



Taming Time

Have you noticed anything new about news broadcasts? Not long ago, all-news cable stations began to position a scrolling bar at the bottom of our TV screens. The goal: to provide concise “headlines” that go beyond what the on-screen news anchors and correspondents are covering. Programmers now even sometimes add a *second* headline bar to add a layer of text to the scrolling one.

Why do they do this? Because the news now changes so rapidly and the volume of fresh information has become so great that it simply can’t be presented any longer within the time constraints of a typical news broadcast. Moreover, many viewers don’t have the time to wait for the news. They want it all at once, *now*. Programmers also realize that people have become increasingly able to absorb several streams of information at once. So why not present it that way?

Our lives had begun to reflect a similar change long before this latest approach to communicating news took hold.

Technology has made possible the transmission of increas-



Making It Up in Volume

The Institute for the Future, Pitney Bowes Inc., and San Jose State University did a study in late 1996 that elicited responses from 972 employees of *Fortune* 1,000 companies. It revealed that workers send and receive an average of 178 messages each day via telephone (24 per day, on average), e-mail (14 per day), voicemail (11 per day), and other mediums. 84% indicated that at least three times per hour their work was interrupted by messages.

And this was in 1996. The numbers today would be *much* higher.

ing amounts of complex data that we need to do our jobs, manage our personal finances, communicate with friends, and organize the ever-expanding volume of information we receive.

As a result, we can be far more productive than perhaps any other generation in history. And we now have the tools—technological, strategic, and personal—that can help us in our efforts to manage our time, enhance our efficiency, and better organize our lives. All it takes is to be open to change and willing to embrace all those new things and ideas that are available to us. We can indeed tame time.

To do so, you must be alert to the challenges that all these changes have generated. For example, when you open your e-mail in the morning, you probably face a blizzard of communications. Some of these are about things you need to know. Many, however, are mere clutter—ads providing information *others* want you to know, but about which you couldn't care less, junk mail that clogs your in-box and demands your time to sort through.

And it's about more than e-mail. Maybe you remember when secretaries handled correspondence, answered phones, screened calls, provided reminders of deadlines and appointments, and helped to prioritize the day's tasks? Today, in many companies, managers sit before their computers, typing their own correspondence, answering their own phones and voicemail messages, making entries in their calendars, and setting priorities without the aid of an assistant. With all of the timesaving attributes of these new technologies, who, after all, needs a

secretary? It's just the way things are today. Yes, today's managers sometimes do have administrative assistants. But very often, they're shared among several people.

So these new ways of doing things eat into the time we once devoted to the *content* of our jobs. Like the little razor-toothed monsters in Stephen King's *The Langoliers*, routine responsibilities began eating time.

But there's good news, too. If our responsibilities have increased in proportion to the rate of technological progress, so—in many ways—has our freedom. The same tools that have made you into your own secretary have also provided you with ways of organizing data and creating communications that people only dreamed about 20 years ago. You can quickly e-mail a product photo to a prospective client, create a professional presentation during your lunch hour, and avoid a time-consuming business trip with a simple teleconference.

The new technologies that have blessed us with instantaneous communication and limitless access to information, though, have also brought us the nightmares of even swifter deadlines and work overload. We're working longer hours to manage our increased volume of information and new responsibilities. We're experiencing new kinds of stress. (How did you feel the first time you had to format a table with your word processing software?) And we're facing new kinds of time management challenges.

For instance, the ubiquitous personal computer—long hailed as a time-saving device—has sometimes proven to be just the opposite—a constant demand on our time resources. Voicemail simplifies our lives in some ways, but complicates them in others. Pagers and cell phones keep us in contact with the world no matter where we are—a decidedly mixed blessing when you have a romantic evening planned but are expecting an urgent call. The excuse of being unreachable no longer applies. And a “paperless society”? Paper manufacturers are making more money than ever.

The cost of poor time management skills, then, has risen



Something to Think About

Imagine a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. But, since it doesn't carry over a balance from one day to the next, any money you fail to spend today will be deleted from your account.

What would you do? You'd probably draw out every penny, every single day, before closing time. And—if you're smart—you'd invest some of it for your tomorrows.

Each of us has a bank very much like this imaginary one. It's called TIME.

Every morning it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off, as lost, whatever seconds you've failed to use to your advantage. It carries no balance. It permits no overdrafts. If you fail to make full use of the day's deposit, you lose what you don't use.

Each of us has the same number of seconds to use as we think best, but we don't all use them to best advantage and we don't all invest them wisely.

The clock is ticking. Don't let those precious seconds slip away.

dramatically—and it's measured as much in time as it is in money. We're more conscious of time passing than people were even 25 years ago. It almost seems that we *need* the increased life spans we enjoy today just to squeeze in all the living we want to do.

But we really *can* assert control over those things that eat into our productivity, our leisure time, and our peace of mind. It's largely a matter of being open to change, willing to adapt to new opportunities, and eager to develop and maintain the skills necessary to exert that control. How do you start? By analyzing who you are and your "style" of managing time.

Knowing Your Time Management Style

The preface to this book emphasizes the need to remember that we're all individuals. We do not all work—or even learn—in the same way. Some of us, for example, are *visual* in style: we learn by seeing. Some people, on the other hand, are *auditory* in style, learning and working best through hearing. And still others

are *tactile* by nature: they need the sense of touch to fully absorb what they need to know. (Athletes are a prime example.)

We're different in other ways, as well.

Some of us seem to have been born neat. Or childhood experiences, or being born a Virgo, or some other mysterious series of events made us so. Our childhood bedrooms were the pride of our lucky parents, our handwriting was (and remains) neat and tidy, and our sock drawers are perfectly arranged. Others of us are natural clutter magnets, with parents who despaired of getting us to clean our rooms. Today, our desks may vary much resemble the bedrooms of our youth. And some of us are a combination—neat one day and untidy the next, with some parts of our lives elegantly organized and other parts in a jumble.

And some of us are organized in what *appears* to be a wholly disorganized way. Perhaps you're the kind of person who can pull out a sheet of urgently needed paper from the middle of one of a dozen messy stacks in less time than it might take a more obviously organized person to retrieve it from a file cabinet. The *appearance* of disorganization (or organization, for that matter) can be deceiving.

As you learned in the preface, this book isn't about imposing a "one-style-fits-all" approach to managing your time. Your individual style should dictate which suggestions and tips you'll find most helpful. You may also find, however, that your style undergoes a slight—or even major—transformation as you adopt some of the suggestions you'll learn here. If you're the sort of person who never meets deadlines—whose library books were (or still are) always late—you'll most likely *want* to change some elements of your style. If you already manage your time well, you presumably are still open to fine-tuning your approach.

First, though, it's important to understand and acknowledge where you are, right now—today.

The Value of Time

You may have seen this popular, uncredited e-mail that has widely circulated on the Internet:

- To realize the value of one year, ask a student who failed a grade.
- To realize the value of one month, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby.
- To realize the value of one week, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper.
- To realize the value of one hour, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.
- To realize the value of one second, ask the person who just avoided a traffic accident.
- To realize the value of one millisecond, ask the person who won an Olympic medal.

Time has a value greater than any currency. We may leave our children the money we don't use in our own lifetimes, but we cannot leave them one millisecond of time.

How Time-Managed Are You, Really?

Before you can decide what kinds of changes you want to make—both in your professional career and in your personal life—you need to understand what kinds of choices (many of them subconscious) you're already making. You need to ask yourself some hard questions, delve deeply, and be brutally honest with yourself in answering them. In short, you need a picture of both your natural organizational style and the ways in which that style both supports and undermines your relationship with time.

The First Step

Start by taking a “snapshot” of your time management style. It will be a good first step on the way to understanding your behavior patterns. Check each item you answer “yes” to:

- Do you have a daily calendar (print or electronic) that you carry with you to and from work?
- Do you make a copy of every document you sign?
- Do you have maps in your car? If you don't have a car,

- would you keep maps in your car if you had one?
- Do you usually reconfirm appointments that were made some time ago?
 - Do you try to return a phone call within 24 hours?
 - In your home right now, do you have a customary place for your keys?
 - Do you keep most of your service manuals (e.g., for home appliances, computers, TVs) in a place where you can find them quickly?
 - At home right now, are there a pad and a pencil next to the phone?
 - Is there an official, set time when someone looking for you will find you in your office?
 - If you were to get sick tomorrow, would there be someone who could step in and handle your responsibilities at work with reasonable efficiency?
 - Do you have a filing system at home for your personal papers?
 - If the light bulb in the main lighting fixture in your living room were to burn out tonight, would you have another bulb at home in storage to replace it?
 - Do you ever take with you material to read when waiting to see a doctor?

If you found that eight or more of the above statements could apply to you, you almost certainly have solid management skills. If you identified with 11 or more, that's great—unless your well-organized behavior is obsessive. (More about that in the next chapter.) If you found fewer than eight statements applied, you probably have some work to do.

The Second Step

Now take a close look at the following questions. Check those you would answer in the affirmative.

- Have you had an unintentional finance charge in the last three months?

8 Time Management

- Do you take work home more than once a week?
- Do you stay at work beyond your official working hours more than twice a week?
- While in school, did you frequently cram before a test?
- Are you presently on a committee that bores you?
- Do you often put off returning a call to someone you don't like, even if it's important?
- Do you wait until you have a dental problem to see your dentist?
- Do you frequently skip breakfast?
- Do slips of paper with phone numbers, addresses, etc., tend to pile up in your purse or wallet, on your desk, in your pockets, etc.?

These questions assess whether certain deep-seated habits or environmental factors undermine the efficiency of your lifestyle. You might want to reread each question to get a few clues as to where you might need some work. If you have five or more *yes* answers, you need to consider some serious behavioral or environmental reprogramming. And unless you have a score of 0, there are facets of your life that need improvement.

How You Relate to Time

We each have a personal perspective of time, but most of us aren't even aware that we have subconscious feelings about time at all.

Read the following list, then choose five words that you feel *best* apply to time. Allow yourself a little creativity in your choices.

spent	white	friendly
opportunity	lively	unclaimed
exhausting	hollow	ready
busy	handy	effective
mountainous	relentless	tense
valley-like	available	empty
energetic	restless	bumpy
jammed	blank	exciting

How can you interpret your choices?

If you selected valley-like, white, hollow, available, unclaimed, ready, blank, or empty, you view time as something to be filled. On the one hand, this can be positive: you're probably not under very great time pressures. On the other hand, you may be too passive about time, allowing others to dictate its use to you.

If the following terms dominate your choices—spent, exhausting, mountainous, jammed, relentless, restless, tense, or bumpy—you view time as an enemy. This is dangerous. It can mean that you're presently overstressed by environment and responsibilities or that you feel that time controls you. In either case, some change will be necessary before you can truly manage your time.

Did the following words compose the majority of your choices: opportunity, busy, energetic, lively, handy, friendly, effective, exciting? If so, you're the kind of person who takes charge of time, who reshapes it to fit your goals and lifestyle.

What if no one category won? Like many people, you probably have mixed feelings about time. By the time you finish this book, those feelings should change. You should be able to view time as an ally, not as a bully or an enemy.

Your Environment

The words *environment* and *environmental* have already appeared several times in this chapter. Environment, in time management, has a broad but defined meaning. It refers to the major people, places, and things that affect the way people shape their time.

Environment Broadly defined in time management as the major people, places, and things that affect the way people shape their time.

Some environmental factors may *seem* beyond your control. What can you do about a spouse who never writes down phone messages? Suppose a color laser printer would simplify your life,



Taking Control

Make a list of items and activities that you confront on a daily or near-daily basis. Assign each a numerical value from 1 to 5, with 1 representing an item over which you have no control and 5 an item over which you have complete control.

For example, you have complete control over how you respond to the ringing of your alarm clock in the morning. You also have at least some control over whether or not you answer the telephone when it rings—more control, perhaps, at home than in the office. You may have absolutely no control of morning traffic, but you do have control over your reaction to it.

Begin by attempting to take more control of items you currently value as 4's—that is, not quite complete control, but almost. As you master these, begin with the 3's. And once a month, for the next six months, update your list and your valuations, reevaluating the level of control you're actually able to exert over each item. As you become more conscious of both the need to take control and your power to exercise control, you should begin to see a steady improvement in your "control ratings."

yet you (or your company) cannot afford one? What do you do if your boss is as dysfunctional as the pointy-haired one in *Dilbert*?

We'll examine these challenges in upcoming chapters. Remember: there are clever, subtle ways to conquer almost any obstacle.

In the meantime, you might find it useful to go back to the questions posed earlier and answer them as if you were your boss or your spouse. Then ask yourself these questions:

- Do my answers reflect the true nature of the person I am doing this for, or how I *feel* they are?
- Am I projecting my own values or fears onto them?
- To what extent do their traits affect my business performance?
- What genuine strengths of the other person can serve as an inspiration to me?
- What honest shortcomings of theirs must I find a way around?

- How can I, by example or persuasion, help them grow into better, more time-managed individuals?

If you can identify the ways in which your ability to manage your time is impacted by the behavior of others, it's possible that you can find ways of either changing the behavior of the other person or changing the impact it has on your own life. Even an adjustment in how you view the other person's behavior can change the way in which that behavior affects you.

Where Do the Hours Go?

How many hours do you spend a week watching TV? During which hour do you receive the most phone calls at work? How much reading do you do weekly? Think out your answers before reading ahead.

If you're an average American, each week you watch TV for 25 hours, read for just under three hours, and receive the most phone calls between 10 and 11 a.m.

Do these figures match your time utilization? If not, is it because you are *not* typical, or because you under- or overestimated?

Most people have a poorly defined sense of how they spend their time. Even if you have a good sense of how you allocate

your time, an inventory of how much time you spend doing various activities may reveal a surprise or two. A very useful diagnostic exercise would be to carry a small notebook with you for a few days and jot down your activities, indicating the time it took you to do each thing. You might want to do this just for

When to Call?

Many time management experts advise setting aside a specific hour each day to make and return phone calls. And the very best times to do that are either in the first two hours of the morning or in the last two hours of the afternoon. That's when you'll find most people in the office and most readily accessible by telephone. (If you make calls across multiple time zones, of course, you'll need to factor in the time difference.)



12 Time Management

your business activities—but you’ll find the experiment even more revealing if you include your personal time as well.

An analysis of your time allocation experiment results should include:

- The two most time-consuming activities in your daily *work* life.
- The two most time-consuming activities in your *personal* life.
- The two activities most *surprising* to you in how *much* time they consume.
- The two activities most *surprising* to you in how *little* time they consume.
- An honest appraisal of which activities you feel should consume *less* of your time.
- An honest appraisal of which activities you feel should consume *more* of your time.

The conclusions you draw from this exercise, and from an honest assessment of your time management style, should aid you in identifying those areas of your professional and personal life that could most benefit from change. You may find you need a renewed or decreased emphasis on various factors that affect your time management approach. Or, perhaps, applying more thoughtful time management techniques would be useful to you. You might even decide you need a more comprehensive practice of organizational strategies throughout all phases of your life.

But to achieve any of these things, you must first sweep away some time management myths that may be impeding your progress. That will be the subject of our next chapter.

Manager’s Checklist for Chapter 1

- Technology has provided us with useful time benefits, but also with challenges.
- With respect to time management, we are all individuals, and we work and learn differently.

- ❑ Your individual style will provide you with clues about the kinds of organizational suggestions and tips that will work best for you.
- ❑ You need to understand how you currently relate to time psychologically, in order to make appropriate behavioral and attitude changes.
- ❑ Self-diagnosis is a critical step in improving the way you manage time.