

TIME MANAGEMENT

BY STEVE BREUER

“Teach us to number our days that we get us a heart of wisdom.” – Psalm 90

“Who gains time, gains everything.” – Disraeli

“”To kill time”, what a profound and terrifying expression!” – Franz Werfel

“A Jew never has time, he is always on the run.” – Mendele

“So many men, so little time.” – Mae West

“To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.” – Ecclesiastes

Workaholism, the “respectable addiction” is as dangerous as any other to your health, to your personal life and, surprisingly, to your job. In Japan it’s called “karoshi”, “death by overwork”, accounting for nearly 5% of that country’s stroke and heart attack deaths. In the Netherlands, it has been identified as the “leisure illness”, when workers get physically sick on weekends and vacations, as they stop working and try, in vain, to relax.

“Workaholism is an addiction, an obsessive-compulsive disorder, and it’s not the same as working hard or putting in long hours,” says Bryan Robinson, PhD, author of *Chained to the Desk* and other books on work. “Hard workers generally have balance in their lives. They sit at their desks thinking about skiing. The workaholic is on the ski slopes thinking about work.”

Workaholics “are people who may not *have* to be at work but feel they *need* to be at work,” says Tuck Saul, an Ohio psychotherapist. “As with any other “aholism” there is often a lack of understanding as to how their work affects themselves and others.”

After taking the 20-question Workaholics Anonymous quiz, one worker realized, “I had my own addiction – to adrenaline.” Workaholics may have as need for that adrenaline rush, according to North Carolina researchers. “One thing we know is that workaholics tend to seek out jobs that allow them to feed their addiction. Workaholics tend to seek high stress jobs To keep the adrenaline rush going.”

The Problem: There always seems more to do than there is time available to do it.

First, understand that this is a perception – not the truth. Time is a commodity, which can be appreciated, rationed, well used or wasted depending on our discipline or desires. We need not drive gas-guzzling SUVs unless we *choose* to. We need not “guzzle” time, either.

Some thoughts:

- 1) Practice Telling Time. Much of our time allocation is based on wishful thinking. “I can knock off that report in an hour.” “We can get those plans done in one or two meetings.” A New York businessman says he can get from his Long Island home to Manhattan in 45 minutes, without traffic; when is there no traffic? Allocate your time realistically, on paper, or your pdr, or your computer and live by your plan.
- 2) Prioritize and Deadline: Several authors recommend a “three-basket” system of prioritizing work. The first basket should contain what *has to* be done. The second, What *should* be done after the first basket is empty. The third receives the work that *Could* be done after the other baskets are emptied. Understanding that the third basket may *never* receive your attention, these experts advocate, emptying it, periodically, of all its contents, which have turned out not to be important enough to merit attention. Believe it or not, it works.

Limiting your time on a project makes work more tolerable. Setting deadlines makes it more achievable. There is no single way to learn these habits, but by learning them.

- 3) Learn to Use Little Bits of Time. Alan Leakin described his “Swiss cheese” method of time management in his book “How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life.” He recommends “poking holes” in a large task by using little bits of time as they come available, rather than waiting for on large block of time. The significance: you can do the report which requires 10 hours of work in pieces, rather than waiting for an available 10 hour block of time.

Lots of tasks can be done in 15 minutes. Make a to-do list, as you log telephone calls to be answered. Check off the calls you’ve made, or the tasks done. It’s very Satisfying. Lawyers use desk timers to bill for their work in six-minute increments. Bill yourself for the time you use and you’ll value it more.

Small bits of time may come available through cancelled appointments, through completing a phone list early, and other serendipitous opportunities. Use them.

- 4) Expect Interruptions and Distractions: A position of responsibility carries with it the dependence of others. An administrator rarely can shut off the phone or lock the office door, or “work at home” in peace and quiet. Just because you are resolved to devote time to a specific project, the world may not cooperate. There is no simple answer. Either provide for the reality of interruptions in your time budget, or set aside weekends, evenings, or vacation days to do that which requires silence and complete concentration.
- 5) Delegate, delegate! Too often we have heard the refrain, “it’s easier to do it by myself. At least I’ll be sure it’s done right.” Too often, because this rationale simply isn’t accurate. There are significant pieces of every major task, which can be accomplished by

others. Delegating *does* require some time for thought and careful instruction and *that* is too often what we're unwilling to give. Even if another won't do the task in exactly the manner you would, does not invalidate the result. If enough pieces of the work are delegated, we can edit the product in addition to completing that part which cannot be delegated. Meanwhile, we can do other, more pressing work.

Refusal to delegate is a form of procrastination and often self-appointed martyrdom. This self-punitive approach decreases your own productivity while increasing the pressure felt from too much work. Even if you cook better than the restaurant where you eat, clean better than your housekeeper, type faster than your secretary and compute better than your accountant, the very fact that you accept the service of these others indicates that you *can* delegate.

- 6) Don't Spread Yourself Too Thin: Psychologist Neil Fiore suggested an "un-schedule" to help analyze your time. He urged that every day in the week be charted in one-hour segments in which all committed time be charted. Meals, meetings, doctor appointments, grocery shopping, social occasions are all charted. And as one completes the exercise, the blank or available times stand out, inviting independent work time. The segments can be filled in with committed telephone or work periods – all the better.

Examining such a schedule can also reveal if you are indeed "spread too thin", with too many tasks to accomplish in the time available. Analysis can help reduce the number of meetings – or assignments – one is able to accept.

- 7) Identify Your Prime Time and Place: There are "morning" people and "night people" Others use their lunch hours to walk or work out. It makes no sense to resolve to do your half-hour on the treadmill or the telephone or the computer in the evening, if that's when you're too exhausted to do more than watch TV and get to sleep, or to tire yourself before the workday begins. Be realistic about your biological "prime time" and use it to be most productive.

Some of our great writers never sat at a desk, but were at their most productive standing at a tall writing surface. Thomas Wolfe wrote immortal novels on the top of his refrigerator! Some people work better on stools. Some work best at their computer at midnight or later. Use your most productive time and place, idiosyncratically.

- 8) Enjoy your Free Time! Neither workaholics nor procrastinators have time to relax. They are under constant self-imposed pressure. Even the enjoyment of social occasions or vacations is limited by the sense of time and pressure. The ultimate aim of time management is to reward the successful time manager with more free time – *free time!* This means time to relax – a candle lit bath, sitting in the sun, time for the garden, immersion in a movie or play, a quiet snooze. The reward is time to be creative – to think, to read, to learn new skills, to hone old ones, to re-create. Time management provides time for recreation. And that is why we work: to give us more time for our own re-creation.

