

Managing Your Biggest Time Wasters

Turn to page 2 to see how you can eliminate factors in your life that contribute to wasting your time.

Take Charge of Your Time

Consider these tips to use your time wisely.

Welcome!

This quarter's theme is Time Management. We welcome your feedback at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com.

DidUKnow?

To-Do List Tips:

Make a list of daily priorities that you plan to accomplish:

- ◆ Don't include tasks that aren't necessary to the success of your goals.
- ◆ Do your most difficult tasks when your energy levels are at their peak.
- ◆ Tackle big jobs by dividing them up into smaller parts.
- ◆ Only take on one job at a time.
- ◆ Handle each piece of paper only once.
- ◆ Look for ways to improve the efficiency of your daily role.
- ◆ Set aside time every day to answer your communications.
- ◆ Learn to say "no" when you can.
- ◆ Reduce clutter around your workspace.
- ◆ Use calendars to track your success.
- ◆ Recognize the difference between doing the job right and perfection.

Take Charge of Your Time

Time is a precious commodity that's available to all of us in equal parts to use as we choose.

"Time is your personal possession. Nobody can manage it or fix it for you," says Glenn Van Ekeren, author of *12 Simple Secrets of Happiness at Work*. "One of the best ways to use your time wisely is to ask yourself, Is this the best way for me to be spending my time right now? And, if it isn't, change your activity to one that will bring value to your company."

Here are Mr. Van Ekeren's other suggestions to help you get a hold on wasted time:

- ◆ **Peak hours.** Schedule work according to your peak productivity time. Dedicate those hours when you're most productive to doing things that give the highest return and produce the greatest value.
- ◆ **Determine your priorities.** "Overambitious to-do lists can be unrealistic and anti-productive," says Mr. Van Ekeren. "Make choices. Sort out your have-to's from your choose-to's. You'll be amazed how many times you choose to do rather than have to do. Direct your energies toward activities that are the most important to you."
- ◆ **Go for results.** Be result-oriented rather than activity-oriented. Activity doesn't equal accomplishment. "Measure your effectiveness by what you achieve, not by how busy you are," says Mr. Van Ekeren.
- ◆ **Get organized.** Have a place for everything and have everything in its place, then maintain that sense of order.
- ◆ **Learn to say no.** Busy people must simply learn to refuse some demands on their time. "It's natural not to want to disappoint people, but sometimes we're unrealistic about our time limits," says Mr. Van Ekeren. "It's easy to let our ego get in the way of saying no. But you'll never feel in control if you're biting off more than you can chew."
- ◆ **Work on your attitude.** Your attitude about how busy you are, the amount of time you have, or the demands on your life can sabotage any effort to make the most of the time you have. Be flexible. Not everything will go as expected. Mr. Van Ekeren advises seeking new opportunities when your game plan runs into roadblocks.
- ◆ **Do it right the first time.** If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?
- ◆ **Place deadlines on yourself.** Don't allow minor or major projects to drag on indefinitely. Challenge yourself with deadlines and beat them. "Try not to leave projects hanging at the end of the day," says Mr. Van Ekeren. "Bring closure to as much as you can."
- ◆ **Prepare for unexpected downtime.** Spare minutes created by waiting in airports, restaurants, or traffic can be the perfect time to complete small projects.
- ◆ **Get up earlier.** By rising 30 minutes earlier each day, you add 3½ hours of productivity to your week. "Multiply that by 52 weeks, and you'll have an additional 180 hours to accomplish your priorities," says Mr. Van Ekeren. "I've used these extra hours to write books and get energized by reading inspirational materials."

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Source: *Krames Staywell*

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Reducing outside interruptions is crucial to premium performance at work. But what can you do if phone calls, visits from co-workers, and rambling meetings waste hours of your work time every day?

"You can defend yourself by learning simple techniques that will help you manage time-wasters," says Stephanie Winston, president of The Organizing Principle, a management consulting firm in New York, and author of *The Organized Executive*. "And you can establish greater control without being rude or shutting yourself off from others' needs."

The following suggestions will help you gain control of your worst time-wasters:

On the phone

- ◆ **Keep calls brief.** Get to the point immediately when you're making or returning a business call. Develop strategies for dealing with long-winded people, such as beginning calls with, "This is Mary. I have a meeting in 10 minutes. What can I do for you?"
- ◆ **Consolidate call-backs.** Return all your calls at a given time each day. Begin with priority calls and work down the list.
- ◆ **Return calls when people are less likely to chat.** For example, call right before lunch or near the end of the day.
- ◆ **Develop a message-tracking system.** If you're disorganized, you may spend more time looking for your messages than returning them. Avoid putting message slips under a paperweight or in your in-box, where they tend to get lost. Instead, use an old-fashioned desk needle or add important calls that must be returned to your master to-do list.

Drop-in visitors

Interoffice visits are a part of office life. The following strategies can help you regain control if you're constantly interrupted:

- ◆ **Send a clear message.** Close your office door or post a note on the entrance to your cubicle saying you're busy until a certain time. You'll deter all but the most insistent visitors.

If your desk faces the door or a corridor, reposition it so a passerby can't easily catch your eye.
- ◆ **Consolidate visits.** Limit appointments to a specific block of time each day or week.
- ◆ **Set time limits.** Limiting spur-of-the-moment sessions without being rude requires tact, but it can be done. When someone asks if you have a minute, you can respond with, "Could it wait until this afternoon? I'm really swamped right now."
- ◆ **Confer in colleagues' offices.** When co-workers want to discuss projects with you, offer to meet in their offices. "It's much easier to excuse yourself than to ease someone out of your office," Ms. Winston says.

Endless meetings

- ◆ **Eliminate unnecessary meetings.** Before calling a meeting, ask yourself if the issue could be handled by a memo, telephone call, or informal conference.
- ◆ **Distribute an agenda in advance.** List the topics to be discussed and note any papers, figures, or information people should bring.
- ◆ **Set time limits.** Try to schedule meetings just before lunch or quitting time. Doing so will curb a tendency for attendees to ramble on.
- ◆ **Take control.** If you're the moderator, limit the discussion to topics on the agenda. Unstructured meetings are usually unproductive.

"By learning to define your time as your own," Ms. Winston says, "you are then free to enthusiastically speak and meet with co-workers, clients and other contacts without compromising your own productivity."

Source: Wellness Library Health Ink and Vitality Communications ©2011

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- ◆ determine the best payoffs for you
- ◆ plan your activities to save time
- ◆ effectively control time wasters

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