

Keep two lists for each day, list the appointments and meetings for the day on one list, and a "To Do" list of random tasks you want to accomplish on the other. Then look over your "To Do" list and identify the one thing on the list that will have the greatest payoff in the long run (not the most urgent!). Schedule a block of time to work on that high payoff task. Then plan and do other tasks in order of priority as time permits. One problem with "To Do" lists is that they are often compiled on a basis of urgency, not importance. Take a moment to review your list of objectives, to see if the things you are working on are really the things that will get you closer to where you want to be.

## **MBO: MANAGEMENT BY OBJECTIVES**

"Management by Objectives," says Tom Peters, "is one more great idea that has been neutered by bureaucrats in nine out of ten applications." Consultant Peter Drucker coined the term Management By Objectives in 1954. It has become a basic management tool around the world in the decades since. Setting specific goals and allocating time towards activities that contribute most to those goals are the keys to the effectiveness of any organization. It means asking questions like: Why are we doing this? Is there a better way? What are we trying to accomplish?

**Steps to MBO:** Clear concise mission, clarifying the organization's purpose. Make sure key people know where they and their activities fit into the big picture. Establish a hierarchy of objectives in which each levels' objectives support those above it. These objectives **MUST** be set through a give and take session, not laid down from above. Conduct periodic reviews to make sure objectives are being met. Make it a coaching session, not an inquisition. Don't let MBO stifle innovation and risk taking. MBO must be flexible to adjust to changing circumstances.

## **MEETINGS: BEFORE**

The most important part of any meeting is what happens before it even starts. Key elements are:

**Is the Meeting Really Needed?** Remember people can't work and meet at the same time. Could you use a conference call? Would voice mail or email or a written memo work?

**Keep the Size to a Minimum.** The chance of getting off topic increases dramatically with the number of people present. There can be a big difference between five and six people. That sixth person - one you really weren't sure about inviting - is often the one who is most likely to take the meeting off track. The optimum size for a problem-solving meeting is from four to seven. When the group gets to ten or twelve effectiveness often goes out the window. Often you end up with two or more different meetings happening at the same time. If you don't need everyone for the entire meeting, ask him or her to come early or just for a portion

and then leave. Free up your time by getting advance permission to leave as soon as matters you are involved in are covered.

**Provide an Agenda in Advance.** Your agenda should indicate what you hope to decide, not just what you want to discuss. Use questions rather than just bullets. How might we increase market share? Will generate a lot more thought and preparation than a plain bullet "Market Share." Questions elicit a response, topics do not.

**Consider Scheduling a Stand-Up Meeting or a Walking Meeting.** Many companies set aside at least one conference room for stand-up meetings. No chairs, often only a conference table, usually at raised height. Often people, who sit all day, enjoy the chance to stand. Standup meetings are often livelier and shorter than sit-down meetings.

## MEETINGS: DURING

**Start On Time.** Starting on time sets the tone for a brisk, businesslike meeting. The reason people come late to meetings is that they have learned from experience that the meetings are going to start late. Let them learn from experience that it will start on time, and that after the meeting, they will have to find out what they have missed.

**Stay On Track.** You've got an agenda, use it! Even if you aren't in charge, you can use the agenda to stifle the person who wants to bring up extraneous subjects.

**Summarize.** Before the meeting is adjourned, the person who called the meeting should summarize briefly what has been decided and what assignments have been made. You'll be surprised how many people will reach for a pencil and make notes of things they have already forgotten.

## MEETINGS: AFTER

Aside from follow-up items, there's just one thing to do after the meeting is over, it's important and often overlooked: ***Distribute the minutes promptly.*** We're not talking about formal minutes, but a memo listing as briefly as possible follow-up items and what was decided. To demonstrate the need for minutes two British psychologists tape-recorded a discussion at the end of a meeting. Two weeks later they asked the attendees to write down what they could recall from the discussion. The results: The average number of points remembered was only 8.4% of those actually recorded. Forty-two percent of items remembered were incorrectly remembered. Many of the things remembered were not said at all or were said at some other occasion. If you want the decisions of your meetings to be carried out, you must take the trouble to write and distribute a record. The briefer the better, covering just: What was decided? What assignments were made? The deadlines for actions.

## MEETINGS: STIMULATING INPUT

If time spent in staff meetings seems to be unproductive: Require each person to bring two ideas" to make their work or the departments work more effective. You'll be astounded by the results, not only will a lot of valuable ideas surface, but the atmosphere of the meetings will change. Find a way to make it fun, give out candy for each suggestion good or bad, ring a bell or clap. Martin Edelston who used this

technique commented that about half gets implemented, some are great and some so embarrassingly simple, it's hard to see how they were missed.

**MEETINGS: WHEN** Ask the people involved when the best time is. Mornings are often peak performance times for many people, so try to schedule meetings in the afternoon allowing people to work. Remember that if they're in a meeting, they're not working. Monday mornings and Friday afternoons are bad times due to the amount of attention that gets paid.

## **MEMORANDA**

Memo writing, whether done by pencil, computer or e-mail, can be a vicious waste of time. Aside from the time it takes, there is another peril: It often encourages procrastination. Another problem is that written communication tends to be one-way. Unless the other person responds, you don't get the feedback you need - reactions, questions, suggestions, and arguments that ensure your ideas are understood and sound. As well, people are often less candid in writing than discussion. The permanence of the written word encourages caution and restraint. A more honest evaluation will always be obtained through a phone call. Avoid the use of a memo for dialogue, to negotiate or get consensus.

## **MENTAL BLOCKS**

When you keep trying to get a job done and nothing happens, stop! Analyze the problem and see if you can come up with a new approach. Common causes are:

- Lack of Facts.
- Lack of Conviction.
- Lack of a starting point (try breaking it down into smaller chunks).
- Tunnel Vision. Perhaps you're too close to the problem, get some input from other people.
- Fatigue. Creative thinking can't be forced. Take a break, go for a walk, get extra sleep, attack it tomorrow in prime time!
- Lassitude.

## **NAPS**

There is nothing sacred about a sleeping pattern of eight hours a day and remaining awake for all of the remaining sixteen. Einstein make a nap part of his daily routine, so have countless others including Edison, Churchill, Truman, J.D. Rockefeller. Many executives find that a daily nap dramatically increases their energy level. Finding a place to nap, is of course a problem for most people. You need quiet and seclusion to get the most benefits. If you can't nap at the office or go home, some people find driving to a nearby park and taking a nap in the car works; for others, a health club or the Y. A siesta is not for everyone, but for many it helps transform more hours of the day to peak performance time.

## **NO**

Of all the time management techniques ever developed, perhaps the most effective is the frequent use of the word no. You cannot protect your priorities unless you learn to decline, tactfully and firmly, every request that does not contribute to the achievement of your goals. Many people grudgingly accept new assignments in volunteer organizations, new social obligations or new tasks at work, without

realistically weighing the cost in time. While you can't always tell your boss, no. You can point out how this task will take you away from more important work related to department goals.

## **OVERSTAFFING**

"Many hands make light work", a phrase used by many mothers. But in an office it's not necessarily so. Many hands make work, period. Too many people create non-value-added work in the form of reports, standard forms, policies, or meetings that add nothing to the bottom line or customer service but tie valuable resources.

## **PAPERWORK, COST OF**

Suppose we hire one additional clerk at a salary of \$900/week to handle non-value-added record keeping, filing, copying and paperwork. If profits are 5% of sales, we must sell an additional \$936,000 worth of steel to pay the salary of that clerk. Remember that every reduction in cost is a 100% addition to net profit. Elimination of time consuming reports, excessive written communication and other unnecessary paperwork is a good place to start.

## **PAPERWORK: THE MARKS & SPENCER EXPERIENCE**

Many years ago Sir Simon Marks, then chairman of Marks & Spencer, noticed the lights burning bright in one of his stores long after closing. He discovered two of his employees working overtime on stock cards. Investigating, he found that over a million stock cards were filled out every year and sent to London to track inventory. After investigating to find a better way, stock cards gave way to spot checks and letting stockroom clerk look at shelves and reorder when shelves were low. Marks & Spencer launched an all out war on paperwork; the question asked was "Would our entire business collapse if we dispensed with this?" The motto was "If in doubt, throw it out." Over 26 million cards and sheets of paper were eliminated. Marks & Spencer experience was not a flash in the pan; CBS eliminated 15 million pieces of filed paper. Examine the paperwork in your own office and see if every report, multiple copy, questionnaire and file, really justifies the time and energy it requires. If in doubt, throw it out!

## **PAPERWORK QUIZ**

The old saying, "A place for everything, and everything in its place", applies to paperwork because having a well-established routine makes it possible to concentrate on the content of the message, not worrying how you will keep track of it. Answer the questions below quickly, indicating what you would do with each item (secretary, desk file, recycle, forward, ... ). There are no right or wrong answers. If you have to think about it or if you would set it aside to come back later to it put a question mark.

1. Bill for materials.
2. Journal, with good articles, but you don't have time now to read.
3. Memo from your boss asking you to attend a meeting next Monday.
4. Material from your staff that you need to prepare a monthly report.
5. Memo from another division, asking for copies of a report prepared by your department.
6. Complaint letter from a customer.
7. Memo from personnel about a procedure for personnel evaluation.

8. Note you had written to yourself as a reminder to start sooner next year on budget preparation.
9. ISS questionnaire asking about operating practice.

More than two or three question marks suggest that you need a better system for handling paperwork. Although there are no right answers, there are some wrong ones that clearly violate principles of effective time management.

1. If you don't have a routine for handling bills, you have real problems.
2. Whatever you do, don't leave the journal sitting on your desk where it will tempt you from higher priority tasks.
3. If the memo lists only time and date of the meeting, transfer the information to your planner and throw the memo away.
4. Put the material into a future file or subject file and until you need it.
5. Send the report immediately, jot a note on the original or scrap of paper. Don't write a memo to go with it!
6. Respond immediately, forward for investigation if required. Consider phoning to provide an answer and note conversation on original letter prior to filing.
7. If it is really worth keeping, place it immediately in the personnel file. But if it is general in nature or trivial, make a mental note of the contents and recycle it. If you ever need it, the personnel department will have it.
8. You should have a system that will routinely bring up those things you want to consider at future times. Either a computer turn-up or an accordion file by month.
9. Decide now if you are going to answer the questionnaire. If not, recycle it now. If you plan to answer it, do so immediately.

## **PARKINSON'S LAW**

Professor Parkinson was right: Work expands to fill the time available for its completion. Thus, if you must have a particular task due at 3:00 p.m. today, it is usually done by 3:00p.m. However, if for the same task you are given until the end of the month, it will usually take till the end of the month. When you think in terms of task rather than deadline, perfectionism sets in. You can always do a little bit more, another graph or table. You can con yourself into thinking these add up to excellence, when in reality you should chalk them up to wheel spinning. The only way to overcome Parkinson's Law is to work it in reverse: Set a deadline for every task and hold to that deadline.

**Perfectionism** - There is a difference between striving for excellence and striving for perfection. The first is attainable, gratifying and healthy. The second is unattainable, frustrating and neurotic. It's also a terrible waste of time. Workers who make a habit of perfection are wasting time and money that could be better allocated elsewhere. The price of perfectionism is prohibitive. When a job is done well enough, move on to something else. Don't forget Patton's Law: A good plan today is preferable to a perfect plan tomorrow.

## **PLANNING**

The first rule of planning is that you can't plan and work at the same time. Suppose you wanted to build a deck, you wouldn't buy the lumber and start sawing the wood without planning how large the deck should be. Yet that's exactly how many people go about their daily activities. They plan as they go along and wonder at the end of

the day why "there aren't enough hours in the day"! No use of time gives a bigger bang for the buck than planning. Five minutes of careful planning today might save you five hours next week. Yet when people get busy, the first thing they eliminate is planning, because planning is never urgent. Just Important. Plan your days, plan your weeks and plan your projects. Rather than planning the day's activities first thing in the morning, try doing it the preceding afternoon, so you're ready to start and have a chance to tackle first thing any item that you might have missed.

## **PRIORITIES**

There are two ways to set priorities, urgency or importance. Most people set priorities based on urgency, which is why they spend so much time putting out fires and never get started on a project till the deadline is staring them in the face. Set priorities first in terms of importance, then by urgency. Ask the question, does this task clearly contribute to the achievement of my lifetime goals or my short-range objectives. If so put a star beside it. Then number the starred items in the order you want to do them. Taking into account two factors, urgency and time/benefit ratio. Time/benefit ratio is simply a way of recognizing that even though a task may be less important and not urgent, it can have substantial leverage. Taking time to delegate a task to staff first thing, before starting on another project is a good example.

## **PROCRASTINATION**

If procrastination is your problem, don't put off doing something about it!

**The Salami Technique** - Break up the task into many small manageable slices. The secret is to write out the list on paper, making each task so small and simple that it does not amount to much. Keep the list close by, when you get five or ten minutes, attack another item on the list.

**The Balance Sheet Method** - Another way to get going on a task is to analyze in writing what you are doing. On one side of a sheet of paper make a list of all the reasons you're procrastinating on a specific task. On the other side list all the benefits that will happen if you go ahead with it. The effect is striking. Usually you only have one or two excuses for procrastinating, and a large list of benefits, the first of which is usually the feeling of relief that comes from getting the task behind you.

**The "Worst First" Approach** - Sometimes it's better to choose the most unpleasant task and do it first. You might dread the phone call or meeting, but getting it out of the way first, makes the rest a lot easier. It's the old principle of eating your spinach first and your cake second. Reverse the order and it doesn't work so well.

**Habit Change: A Systematic Approach** - Procrastination is seldom related to just a single item; it is usually an ingrained behaviour pattern or habit. Changing how we think, is the key to changing how we act. Decide to start making the change immediately, now! Taking the first step promptly is important. Don't try to do too much, too quickly. Instead try to do now one thing you've been putting off. Then beginning tomorrow morning, start each day by doing the most unpleasant thing on your "To Do" list. Start to apply the "Worst First" approach. This simple procedure can well set the tone for the entire day. Even though the day is only 15 minutes old, you've already done the worst!

**Caution!** During the first few weeks when your new habit is taking root, you must be careful not to permit any exceptions. Be tough on yourself for the next few weeks, just for a few minutes at the start of each day. Learning a new habit has been compared to winding a ball of string; one slip can undo more than many turns can wind up.

## **PROTECTING PRIME TIME**

For most people the first few hours of the day are prime time, that time where your productivity, problemsolving ability and attention are at their peak. This time should be spent on the things that matter most, schedule your one or two highest payoff tasks into prime time and do the less important ones when you can. Don't waste these precious hours doing routine tasks like reading mail or periodicals, following up on phone messages or other low importance tasks.

## **QUIET TIME**

Quiet time, in today's busy world it seems unattainable, especially during working hours. It isn't unattainable. The only question is whether you are willing to pay the price. To get quiet time you have to carve out a chunk of your day when you simply won't permit routine interruptions. You might say it won't work, I have a demanding boss, I have crisis to deal with, I have important phone calls, I have customers, .... That's true. It's also true for everyone else, yet some people do manage to set aside a portion of their day to concentrate on some important task without fear of interruption. And they are the ones who are most effective because creative thinking is difficult or impossible with constant interruptions.

**Radical Surgery** - Time wasting activities are like cancers. They serve no useful function, drain off vitality, they never disappear of their own accord and they have a tendency to grow. The only cure is radical surgery. If you are wasting time at meetings that don't add value, generating reports that don't improve the bottom line or filling out forms that aren't really needed, STOP! You must also perform radical surgery on your daily "To Do" list, which nearly always contains one or two tasks that you would like to do or someone asked you to do but which simply take more time than they're worth.

## **SLEEP**

Can you afford to spend one third of your life unconscious? On the other hand, from a health standpoint can you afford not to? How much sleep do you really need? It depends. Sleep needs vary widely, normal sleep times range from five to ten hours, the average is seven and a half. A study by Detroit's Henry Ford's Hospital, found that healthy people who slept just one more hour felt better, were more alert and performed better on the job.

## **SPEED READING**

If your problem is you spend too much time reading, a speed-reading course won't solve it. The solution is to read more selectively. Keep in mind the words of the British critic F.L. Lucas: "It is mere common sense never to undertake a piece of work or read a book with out first asking, "Is it worth the amount of life it will cost?" That simple question will save more time than any speed-reading course.

**Stand-up Desk** - Many people have used a stand-up desk including: Thomas

Jefferson, Winston Churchill, John Opel of GM and David Kearns of Xerox to name but a few. Research has shown that people as a result of standing up heart rate increases and neural simulation increases, resulting in improved cognitive functions. The brain's processing speed increases by five to ten percent. If you're going to try it, you should have a stool with rungs or some other arrangement that allows you to one foot off the floor, reducing back strain.

**Staff's Time** - If you have one or more staff reporting to you, chances are they consider you an obstacle to efficient use of their time. Every list of time problems includes "interruptions by boss" or "indecision by boss" or "boss-imposed busy work". Because your success is linked to their output and morale, you pay the price for it. Make it clear to staff that you understand their work can be more important than yours, and that in case of conflict, they should use their good judgement or at least discuss the situation rather than automatically giving top priority to your request. Encourage staff to think about time use and to level with you whenever you ask them to do things that they consider wasteful or inefficient.

## **TECHNOPHOBIA**

The world has changed; computers and e-mail are part of business life. Those who do not change and embrace the new technology will be left behind. Take time to learn new skills, enroll in a course, work through an on-line tutorial or consider hiring a tutor. By learning how to use the new tools you'll be able to leverage your time and effort to an incredible degree.

## **TEMPO**

Tempo is the pace at which a company makes and implements decisions, identifies and solves problems, reacts to competitive pressures or changes marketing strategies based on shifts in business climate. Tempo is a reflection of the attitude of the person in charge. If that person is goal-oriented, the pace is brisk. If the person is procedure-oriented, the pace is sluggish. It is often the one factor that contributes most to corporate success or the lack of it.

**Tension and Time Use** - There is a common belief that tension is bad, that quiet and tranquility are goals for which we should strive. Nonsense. Without tension, nothing gets done. Positive tension can take many forms: a deadline that must be met, awareness that your work is going to be judged, a sense of competition with others. Good management involves building a reasonable amount of positive tension into a work group. Negative tension, of course, is bad, the kind that can produce harmful stress. Often it's a result of poor time management skills, failure to set goals, set priorities, plan, delegate effectively or schedule quiet time for major projects.

## **TIDBITS OF TIME**

When you are stranded in an airport, or a meeting is delayed fifteen minutes or your car's not ready at the garage for another twenty minutes, how do you use the time? Go for a brisk 15-minute walk Read a trade journal Go through your reading pile Be prepared to exploit those tidbits of time that drop into your lap.

## **TIME, DOLLAR VALUE OF**

Often people don't fully appreciate the value of their time. Crudely, dividing your

annual salary in thousands by two gives your approximate hourly wage. If you're paid \$60,000 a year, your hourly rate is about \$30. Taking fifteen minutes to gossip by the water cooler with a co-worker, costs \$7.50 each. I know of no one who would throw \$7.50 away in the garbage, but many who throw away cash every day. If ten people are waiting for a meeting to start, and you're late by ten minutes, you just cost the company \$50 (using \$30/hourly rate). A meeting with ten people that runs on for an extra half-hour because you didn't send out an agenda costs \$150. At a 5% return on sales it would take \$3,000 in additional sales to pay for the time lost.

## **TIME FOR WHAT?**

If you use these skills well you should recover one to two hours per day of additional discretionary time each day. So what are you going to use it for? Lay claim to the time you save. Plan it. Allocate time to do the fun things you've wanted to and to activities that will move you closer to your personal and professional goals.

## **TIME LOG**

The time log is the most valuable single tool ever devised for getting control of your time. It's not intended as a permanent part of your routine, only as a diagnostic technique to be used to assess time management effectiveness. It's easier than it looks. Chart two categories: "Activities" (the things you do) and "Business Function" (why you do them). For each fifteen-minute period during the day you put two checkmarks on the log, one in each category. Put the time log some where it will be easy to reach (sliding work shelves in a desk work well) and every half-hour or so (but no less often than each hour), bring it up to date. The cumulative time to fill it out will perhaps be 3-4 minutes. Keeping a time log for only two-three days will point out areas to improve performance, meeting that chew up large blocks, time spent traveling, time lost because a meeting was 15 minutes late, visits that were 45 minutes instead of 15.

## **TIME MANAGEMENT AND YOUR HEART**

Time management is not about finding ways to run harder and faster on the treadmill. That isn't time management, it's a neurosis, commonly known as Type-A behaviour. Good time management - the concept of "working smarter, not harder" - helps you shed habits such as perfectionism, wheel-spinning, failure to delegate, inability to set priorities and not having realistic goals. Finding time for "things worth being" rather than just "things worth having", time for reading, exercise, relaxation, solitude, community involvement.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

In baseball, you get credits for runs, men left on base count for nothing. Each inning you start all over again. Work is like baseball. If you don't finish a task, but leave it for tomorrow, you have to start all over again, reviewing what you've done, gathering information, re-establishing your train of thought. Once you've started something, finish it! There will be times when the task is too big. Try breaking it down into small manageable chunks, preferably in writing (remember the Salami).

## **UPWARD DELEGATION**

The commonest form of upward delegation is the submission of partially completed

work by workers who count on their manager to make the tough decisions, finish the job or check for errors. When staff get away with this, it's often because the manager thinks he can finish the job easier and faster. It's not good, as the boss is doing things that somebody else should and staff don't get a chance to grow. The best solution is the military concept known as "completed staff work". Staff always provide the General with analysis of the problem, options available and their recommended option. In business, a manager should develop staff with a policy like "My door is always open; I'm available whenever you need help. All I ask is one thing: Any time you bring me a problem, I want your opinion as to what you think is the best way of dealing with it."

### **USER-FRIENDLY OFFICE**

Make sure your office is a place you are really comfortable, you'll spend enough time there. Issues like chair (ideally properly adjusted ergonomic chair), lighting, computer placement, keyboard, and wrist support.

### **VELLEITY**

Velleity: wanting something badly enough to pay the price. Every time you list your goals, there's a temptation to fall into the velleity trap, listing goals like: to write a book, sail around the world, or own your own business. Which are fine goals for a few people who are willing to pay the price. But adding goals to your list that you have no attention of working on or truly striving for makes your entire list worthless. Have a hard look at your list of goals, are they real or not. Eliminate the velleity and get on with life.

### **VOICE MAIL**

Telephone tag is frustrating, time consuming and inefficient. Use voice mail as an asset. Leave a detailed enough question that the person can respond back, if you're out of the office for the day or week use the extended absence capability.

### **WASTEBASKETRY**

If your office is typical, roughly three-quarters of the items to be found in your files should have been placed in your wastebasket. Insufficient use of the wastebasket leads to crowded files, a chaotic desk and a cluttered mind. Be ruthless in channeling paper into the wastebasket instead of into the files. Never file memos, for example, that are routine and are on file somewhere else in the organization. Things like: announcements of meetings, press releases from other departments or in-house newsletters. File only things that you are likely to refer to again and are not available elsewhere. Try to cut it off at the source if possible, ask that your name be removed from the circulation list.

### **WEEKENDS**

Protect your weekends. Don't let work spill over into weekends except in emergencies. A weekend of exercise and relaxation, completely removed from the cares of the office or factory, contributes to high performance in the week ahead. Plan your weekends, having specific plans for the weekend is a morale boost for the entire preceding week and provides an incentive for getting the week's work done in time to go out to play.

## **WHEEL SPINNING**

Working frantically in a crisis atmosphere seldom produces satisfactory results. The mad scramble of activity, is a sure sign of poor planning, goal setting and time management skills. Instead of wheel spinning when faced with a crisis, take the actions that you should have taken in the first place. Stop and clarify your objective, take stock of your resources, delegate what ever can be delegated, set a firm list of priorities and then start working the item that is number one on your priority list. After you have worked your way through the crisis, sit down and ask yourself why it happened and what you can do to prevent its recurrence in the future.

## **WORKAHOLIC**

People can become addicted to work just as they can become addicted to alcohol. Symptoms include refusal to take a vacation, inability to put the office out of your home on weekends, and a son or daughter whose face is familiar, but you can't recall the name. Take stock of life is a good start, spend some time to think about what your life time goals are and if the things you're doing now are moving you towards them. As yourself where health stands on your list of priorities and what you're doing about it. Where are your mate and children on your list, and are you giving enough of yourself to them.

## **XENELASIA**

Xenelasia is a practice from ancient Sparta, where strangers could be expelled at any time without cause. At times most of us would like to have that capability to get people out of our office so we can get to work. The trick is to do it without offending. Look at how your office is set up, does your desk face a busy corridor, would a partition give you more privacy. Is there an empty chair next to your desk that seems to invite people to sit down? Get rid of it, put a book or file folder on it. Whenever possible, schedule a conference in the other person's office instead of you own. When you are the "guest", instead of the "host", it's much easier to leave. You can stand up and say, "I've taken enough of your time. Another tactful way to end a discussion is to summarize what has been said: "Bill, as I understand you have three basic objections to the proposal, ....." Whenever you make a "summary" you are gently hinting that it's time to call a halt.

## **YESTERDAY TRAP**

In avoiding the yesterday trap is especially important not to spend precious time regretting mistakes you may have make. A famous psychiatrist, said the most useful concept he had discovered for helping people turn their lives around was what he called his "four little words." The first two were if only. "Many of my patients have spent their lives living in the past, anguishing about what they should have done in various situations. "If only I had stayed in school..." "If only I had prepared better for that interview..." Wallowing in a sea of regret is a serious emotional drain. The antidote is simple: Eliminate those two words from your vocabulary. Substitute the words next time and tell your self "Next time I'll stay in school." "Next time I'll be prepared for that interview."

## **A FINAL WORD**

Above all else, good time management involves an awareness that today is all we ever have to work with. The past is irretrievably gone; the future is only a concept.

Each day is a gift, 1,440 minutes that are ours to choose how we use. Use them well, because once wasted, they're gone, never to be recovered.

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