

organizing your day

time management techniques
that will work for you

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introduction

We have discovered something we want to share with you: time management can be fun. Oh, maybe not birthday party fun or Disney World fun or winning-the-game fun. But nothing beats the satisfaction of coming to the end of the day and feeling it was successful. That's real fun!

After we have a good time at Disney World, we come away saying, "Disney did a good job." But when we come to the end of a satisfying day in which we accomplished significant things, we look back and say, "I did a good job." In the long run, that feeling adds a lot more to life than a good vacation.

Sometimes we are admonished to remember that we are human "beings," not human "doings." But people are designed to be doers, to accomplish significant things during our time on earth. What we actually hate is to choke our lives up with low-priority activities that mean nothing at the end of the day. We recoil from wasting our lives on a myriad of things that have little or no significance in the long run.

One of the goals of this book is to help you accomplish easily and quickly those necessary but uninspiring activities that comprise much of our daily lives so you can turn your

attention to the significant things you want to do. As you read and use the ideas in this book, you will begin to notice that piles of paper are no longer on your desk at work, and piles of clothes are slowly disappearing at home. The bills are getting paid. You are able to get home in the evening on time because you have eliminated time wasters at work. Somehow, when you manage your time, things that used to be neglected just get done.

Another goal is to help you turn your heart and mind to the excitement of discovering the things that are really important in your life and getting those done. For most people that will mean two things: deepening personal relationships with family and friends and accomplishing meaningful projects.

Some of us have a hard time creating and using systems. Either we don't have the skills to design a system or we design one that is so complicated we can't maintain it. In some cases, once we find a really good system, we have trouble being consistent. This is the reason we have boiled the secrets of successful time management down to the big ten we spotlight at the end of this introduction. Focus on these. Weave several into your life over a period of time and one day you will wake up and find your life has changed.

When you discover the power of managing what goes on in your daily life so that it works better than you ever thought possible, you may want to let out a little shout of joy. As your life becomes vigorous with significant accomplishments, you will feel a surge of enthusiasm.

But first, there are problems to be solved. "The time is out of joint; O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!" was how Shakespeare's Hamlet expressed his personal problem.

What has that to do with us? Hamlet has little to do with us, unless you are reading this book because you also have a problem with time that is out of joint and needs to be set right. Like him, you are the only one who can do what it takes to fix it.

This leads us to the twofold question of this book: Why are you (like many of us) having problems with time management and what can you do to change things for the better? In other words, how can you move from the dark clouds Hamlet was sitting under into the whoohoo! sunlight you are looking for?

When you finish this book, you will know these two things: how your time got out of joint and how to set it right. Once you have acted on what you know, we want to hear the shouting.



Let us hear from you. After you have read this book and made changes that benefit your life and the lives of those who matter to you, you want someone to know what you have done and to care. We care and would love to hear your good reports.

Contact Sandra at www.messies.com and/or Marsha at www.sortitout.net.

True or false?

1. Life seems to be getting more frenetic.
2. I want my life to count for more.
3. I am looking for a time management system that really works.

If you answered true to any of these you will enjoy this book. Read on!

ten time management choices that can change your life

The following are choices you can make to bring needed change to your life. The chapters indicated will fill you in on what you need to know, so you can fold them into your life one at a time. When you have successfully added one, go on to another.

1. Dream Big—Chapter 4

Dare to wonder what your life would be like if your time worked out just right, if it were (gasp!) perfect. Don't skip over this as a superfluous exercise. Remember the old saying: He who aims at nothing is likely to hit it. The opposite is also true: He who aims carefully at something is likely to hit it.

2. Focus: Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing—Chapter 5

Creative and interesting people have many areas about which they are enthusiastic. They overextend themselves in their passion for life. Keep the passion but learn how to prioritize so you will accomplish the goals that are most important to you.

3. Do It Now—Chapter 9

There are two kinds of procrastination that plague us all: procrastination of the urgent and less critical but chronic procrastination. No matter what kind is holding you back from doing what needs to be done when it needs to be done, you can get yourself unstuck.

4. Take Control of Your Projects—Chapters 10, 11, 12

Some projects are simple and it is easy to let the ball drop on these. Some projects are complicated and we need a method to clarify the steps. You will be surprised at how your life will move forward as you apply the principles found in these chapters to all of your projects.

5. Delegate, Delegate, Delegate—Chapter 13

Should you delegate a responsibility? To whom? How do you go about it? Delegating well so you can use your time efficiently is an important part of a life well lived. The key? Just do it!

**6. Manage Interruptions, Distractions, and Time Wasters—
Chapters 14, 15**

None of us lives on a desert island. In this era of electronic communication, we are more likely to be interrupted than ever before. In addition, internal distractions creep in to dissipate our time.

7. Make and Use an Effective Schedule—Chapters 16, 17

A well-crafted schedule is a wonderful thing. It's like a powerful engine in a car and will move your life forward.

**8. Use the Right Tools—
Chapter 18**

To have the greatest success in sticking to a schedule, you need the right tools. Whether you develop them yourself or buy what is on the market, the right tools will be invaluable. Some people don't want to be bothered with tools. Bad idea. Check out what is available and choose what meets your need and your personality.

9. Hang On to a Few Powerful Habits—Chapter 20

People who manage their time well have developed a few consistently applied and useful habits. Weaving some of what you learn in this chapter into your life will free you from unnecessary time wasters.

**10. Organize Your Space—
Chapters 21, 22, 23**

"Stuff" in the way, "stuff" to be cared for—these impede our progress and demand our time. Whether papers are piling up in your office or out-of-place items are messing up your home, decluttering your life will free you to do what is really important.

No matter what is holding you back, you can overcome it. Choose to incorporate these ten habits into your life. Your productivity will soar as will your personal satisfaction. There is a wonderfully upgraded life waiting for you. Just begin one step at a time to move in that direction.

1 something strange has happened to time

too many options

Yesterday is a canceled check; tomorrow is a promissory note; today is the only cash you have. Spend it wisely.

Anonymous

If you think people in today's world have a unique problem with time, you are absolutely correct. While we were not paying attention, something happened. That something is progress. Modern advancement is like a wonderful train full of good things for our lives. It transports prosperity and convenience beyond the dreams of the past, and even beyond the reach of many in today's world, but it brings some baggage as well.

In his book *Margin*, Richard A. Swenson uses an enlightening illustration. Let us suppose that a five-hundred-car train were bound for a needy third world village, loaded with medicine, automobiles, libraries, food, recreational equipment, and a good supply of gold.

Scattered randomly among the five hundred cars, however, were fifty cars containing deadly viruses, pollutants, poisonous gases, illicit drugs, and nuclear weapons poised to explode if they were jostled.

That's the way it is with modern progress. Some very good things have come our way, but unexpected problems have gotten into the mix—among them our problem with time.

Time got very much out of joint when technology entered modern life. The average American spends thirty-one and a half hours a week watching television (2006, Nielson). Yikes! That's almost a second job. We spend more time commuting, since the automobile has made it possible to travel farther to work. The cell phone connects us to more and more people wherever we are, so we can talk many more hours. When modern household conveniences made cooking, cleaning, and laundry easier, women raised their standard of house-keeping and added other time-consuming pursuits as well. Life got less physical but more hectic.

In short, modern conveniences give us more options, more opportunities, and increased stimulation to participate in more activities. That's good. But many activities are time wasters. That's bad. It is such a good train, many of us have not realized that it has muddled up our lives in ways our grandpa did not have to worry about. People are feeling the pressure. As a result, an important concept is growing more and more important in modern life—time management, which is really activity management, which actually boils down to self-management.

Our job in this book is to identify and derail the time management difficulties that got mixed in with the good life we have developed for ourselves. This book spotlights realistically the issues you and many people just like you face every day. As you read about people in real situations facing actual problems, you will begin to recognize the strategies you can apply to bring you real success both at home and on the job.

As you read this book, spot your personal problems with time management so you can set about getting rid of them.

The Problems Look Something like This

You come into work early and leave late and tired. You want a change. In short, you are overwhelmed.

Or you work all day at home, and when your husband comes in, looks around, and asks what you've been doing all day, you have trouble knowing what to say, because you aren't really sure.

What is the problem, or better yet, what is the solution?

Michael

Michael's company downsized and let his co-worker go. Now Michael's doing two jobs in middle management and calling it one. Stress is building. He has just found out he has high blood pressure. He needs help and he needs it quickly.

No matter how diligently he focuses, he's not able to get his work done, even though he's efficient, on top of things, and hardworking. In addition to his regular tasks, his bosses schedule meetings over which he has no control. Often he is interrupted by people calling or dropping in unannounced. Unfortunately, he is not good at delegating and his assistant isn't very helpful anyway.

At the end of one particularly rough week, he had hardly any energy left for his wife and children. He thought, *I need help. I don't want to keep going like this.*

Many of today's employees have to work harder and longer to get their work done, especially since downsizing means they have to carry a heavier load. A third of those in middle management are frustrated with their life-work balance according to *USA Today*. Michael was one of that group.

Linda

Linda teaches fourth grade. She is going to have a larger class this year so she will have extra paperwork. She is an excellent teacher but somehow never learned how to do the paperwork efficiently. She does report cards at the last minute and other reports are often tardy.

She's a single mom with one son and she cares for her elderly mom. To fit in all of her activities, she stays up late at night and often is late to school.

Each morning Linda has to exercise, shower, fix breakfast for her son and mom, give her mom her meds, gather her papers, and get in the car by 8:15. At school she wrestles with keeping straight the forms from the office, homework papers, and various kinds of permission slips from the students. During the workday, she has a couple of breaks and she enjoys socializing with her friends in the teachers' lounge. She realizes she could be correcting papers or doing lesson plans but she tells herself she will catch up on work at home.

After school her real job begins. She ferries her son to his activities, helps her mom bathe, washes clothes, cooks, unloads and loads the dishwasher, grades some papers, feeds the dog, handles the mail, answers her emails, and falls into bed exhausted.

As teaching loads become more stressful and increased requirements are added, Linda is feeling the pressure. And the complexities of family life add to the stress. Workers who are part of the sandwich generation, caring for both their parents and their children, like Linda, have an added time crunch at home.

Bernice

Bernice is a happy, self-employed personal coach who works from home. Keeping up with information for her clients, she amasses a great deal of paper on a variety of topics. Her

schedule is tight with back-to-back fifty-minute phone appointments. She allows ten minutes between calls and often uses that time to make other calls, prepare for the next client, go to the bathroom, or walk her dog. She seldom takes the time to put the accumulating papers away. As a result, they pile up.

Bernice doesn't have much time to develop friends or read for pleasure. She watches TV primarily for the news as it relates to her clients.

One day follows another. Her work has become her life but it is unsatisfying in some nebulous way she is just beginning to feel. Her spirit is dry. She encourages others to live a balanced life but doesn't take her own advice.

If asked to pinpoint her biggest problem area, she would say it is paper accumulation. However, to the objective observer, it is obvious the problem is one of life balance. Though she coaches others on time management, she does not recognize that she has a problem with it herself.

Bernice is an excellent coach partly because she goes beyond the call of duty for her clients, researching, referring, emailing them forms they can use, and doing anything necessary to make sure they are helped. But she neglects her own needs.

Time management is a vital issue for entrepreneurs like Bernice. They are often creative types whose strengths lie in their freewheeling style not in their organizational skills. But to move their ideas forward, they must harness their creativity with down-to-earth management of their time and activities. Because they are flooded with ideas and see many opportunities to overwork, it is crucial that they use their time productively.

Marshall

Before his date to retire, Marshall counted the days. He had been contemplating it for months. He planned to go

to the library and read for hours; he wanted to plant a vegetable garden. He would spend time with friends, teach his grandchildren woodworking skills, learn a foreign language, and volunteer at his church. As he put it, he wanted to sing his song.

But having retired, things were not working out well. One of his projects was to write a book about his life, an important legacy he wanted to leave his family, but he never got far because his daughters would call, a repairman would arrive, or he had to get the oil in his car changed.

Where does all the time go? he wonders after trying his new lifestyle for seven months. Then he says what he has heard many other retirees say, “How did I ever have time to go to work?”

The worst part is he feels incompetent. He remembers when he used to be productive in the workforce and the satisfaction it gave him. If he keeps frittering away his days, he is afraid he will be too old to do all of the things he wants to do and he will leave his song unsung.

Retirement forces people to abandon the idea that it is the job that has been holding them back. For most people the depressing truth is that they have never learned to be organized, disciplined, or motivated on their own. On their jobs they were not solely responsible to be self-starters or self-motivators. Nor did they have to set up their own schedules. The job, with all of its preset requirements, did that for them. A day on the job is more easily organized than a day at home.

Marshall had envisioned his retirement filled with activities that were both enjoyable and significant. Instead, he found himself picking up cleaning, unstopping the toilet, reading the newspaper, watching afternoon TV, and buying groceries. The weeds of everyday living were choking out the activities he had dreamed of doing. As he faced the end of his journey, he was beginning to wake up to the fact that he needed to

learn and apply time management skills to his life if he was going to sing that song.

Time Management

We need to emphasize two basic facts before we continue:

1. The focus of time management is priorities and stems from self-management. Self-management is the powerhouse of time management. Self-management makes it happen. In reality you can't manage elusive time but you can manage the very-much-in-the-now you.
2. Techniques, tricks, systems or whatever you want to call real time management know-how can be very valuable. Some books downplay organizing systems and indicate that if you have enough focus and self-control, you'll be okay. Not so. You need good skills as well.

To make time work for you, you need systems. Without a system, things fall apart. You may have several systems and life is going along swell until you hit a spot for which you have no system. When that happens, you need to develop a new one.

Is Your Time Train on Track?

If you see yourself in any of the four stories above, you are not alone. But it does not have to be this way. Instead of life being a day-to-day drudgery, your life can become a source of pleasure and productivity.

Michael, Linda, Bernice, and Marshall have to recognize the problem before they can find the solutions. All of us who experience these problems must face the same issue—realizing that something needs to change and caring enough to do something about it.

Your Turn

- Briefly tell the story of where you are in the area of time management. Which of the stories above sounds the most like you?

- Look at the following list and check the areas where your time is out of joint. Add others if you wish.
 - family life
 - other relationships
 - career
 - education
 - house
 - health

- What do you already do well? Laundry, dishes, filing, for example.

- In what areas do you need to do better? Bill handling, getting out of the house on time every day, for example.

Tips

1. Control your time. Don't let time control you.
2. Be realistic about how long a task will take by timing what you do and writing it down for next time.
3. Locate specifically where you are running into trouble timewise and concentrate on fixing those places.
4. Focus on solutions not problems.
5. Group your activities and you will save time.

Yes or no?

1. Are you trying to do too much in the time you have?
2. Do you know what the chief time hindrances are in your life?
3. Are you willing to make some changes in how you use your time?

If you answered yes to any of these, you are ready for the next chapter.