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“Time-Stretching Tips”

By Madeleine Frazier

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Please Read This **First**

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Why Manage Your Time?

Just about anything which we are given for nothing is valued at about that. Even our time which we cannot store or replace!

So, let’s start with the obvious question: why do YOU want to stretch your time?

Take your time – as much as thirty seconds, if you really must!

Then list your three most important reasons right here so that they can be a reminder to you as you progress toward your goal of Time-stretching Champion.

1.
2.
3.

I hope that some of your points were about wanting more family or personal time and to face less pressure or discomfort?

If your reasons were all about improving your job performance and business success, then you got this book just in time!

One major but little understood effect of poor time-management is the severe negative effect which it exerts on the health of all time-poor people.

As they get older and they start to realize their most valuable asset is being thrown away, plus their inability to handle the increasing production levels required by most businesses today, causes them stress.

That further sabotages their sincere attempts to improve the results they are achieving.

So, they work harder but, because the problem is their well-intentioned but faulty methods and only very rarely a lack of commitment or effort, they become more stressed and less productive than before.

They are on a powerful, negative spiral which damages their business and social future and, most importantly, their health. That causes them more stress and so on.

Remember the old saying, “*The Hurrieder I Work, the Behinder I Get!*”

Grab the proven tips and short-cuts from my hard-won experience and research. The success and greater freedom which you get from your first small successes will motivate and energize you to go further, quite possibly farther and faster than me.

I suggest that you skim the whole book first. Then, start reclaiming your time by focusing on the sections which deal with those areas which you need to address first.

Put your first efforts into just one or two areas.

Don't take on too much too soon or the extra load may discourage you and any bumps in the road will have greater negative effect.

This ebook has strategies and suggestions which can help you to make better use of your time in both your personal and business endeavors.

Some tactics will work for you “straight off the page” while you may need to tweak others to suit your particular needs, or even discard some.

You Can Be Your Own Consultant

This technique may seem a little odd but has been proven by all kinds of people to have positive outcomes in many areas, including time-stretching.

Ask yourself, “How would I advise someone else to handle this problem or activity?”

Try to step outside yourself. Imagine that you are a skilled, experienced and highly paid consultant who is looking on **your** life and time-related problems.

That small re-alignment of your thinking can have a strong effect. From outside, you tend to recognize the real sticking points of your situation and possible improvements will be highlighted more clearly for you to consider and act on.

Your personal qualities and experience are critical for how well different strategies will work for you. Separating yourself from the natural inward focus which we all have about our own affairs, gives you a valuable perspective on them.

If you are a ‘morning person’, then you know you will get better results from scheduling critical tasks during that time.

If your metabolism is sluggish in those first hours, you might use that time to do less physical tasks like writing, handling mail and email as well as getting your day’s phone-calls done.

That could clear some more time in your afternoons for a bit of extra exercise.

You

You may believe that you’re incapable of being efficient or time-savvy. But there’s no such thing as a natural pre-disposition to be thrifty or a spend-thrift with time.

Are You Already Discouraged?

You’ve probably tried to improve your use of the available time before. If, like me, your early efforts did not work out anything like you hoped, are you truly confident that you can break through this time?

I know that you can, just like I did, and the sooner you begin, the easier it will be. It will have a profound effect on your lifestyle, comfort level and even your health for months or years.

If your mind-set is one thing which limits your success at this point, you’ll find methods which proved very successful for me and thousands of others in this little book.

I agree that it’s easier to say than do. You need patience and consistent effort to reverse these thoughts and previous lack of action.

It won’t be a completely smooth, upward progress as you deal with and push forward through any temporary failures you have.

But you can succeed in stretching your useful time allowance without staying awake for longer than is comfortable and healthy, or becoming a list-obsessed time-tyrant who allocates every minute in advance and gets highly stressed, even aggressive, about any deviation at all from the schedule they’ve prepared.

I guarantee that you can accomplish your work and lifestyle goals without becoming a robotic clock-watcher like I was for so long. That sort of trade-off would make reaching your targets much less satisfying and much harder as well.

Better, Not Just Faster Reading

Media reports usually focus on how many thousands of words that some speed-readers can scan per minute, but the most important factor about your reading is not how many words, or even pages, which you can scan per minute but what useful information you retain from your reading.

If you already use your memory well, or you follow my suggestions, you will get more value from what you read.

It's easy to improve the value we get from our reading.

1] Be More Selective: Most of us could probably discard at least 10% of the magazines and other articles we get without any effect on our enjoyment or knowledge.

We don't need negativity or gossip, so that's most pop media we can avoid from now on.

2] Be Comfortable: We can't get the best results if we aren't comfortable when we read. That means:

- a good but not intrusive light,
- get any vision problems attended to
- keep the screen or paper clean and at a comfortable distance and
- do our reading in time-blocks so there are less interruptions.

Your mood also affects your reading and the amount you retain from it. If you are depressed or under pressure and what you intend to read is not directly related to the problem, your best course would probably be to set the reading material aside and deal with the problem.

3] Just the Essentials: Most reports, in the media or elsewhere, give the most important facts in the first couple of paragraphs (who, what, when, where and why). Then, they summarize the whole story in the last few paragraphs. If those don't hold your interest, skip to the next article.

4] The ‘Fillet knife’ Approach: This would destroy your enjoyment of a novel by your favorite author if not read entirely, but will save you considerable time with a stack of non-fiction books or magazines. Just read the Table of Contents and scan the illustrations, also the bibliography and index.

You don’t need to read the blurb and testimonials unless there are some by people who you know produce good information and are too jealous of their reputations to give a “back-scratching” endorsement, just because the author is a friend..

Some Tips for Faster Reading

I did a speed-reading course at a local college some years ago and I recommend a course of that sort if you have the time available. Certainly, I’d do one of those before I thought of investing the greater amount for a commercial program.

That way, you’ll have some idea of how you handle the procedures which I believe are shared by both types of course.

You will read light material faster than material which you have to think more about.

The sort of material you are reading affects your sense of the passing of time. It’s a good idea to set a specific period for reading and check the clock now and then. Or you might use a kitchen timer set to an hour, or whatever period you decide.

Decide if the time needed to read something is likely to be repaid by the content. If it is, but you don’t need it now, put it aside. If you don’t find enough reasons to get back to it in, say, a month, discard it.

Scan the index, first and last paragraphs for the basic information and to get an impression of the writer’s point of view.

Try to stop sub-vocalizing as you read. Almost everybody silently speaks every word they read. It really reduces your speed!

One technique which helps with this is to focus on the center of each line of text and draw one finger down through the center of each line. Your eyes follow the finger and your peripheral vision helps to bring in the rest of the line. That changes the focus from individual words to whole lines without losing the meaning.

You could use a piece of blank card, about two thirds the width of the line. Put a mark in the center of the top of your card, and then hold it over the top line on the first page.

Starting fairly slowly, draw the card down the page and concentrate on the center of each line as it was revealed above the mark on your card.

As your eyes and brain became used to the system, you will begin to understand the context of whole lines and paragraphs without consciously focusing on each word individually.

Some fast readers use a variation where they sweep a finger across the page under each line of text, increasing the speed of the movement as they get more comfortable with the method.

I don't know what my actual reading speed is but feel that it is much better than it was twenty years ago.

There are many variations which work differently for different people, so don't hesitate to change to whatever works for you.

I won't guarantee that it will work for you at all because some will find it as useless as I find trying to separate the hidden picture out of those special images which were all the rage a few years ago.

Don't even try it if you feel at all uncomfortable about any aspect of it. If you do try it and don't get the results you hope for, then please don't let that make you decide not to consider a course where many other techniques are explained and carefully demonstrated.

Audio Books

I’ve found audio books, either on audio cassettes or on CD or MP3 Players in MP3 format, to be a great time saver. It’s very easy, especially with the MP3s, to get straight to the section you want and I can comfortably and safely listen to them (no headphones, please) while I’m driving.

The Value of Sleep

How much is that hour you cut from your night’s sleep to finish yet another urgent project costing you? There’s not just the missed opportunity for your body to refresh itself, which may have serious health consequences in later years, but you will also probably find that the quality of work you produce in that last hurried, hazy hour is not up to your usual standard.

Valuable sleeping time is often the first area which people cut away at, trying to make up for the short-fall they see in other, supposedly more productive, areas. But, your body absolutely needs a certain amount of uninterrupted sleep regularly to help restore your physiological and mental resources.

If you don’t let this recuperation take place in the way nature demands, then you won’t be able to perform your work or sport to your best ability and you risk long-term damage to your overall health.

Some people can perform well with less than the normal eight hours a night. Some of them are actually born physically wired to accommodate shorter sleep episodes than most people need. But, the number of those fortunate people is much lower than the number of people that just *think* that they can make do with less than an average of eight hours.

Some other people top up their night’s sleep with short naps during the day. This can re-energize your system and a nap is a lot healthier for you than another cup of coffee!

But, it’s important that you relax your body when you sleep for short or long periods. You should, preferably, lie down. If you can’t do that, then at least make sure that your feet are raised to hip level and there is no risk of you falling or you might wake the guy sleeping at his desk next to you!

It’s important that, as far as possible, you clear your mind of worries, hassles and all negative thoughts before your head hits the pillow. If your mind is full of fears, then your sleep is likely to be less refreshing than you need.

I used to worry a lot more than I do now. That meant hundreds of nights restlessly tossing and battling yesterday’s worries, which left me poorly equipped when I got up the next morning and had to face the next day’s ration of new worries!

Try to clear your mind of them. Tell yourself that a good sleep will have you better prepared to deal with them.

How and When to Organize Tomorrow’s Tasks

You can give your next day’s work a power start if you organize your schedule for the next day’s work in, say, just ten minutes shortly before you go to bed.

Don’t spend too much time or get yourself worrying about the various tasks. List the important tasks, meetings and anything else which will take a chunk of your time or should not be overlooked.

Then put it out of your conscious mind and get some rest. Consign any associated problems to the care of your sub-conscious for the night.

After all, what will worrying about them accomplish except to reduce the benefit you get from your sleep and also reduce your general effectiveness tomorrow?

The next day, you will be refreshed and also find that your subconscious has probably produced some ideas from your stored knowledge which you would never have got by worrying all night.

Your Vital First Step

**Many people do no planning but their New Year’s Resolutions.
These are mostly discarded by about January 3rd**

That’s because these people grab their good intentions (that’s all they really are) from thin air and don’t allow for the extra work needed to fit these goals into their routine.

But, your own Success Plan is vital.

Carefully writing down how you will get to your vision of success will support you through any initial stumbles and reinforce your confidence when you reach your first goals.

Success always starts with a PLAN. If you haven’t got one, how will you know when you’re on or off the right track?

“Great idea,” you might think, “but it would take too much time!”

You will waste more time later on regretting your lack of focus if you don’t do it. Your plan should take an hour at most and I guarantee that you will recover much more than that in a couple of weeks if not sooner.

Then you will reap at least an hour every week from that single one you invest now. That’s an excellent return!

As Benjamin Franklin wrote, **“If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail!”**

Some people argue against having a written plan because “it may limit your options and discourage you from taking advantage of new opportunities and contacts”. The reverse is actually true. Having a system will better prepare you to make full use of new positive situations than you could be if you keep spraying your energy in all directions.

Word-process it if you’re comfortable with computers and can keep the file(s) strictly private. You will want to review your progress regularly and adjust your plan for changes in your circumstances.

You also need to produce a paper copy, just for your own reference. Keep it in your diary. If you don’t have a diary, get one today.

Most diaries have a section where you can record notes for future months. Use this, if your diary has one, in conjunction with your Success Plan.

Your Diary

If you haven’t got one, your trajectory to success may depend on how soon you get one and how you use it.

Danger of Two Diaries.

A problem for many people who set up 2 diaries; a large desk diary and a pocket or brief-case, slim-line one is when they miss putting a vital entry in the correct spot in both books. But, if you stay aware of that small risk, you may find the extra investment worthwhile.

Software and Equipment

There are many electronic helpers, diaries and organizers as well as computer programs of varying complexity and cost which you can use. All of these require some time and effort to learn to use well but, if you are comfortable in taking on that sort of challenge and cost, that might be the best path for you.

Always back up all your information to your computer and store it on its own disk/CD Rom or DVD. No equipment I know of in the general market is guaranteed to never fail. Your information is worth too much to you to only have it on one sliver of silicon which probably cost about 5 cents.

Always note the type of battery and when you changed them in your diary. Put a note there to change them a month before they are due. Carry spare batteries. Only use specified power packs for these devices; some cheaper power packs may deliver the same power but not be suitably filtered and can fry your equipment along with your information.

Many companies which offer this equipment provide ways to transfer your information between their devices and your computer where you can use it in spreadsheets and other software with which you are already familiar.

Some people might like the idea of a whiz-bang electronic secretary but not have the confidence to go there yet. For you, there are a variety of printed diary/organizers with tabbed sections and specially formatted pages to suit different types of businesses and other requirements.

Many people carry small digital recorders instead of a notebook in their pocket. There's some advantages, especially the modern versions where your messages are recorded on a chip instead of tape. The quality is very good and some can be used to record lectures and small group meetings. You should have prior permission from those present.

Do YOU Need or Want the Technology?

The most basic, but very successful, system which I have seen in action was a diary, an address book (and a box of tabbed cards with the contacts' information on them), and a box of paper files. One of the files had 31 tabbed sections – 1 for each day of the month.

The person with this system ran a successful, highly regarded business through a shop and a mail-order section. He said it worked so well because he used it every day and he would not change to an electronic system because “his cards never got a virus!”

You should only change a successful system when you can see major benefits from doing so.

Of course, this system would not suit someone that was only taught to use electronic systems. When he sold his business, he had to pay someone to transfer his neatly handwritten information to disk, which was then put into a computer system which the new owner used.

Your Office

Your office may be a cubicle supplied by the super corporation which employs you, your own office at your business premises, or a desk and filing cabinet in the corner of a room in your home.

However you are set up, Parkinson’s Law (with Frazier’s adaptations*) probably applies:

“Work (and junk*) expands to fill the time (and space*) available to it.”

..... *C. Northcote Parkinson (and Madeleine Frazier)*

Paper

Have you realized what the piles of paper on your desk and elsewhere are costing you? Do you waste time trying to find something you had yesterday?

The biggest shock might come from this little exercise. Sort the papers in a pile according to how much time is required to deal with them. You probably will find some you can permanently discard as you go through.

Handle it once.

This one rule will save you time and money every day for the rest of your active life. Every piece of paper which you have to go back to will cost you extra time for reviewing the content as well as the time required to deal with it.

Ask these questions of each piece of paper which you handle in your next work session:

1. **Is it necessary?** Some people will eliminate 20% of all the paper sent to them immediately. Notify whoever sent it they don't need to send it to you in future.
2. **Do I need to do anything with it?**

If not, direct it to the proper person and ensure that the sender sends it direct to them from now on. Cross yourself off any distribution lists on material which you don't have any interest in or cannot provide useful input to.

If you do, try to deal with it now. Can you just write an answer to the comments in it and send the original sheet back to the sender, saving paper and time?

3. **Do I need to see it again?** If you don't, don't make copies or file it unless it's an accounting or legal requirement.

If you need to, then do it today, if not right away.

4. **Do I need to follow up with it?** Make a note now in your diary/on your whiteboard, as appropriate, who to follow up with and when.

Your Desktop

If you haven't got space to do your current work, cut yourself an urgent 30 minutes to an hour and reclaim your desk-top.

Is your desk clean, cluttered or “organized but crowded” as a friend described his home office to me the other day? If you're among those with a clean desk that can find the right piece of paper or computer file in short order, well done.

For those readers with their very own Mt Everest on their desks, even before they open today's mail, here are some pointers to that happy state.

Remove every piece of paper from your desk which is not connected with your most current projects. If you can, deal with them as soon as possible after you've sorted the 'mountain' in the way I outlined earlier:

- Respond to it as soon as possible after you've sorted the 'mountain'.
- Act on it.
- Delegate it.
- Discard it – just drop it in your bin.

That will not be easy. Allow yourself a reasonable time to get through the accumulation and give yourself a drink of water when you finish it.

The 4 step process can eliminate almost all that mountain in one concentrated session each day.

There should be no food or drink on your desk ever. Coffee and tea are unhealthy choices but all liquids and crumbs can *kill* computers as well as looking very unprofessional. Keep water on a

solid side-table and nuts or fruit in a small bowl if you have the room, or go to the water cooler. The exercise and time away from your keyboard is good for you too.

In box. Is the bottom piece of paper yellow? Was it when it was put there? Take everything out and run those 4 questions in the previous section over each form, magazine, letter or whatever.

Pending or Permanently Parked? If you have a “Pending” or similar tray, empty it as soon as possible, and then discard the tray. It’s the office equivalent of the Sargasso Sea where nothing moves.

Old Files. I’ve still got my first certificate from Secretarial School though it would not get me any recognition in today’s job market. You’ll understand that I’m not likely to throw it away though.

Until I got serious about using instead of just losing time, I also still had the receipts for my lunches which I bought that year and all of the job applications I sent out then before I got a job (in my uncle’s office where I didn’t need a reference, just a willingness to work extra unpaid time!)

Taming Your Telephone

Try to make all your calls in the same block of time each day. That will help you to:

- get yourself in the right mood (smile!)
- have the necessary paperwork, etc., ready to hand and
- let customers and suppliers know that you are likely to be in touch or reachable every day at that time.
- get staff used to not interrupting your phone session with other matters.

Answering calls.

Smile as you lift the receiver or press the button on your mobile phone. It really helps!

Answer on the third or fourth ring. It can actually upset some people if you answer a phone too quickly!

Don't leave the phone ringing much longer than 4 rings where possible.

Practice the phrase you will use to answer the phone;

give the caller enough information – your name, company and area if relevant.

Don't say too much or rush your words so a new caller might not understand you.

Let the caller identify themselves and give you their message. If they don't identify themselves, ask for that information before saying anything else. If they don't give their details clearly, end the call.

Keep the discussion on one topic. Deal with it before opening another one.

If the call is at a bad time or not useful, then politely ask if you can call them back when it is more convenient (that might be 2020 where some callers are concerned!)

If it's an unwelcome or offensive call, just hang up!

Making calls.

Work out exactly what you want to accomplish with each call before you make it:

- their time is at least as important as your own.
- they will appreciate your business-like attitude and courtesy.
- You will get a very positive reception when you call them in the future.

Before you call, work out and write down a short message with the important details in case you have to leave a message and ask someone to call you back. That also helps you to focus and make sure that you mention all the important points during the call.

When talking to someone on the phone or leaving a message, give them the facts - Who, What, Where, When and Why.

Answering Machine

If you haven't got one, get one today. Some people will tell you that they never leave messages on them but, if you're not there when they phone, then you're not going to get their call anyway!

As mentioned in the previous section, write down a brief message with the main details before you call so you can put that on their answering machine in a concise, professional manner.

Keep your message brief and enthusiastic (putting a smile on your face when you are recording your outgoing message really works!)

Tell the caller that you regret not being available when they call, ask them to leave their name and phone numbers, a short message and the best time for you to call them back.

Do not give out extra information, such as that you’ll be away for a couple of days (the caller might be a part-time burglar!)

You don’t have to record your message yourself – most machines come with professionally voiced, pre-recorded messages which can give a business-like impression if you are not able to record a good one yourself.

Digital machines are more convenient and reliable.

Mail and e-mail

Try to deal with e-mail and regular mail in blocks, just like most of your telephone calls.

There have been reductions in many mail services while, of course, the charges have risen so time and money can be saved here.

Incoming Mail

Record the arrival of all important correspondence and try to deal with it just once. You will have exceptions, like accounts, but most can be sorted and acted on the same day.

Junk mail – junk it!

For each of the other pieces of mail, ask yourself:

What do I need to do with this?

- Respond to it.
- Act on it.
- Delegate it.
- Discard it – just drop it in your bin.

Can any of the incoming mail be responded to by e-mail or phone? Both are quicker and also less costly in most cases.

Do I need to ever see this piece of paper again?

- Yes, for follow-up action – file it.
- Yes, for reference (financial or customer records, for instance) – file it.

- No – file it, forward it or discard it.

Don't make copies unless there is a practical reason for doing so in each case.

Give your experienced staff, if you have them, the opportunity to deal with mail that relates to their area.

Out-going Mail

Keep your answers brief to help your correspondent to also save some time.

Recycle your answers. If there are questions which keep cropping up, make a Word processing draft of a comprehensive answer from which shorter, more specific answers can be quickly extracted for replying to individual inquiries.

If you have a secretary, then you should not try to do their job as well as your own. After they've seen how you answer standard letters, you can just note the essence of the response and any specific points you want mentioned, then let them fill out the reply for your signature.

If you don't need to see some mail before it is sent, then tell them that too.

E-mail.

E-mail has caused a revolution with our correspondence. We're happily getting used to very quick replies and the ability to reach many new suppliers and potential customers in almost any part of the world at very low cost.

At the same time, the junk mail curse has become an avalanche of hype and scam. Then there are the viruses and other unwelcome software which can be slipped through our computer defenses in the guise of a charming (or even naughty) screen-saver or whatever.

Incoming e-mail.

The security aspects can be minimized by linking our e-mail software to our anti-virus software and keeping both of them up-to-date. You should also run anti-spyware software regularly.

Filter the spam (unsolicited commercial email) ruthlessly and never buy anything from those companies which use it.

Scan the Sender and Subject lines of each email. If the Sender is not familiar and the Subject does not make it clear why this email should especially interest you, then just give the message a quick look. If you don't find the first paragraph or so of particular interest then you should probably bin it.

Keep copies of only those e-mails which you need for legal/accounting reasons or are sure that you will have to refer to again.

Don't forward any e-mails that ask you to forward them because “these people need our help” or “your friends need to be warned about this”. Most are hoaxes or scams.

Out-going e-mail.

The first point is to ask yourself whether sending each email is really necessary?

Make the Subject line clearly show the main point of sending the email to that person.

Use the Signature option to provide your contact details.

Keep your e-mails short and use short paragraphs – no more than 3 sentences that all focus on the same aspect of the e-mail's subject.

Security Tip: Don't use the CC option when you have to send the same message to more than one person unless you are sure that everyone that it is being sent to will be happy with everyone else on the list seeing their e-mail address.

Otherwise, use Bcc (Blind carbon copy) instead which will not let any of the recipients see any e-mail address except yours and their own.

Opportunity Knocking?

The regular appearance of a particular question in your mail should also be a pointer that some of your brochures or even instructional manuals may need reviewing to remove any possibility of misunderstanding.

If the question does not relate directly to your current products or services, it may highlight a gap in the market where you could introduce something new or promote something you currently offer to a new bunch of hungry customers.

Your Home

Clutter

The stuff which we hoard in our homes steals our time because we must care for it and provide space for it and finally pay money to get rid of it.

Have you cleared out some of your junk before and ended up with almost as much as you started with?

I'd start with enthusiasm and energy which quickly faded as I became stressed about the hours ticking away with little in the way of results.

Tackle each section of your home systematically and you'll soon see positive benefits.

Clutter black-spots could almost sink your 'ship'. They actually costs you money! You *pay* rent or council rates for the space and you *lose* the benefit, which could be financial or emotional, that you will only have when the rubbish is gone.

Don't try to do it all in a day. A couple of hours' effort at one of these can give you a great start with your campaign to reclaim your home and your life. After that, your energy and enthusiasm wanes, so do something else with the rest of your day.

Memento Madness

We treasure our memories and enjoy them, but the tacky tourist tat may take over a large part of our homes. Do you have tatty souvenirs of long-ago, or even forgotten, holidays?

We don't actually want tacky, plastic trinkets or even bigger and junkier souvenirs – we look for something which is within our budget to remind us of the wonderful time; the friends, meals and adventures we had on that trip. That's why we pay a few dollars for that plastic ornament and carry it home to join the souvenirs of the other trips we've had.

But, then it takes our time to keep it dust-free and fills our living space until it breaks and is finally put in the uncomplaining earth as non-degradable land-fill. The memories don't disappear when we tie up the plastic bag ready for collection, just the expensive dust-catcher.

The best memories are those which are in our brains and our hearts.

Filed and forgotten

It's the same, sad story with other things. We cut out, or copy, articles which we enjoyed or thought might “be useful one day”. After a while, they fill boxes which clutter our already groaning bookshelves. Many of us probably keep the whole magazine as well!

If we're serious about cooking, we'll store hundreds of recipes in binders, gather the ingredients and push it on a testing panel of friends or family. Then, when we find that they don't like it, we don't cook it again. But, we continue to store the ingredients and that useless recipe until the end of time.

Other people collect jokes or patterns etc. How many do you have and how many of those will you ever use again?

Kitchen

Pull out and get rid of the packets of food which are past its “Best By” date, chipped crockery (serious germs hide in even the smallest crevices), empty or dried-up jars of spices, preserving equipment if you don't preserve anything, gadgets which you don't use, containers without their lids and lids which don't fit any of your containers.

Medicine cabinet

Get rid of your dried-out cosmetics, expired prescriptions for illnesses that you probably recovered from years ago, colognes that smell worse than we ever could.

Be ruthless with all over-the-counter medicines, lotions and pills which have passed their “Best By” date. They not only have probably lost their effectiveness but, worse, could have changed the way they would affect you and actually cause harm if you used them!

Wardrobes etc.

You have clothes, shoes and other accessories that don’t fit or are out of style (if they were ever *in style!*) Put them in a charity bag or three so that someone who really needs a hand can benefit from them. Your reward will be the extra space.

Please don’t rush out for new clothes to refill it! If you kept some that don’t fit you any more for when that new diet kicks in, throw them away now. When you’re slimmer again, buy something which fits the new you and is in fashion too!

Getting a couple of new outfits will be more incentive from now to that happy day, than just being able to fit back in to your old stuff.

Workshop

They’re useless, take up valuable space and they’re probably a potential fire or poisoning hazard.

Get rid of all of your:

- × part-used cans of dried-out paint,
- × dried-up or fur-less rollers,
- × bald paintbrushes and those full of dried paint,
- × bits of wood that you’ll never use,
- × fittings (hinges, handles, knobs) that don’t match anything in your home,
- × anything that’s broken (you don’t need it or you’d have already found the time to fix it),

- × unfinished projects or parts for projects which you never started and
- × remnants from jobs you finished.

Garage

Pass on to a charity all but the most treasured of those toys that even your grandchildren outgrew.

You might be able to sell any remaining parts for the cars you’ve already got rid of through a cheap classified advert in your newspaper and then get something for your present car.

If you’ve got any:

- × tires that don’t fit anything you own or would be dangerous to use
- × excess or damaged barbecue or sports equipment (unless it’s your current sport),
- × unused or unusable camping gear, sun lounge or pool cover

..... then, you know what to do.

Your Car(s)

Our vehicles generally become smaller versions of our homes, so your junk level at home will be reflected in your car.

If you’ve got a Winnebago® or similar, there could be more junk in that than you have in your whole house!

Now is the time to hit your accelerator and get rid of:

- × expired air fresheners,

- × candy wrappers and squashed candies,
- × litter bags - great idea but don't carry 3 spare packets in the car!
- × broken or incomplete tools,
- × unused gadgets and decorations,
- × more than 1 rug,
- × maps which are out of date or not likely to be required for future trips
- × more umbrellas than the number of people that usually ride in your car and
- × ALL jiggling decorations.

Take all food, drink, containers and wrappers out of the vehicle with you after every trip.

Keep a small, lined bin in the garage and clip a small broom and dustpan to the side of it, so it's quick and easy to give your car the once-over each week or after any long trip.

Your Basement

Put on your miner's lamp and bag up:

- × magazines and books that you didn't read or finish or won't read again
- × empty storage boxes, cans and bottles
- × containers with unknown contents
- × old chairs that nobody can or would ever sit in

- × games equipment that’s damaged or never used
- × equipment for discarded hobbies.

Garden Shed

Like your garage, there could be more potential health or fire hazards here!

Put on your thick gloves and get rid of:

- × Empty bottles and cans
- × part-used packets of garden chemicals and all unlabeled ones
- × damaged sprayers and other gear
- × odd gloves or boots
- × seeds that you’ll never plant
- × broken tools, pots and trays and those which you won’t use soon.

The Big Stuff

The difference between children’s toys and adult’s toys is not just the cost, but the quantity and the space they absorb.

People that have an attic, spare room or extra space in their garage will resist any suggestion to throw out anything, with the casual excuse, “It will come in useful some day.”

The truth is that, unless you can find all of its bits and remember how to use it, then the time you’ll waste getting ready is probably worth more than it would cost you to pick up another,

probably cheaper and more recent, advanced version when and if you might ever have an actual need for it.

You can add to that:

- the value of the space taken up by all the unused items you’ve salted away
- the bruises you’ve received when you bump into them (or they fall on you) and
- the stress because you resist your partner’s repeated hints to *get rid of the junk*.

Sensible Recycling

Some of the stuff which you discard may be useful and gratefully accepted by charitable groups, either for resale or for use in therapy programs and workshops.

A friend bought a couple of hundred old wooden matchboxes but had no use for the matches. She thought someone might be able to use them – two shopping bags full. So, she phoned a local workshop.

They were delighted because an associated group provided therapy for people recovering from accidents and illnesses. The group packed some matches, glue and a plain wooden tray into a craft kit. The patients filled in their time, and improved their dexterity and concentration, by gluing the matches in patterns onto the trays which were then sold in the charity’s store.

Schools also use old newspapers, egg trays, soft drink bottles etc. Phone them to find out if they can use the sort of material you will discard.

Make sure that they collect it with minimum delay or that you take it to them promptly. Your focus must be to reclaim your home. Having bags or boxes waiting months for collection means you are no closer to *your* goal.

Be responsible with the stuff which you dispose of so that you don't add to our environmental problems. If in doubt about how to handle, say, old cleaning chemicals, phone your council waste-disposal department for advice.

Useful Links

All links provided in this book were live and accurate at the time of writing.

The author, publisher and distributor do NOT offer any endorsement or any kind of warranty for the content, products or services at any of the sites listed.

All readers must accept that any use they make of links in this book is entirely at their own risk.

This list contains mostly software for customer management but which has calendaring and other useful time-management functions and support.

Shareware are programs which the programmer or software company will let you use for a specified period, usually under 2 months, without charge. Then, you have to pay the set fee if you want to continue to use the program. Some features of the program may be limited or unavailable during the free trial period.

Shareware programs may be cheaper to buy than the full commercial programs which you buy from your local computer store. They are usually of high quality because, if they do not become almost indispensable to you, you will stop using them before the trial period finishes and the supplier will not get any payment to cover their distribution or other costs.

<http://www.programming.de/> **SuperDiary** is a Shareware program (free trial, then you pay if you want to continue to use it) with just about every feature you might want.

<http://www.programming.de/> Check out the other free and shareware programs here, especially **XML Address Book** and **World Time Clock**.

<http://www.franklincovey.com/> Established supplier of proven paper systems and software solutions.

<http://www.maximizer.com/> Business contact management software for individuals and companies.

<http://www.frontrange.com/GoldMine/> Business contact management software for individuals and companies.

<http://www.sourceforge.net/projects/sugarcrm/> A free, open-source Customer management system with calendaring functions. Some commercial versions are also available.

<http://www.vip-qualitysoft.com/> Their **VIP Organizer** software (free trial available) helps individuals to manage appointments, workflow, events, projects etc by focusing on the tasks which are most likely to produce 80% of their successful results.

<http://www.timeanddate.com/> Find the time and date in almost any location on Earth when it is a specified time where you are – or the other way around.

Specialized Software

<http://www.copernic.com/> A quick, smart search engine which finds any file, email or attachment on your computer’s hard drive.

<http://www.openoffice.org/> Office software suite available for most types of computer systems and in many languages.

<http://www.marratechfree.com/> Free downloadable video-conferencing software. Full commercial version available from <http://www.marratech.com/>

<http://www.grisoft.com/> Grisoft offer free and paid versions of their **AVG** anti-virus and firewall software, A hardware or software firewall (the AVG one is software) is essential for any computer which is used to access material from the Internet.

Goals Ahead!

I hope that you’ve started to use some of the material in this book and may be already seeing some benefits out of it.

When you start reaching some of the goals you’ve set for yourself, you’ll have one task which will become easier and more enjoyable:

You’ll have to set bigger and better goals.

It’s easier because the first part of the journey, which you’ve already covered, will prove that you probably set your first goals much lower than you needed to.

The day when you realize that this world is ready to give you just about whatever you are prepared to work for will be like all the happy birthdays you’ve ever experienced in one.

The sooner that you set your own goals and write your plan to get there, the sooner that day will arrive for you.

All the best.

Maddie Frazier

Articles

This is background material which is relevant but isn't essential for getting your time usage under control. I hope that you'll find it interesting and even useful.

How to Really Get Started

The biggest problem for many motivated, time-poor people is procrastination.

To fix this, you just have to realize:

- why we put things off
- the enormous cost we pay and
- some really easy ways to reduce and, finally, eliminate it.

Although they are unlikely to say so, most procrastinators are fairly comfortable in the rut which they share with their worries, debts, health issues and missed opportunities. They can't justify to themselves the effort and expense required to change their situation.

This usually only changes when an acute personal situation gives them little choice but to take action. That's not the best way, because the extra stress and effort which they unexpectedly have to deal with always takes a toll on their health and other resources.

You'll get better results with less expense and effort if you begin now before there is any pressing need. That puts you in charge, planning your own future rather than being forced to make abrupt and costly changes because of circumstances which you cannot control.

Why Do I Put Off Important Things?

The reasons which people tell themselves are valid for delaying action may include:

- **It's not ready.** They want everything to be perfect before they have to stir themselves to

action. But, that’s not how successful projects are done in the real world. Most projects, even many which involve very large investment, begin while some parts may still not be fully tested.

Some things cannot be fully tested until they are in front of the customers. If software was never released until it was perfect, we’d all still be using electric typewriters.

- Some people feel a buzz when they’re in a tight situation and may delay action on some of their most important tasks to create that tense situation. The drawbacks are the effect their reputation, potential level of success and their health in the longer term.
- Sometimes, it’s a project which the person responsible or, more likely, a subordinate who has no desire or emotional/financial connection to it, lets it slide while they concentrate on their favorite projects.

But, of course, the outcome of every project which we are required to invest our time and skills in has an effect on what projects and opportunities we get to work on in the future. Everyone needs our best efforts. Word about delayed or failed projects always travels wider and higher than the good news of our most successful accomplishments.

- Some projects have no appeal to us, so we delay doing them.
- Bad work-flows and methods often add to this problem.

Anything which you put in a pending box, rather than dealing with it when you first see it, will cost you more valuable time for review when you go back to it. So, “Deal with it now” – either do the work or pass it to the person who will.

Make a note to check that it is done because you might be held responsible at a later time since it had passed through your in-box.

If you have to get other people to help you on a project, your timetables have to mesh. That’s best sorted out when you first look at the project. If you leave it ‘just a few days’, there’s more chance

that other projects or commitments have filled out the other participants’ schedules and that means delays which might have easily been avoided.

We only need to really see what we’re depriving ourselves of. It’s better in every way for us to work that out for ourselves rather than be pushed into the realization through sudden catastrophe and upset.

Delay that’s Okay.

Sometimes we should put off some tasks. You should not push yourself beyond reasonable limits for a temporary benefit but risk more serious long-term consequences.

If we are physically unable to handle some aspects, because of illness, or we don’t have the resources we need to do a professional standard job of it then tell those affected the full situation.

People appreciate honest and straight-forward dealing. You may lose that particular task and the fee, but will keep your reputation intact or even enhance it.

Your Work and Your Family

Even if you work at home, clear your mind and your conversation, as far as possible, of work topics and concerns when you are with your family and friends to give your mind a chance to refresh itself.

If you work from home, you should try to have a separate room, even a shed, for your business activities and a separate phone-line. For financial or space reasons, this may not be practical when you start, so you have to be aware of the effect which your business has on your family.

Fit your business, as far as possible in with the needs of your family.

Make sure that, if any of them answer the phone for your business, they know what to say and will create a good impression. Otherwise, ask them to let the answering machine kick in before they answer any calls during business hours.

Most modern answering machines put incoming calls through a loudspeaker as it is recorded so your family can still answer their personal calls once they know who the caller is.

Don't forget to thank them for helping you. Cash or some other reward is always welcome but a few sincere words of thanks will also help to make them more comfortable about answering other calls in future.

It May Not Be Our Fault But We Can Fix It!

How we value time and use it comes from what we've learned from others. If our parents and teachers encouraged us to value our time and were themselves good role models, then we probably followed their lead.

If we were left to do as we wished, and found we could get away with doing less than our best, then we probably continue to do things that way instead.

Now, we're adults and fairly set in our ways. I don't know many people who change how they use or lose time until outside circumstances or a significant, abrupt change in their work or home life demands that they do it.

That's not the best way, because desperate and unplanned, but necessary, changes add extra stress on our ability to handle the situation. And then there will probably be longer term consequences for our health and level of success.

Most of us become comfortable with our rut and the success, or lack of it, which we have. We're too comfortable to attack the piles of paper and other impediments to greater comfort and achievement – it just looks too hard.

It's actually easier to move forward than it is to put up with whatever discomfort and stress we have now. The trick is that we see a huge mountain which we must climb but don't realize how a few small, easy steps along the right short-cuts will get us a long way nearer the top.

Paper-less Office, Ha!

Can you remember the positive but overblown predictions from many experts, that the march of technology would deliver great efficiency benefits in our workplaces and more leisure for all?

There was a lot of excitement about ‘the paperless office’? Is your workplace any less awash in paper and folders than, say, ten years ago?

I thought not!

What happened?! Well, the paperless office had no real chance of changing human nature – maybe in another thirty years, or sooner if we run out of trees. We were ready to get rid of paper forms but, after a few problems which were caused by human error or imperfect use of unproven equipment, we also wanted to keep 2 copies of everything just in case something went wrong with the new technology!

And, of course, that was so much easier with the new equipment. Instead of waiting a day for the secretarial pool to return a single copy of your carefully worked-out letter that was to be circulated around the departments of your business with a “Please Sign and Circulate” list paper-clipped to it, you just tapped a couple of buttons on the personal computer on your desk. Then you could watch individually-addressed copies for each Department Head, along with one for each of their assistants, roll out of your personal printer in just a couple of minutes.

Of course, each of these people would copy your letter to their staff and also produce a paper copy of the reply email which they sent to you to put in their own over-stuffed filing cabinets.

Almost everybody makes copies of any vaguely relevant article from the torrent of general and business-specific magazines which cascade on to their desks in printed or electronic form. We all carefully file the copies of the articles, but never throw away the magazines!

And, we also need extra boxes and shelves for them.

Even today, an over-flowing book-case is the default background for every executive’s portrait – even the efficiency experts! But the top of their desks are clear (where do you think that the books and papers in the book-case came from?)

Home Office

One of the advantages of working from home, full or part-time, is that you can be close to your family and your refrigerator too.

A great disadvantage for many of us is that family, friends and other visitors usually treat us as if we were not working at all.

They talk, or even shout or play loud music (not great for our concentration or giving a professional impression when we’re answering a client’s phone call and the “Bald Vultures” are providing a loud background accompaniment.) Some will drop in and expect us to continue our conversation about the weekend football and some may even want a run-down on how we do our work or discuss some get-rich-quick scheme they have while we’re in ‘business mode’!

Not all of us have the means to set up a separate shed for our work though that’s a great way to handle these problems.

We need to politely but firmly demonstrate that we’re earning our living and need some privacy and, sometimes, a lot of understanding and support.

Many of the home-workers I know get dressed every day as if they were going to a regular office even if their longest trip that day will be to their letterbox. They set regular times for working and stick to them, whatever the alternatives on offer.

After a while, your family and friends will accept the situation. Then you just have to discipline yourself to maintaining your attitude and level of production.

Buddy, Can You Spare Some Time?

We all have the same amount of time in a day, right?

Theoretically, you get the same 24 hours which I do – the same with your Bank Manager, your Boss, your spouse and the average ten-year-old child.

If we accept that everyone gets 24 hours and nobody has figured a way to store any time for them to use later, we have to focus on making the best use of our share when it’s available to us.

The next question is, “How Much of Your Time Is *Really* Yours?”

You either have a job or family commitments and many of us, these days, have both. That’s time you give to a common purpose and you get some obvious benefit from. That portion is pretty difficult to change very much in the short-term.

And you really need around eight hours of sleep to refresh you for another day at the office or home.

The real difference between time-rich and time-worn comes from the way we use every waking minute.

If we waste more time worrying about:

- what might happen,
- what happened in the past which we cannot do anything about,
- what others think of us (they probably don’t think about us much at all! Or
- why we let all that time slip away (We did. It’s done. Move on)

.... then we’re just wasting much of the increasingly valuable time we have left.

And that’s not all. The effect on our mental image of our self and even our body’s general health is affected when we fill our minds with these negative messages.

The time to change all that is now. Whatever time and effort it takes will be repaid a hundred times or more.

You’ll help yourself and also help everyone around you have a better day, year or years.

A Salesman’s Hidden Hour

One of my first bosses used to say that most salesmen (they were almost all men at that time) threw away about an hour a day.

He pointed out that they would plan their route to make as many calls in the same area on the same day, saving time and gasoline.

But, when they got to the buyer’s office, they almost hibernated until they were admitted to see him. That waiting time could be used to sort their diaries, brochures and fill in the boring reports which mostly got left until the salesman needed the money from the related Petty Cash docketts.

He also believed that they set a level of sales and commissions which they worked for, but only a few ever put in any effort to reach higher levels. He could quote figures and bury you in charts which showed the difference between an average performer that worked just hard enough to keep his job and the “star salesman” was often just a couple of calls a day.

But, wouldn’t that mean working a longer day? It rarely did because the average performer could comfortably have a couple less coffee breaks with other salesmen he met on the road and that would give them the time!

He would always finish these lectures with, “Sales is a numbers game. Every salesman that realizes there’s a ratio between the number of calls they make to their sales level, starts to leap up the sales charts. Then, I’ve got to start teaching some more, because some other company will grab the new star to be their Sales Manager.”

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