

BUSINESS TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS

By Debbie Williams

Leading time management experts agree that man cannot manage time, but there are some very effective ways to turn the tables so that it does not manage you. Listed below are tried and true techniques for controlling the workflow and streamlining the operations in your work at your desk and while on the road. Although most of these tips are not new, they do work, and sometimes we just need a gentle reminder to get us back on track.

DAILY OPERATIONS

- **Color-code tasks** in your planner or calendar. Use colored pens or colored dot stickers purchased from your local office supply or grocery stores.
- **Consolidate your daily tasks** for maximum efficiency: return phone calls several or all at a time, read and return emails once or twice daily rather than as they are received, group meetings at the end of the day, and run errands one or two days per week rather than every day.
- **Keep a time log** when you start a new job, project, or business. Maintain your log religiously for the first week, writing down everything you do from hour to hour. Review this at the week's end and highlight those time wasters. After one week, you will probably see the actual length of time a task requires. Most of us lose track of time when doing something we truly enjoy, and this is an effective way to establish fees for consultations and special projects.
- **Utilize your peak times for important tasks** at work or home: are you a morning person, who comes to life in the afternoon, or a night owl? Try to do your most important (and best) work during these times.
- **Include the phone number with important appointments** in your planner to save time and streamline record management.
- When processing incoming mail, **highlight important points or write notes in the margins** on their original memo. Often you can return the original document to the sender without the need for dictation or formal correspondence on your part. Or pass the information along to a colleague or file for future use.
- **Set an alarm to end meetings or phone calls** at work or home

PRESENTATIONS

- **Make a Presentation Checklist** and keep it in a folder, on your computer desktop, or in your briefcase. You may not always need every item on your list for each speaking engagement, but this eliminates the need for creating a new list each time you conduct a meeting or give a speech.
- **Carry extra batteries for your Dictaphone**
- **Request a spare bulb** when reserving an overhead projector for your presentation. Have a flipchart handy for those emergencies when modern technology inevitably fails you.

TRAVEL

- **Carry stationery** for noninterrupted correspondence with clients and vendors, **envelopes with postage** for mailing work back to your office, and **a reserve of coins** for tolls and parking fees (quarters fit quite nicely into an empty film canister you've used in your travels).
- **Establish a To-be-Read file.** Tuck this into your briefcase for downtime while waiting for appointments, riding in a cab, or on a plane. Carry miniature Post-It notes (flags) or small paper clips to mark articles for later action.
- **Use an over-the-seat organizer on the back of your front car seat.** Roomy pockets hold maps, umbrella, and even a snack for those long days on the road. And if you're traveling with others, this provides invaluable storage space for entertainment items such as a Walkman, favorite book, and snacks.
- **Store a Packing Checklist** in your suitcase or in a dedicated travel folder. This greatly diminishes the time you spend preparing for trips. Store in a plastic bag or laminate for a protective coating.
- **Keep travel-sized toiletries in your travel bag**, duplicates of the items you use on a daily basis. (If you ever wondered what on earth to do with all those free bottles of shampoo and mouthwash picked up from hotels, you've now found a home for them.)
- **Create a file for things you need** on a business or leisure trip, then fill it as you go. Splurge and buy yourself a pocketed folder to prevent spillage as you quickly prepare for your departure.
- **Keep a file of directions to client and colleague's homes**, or write them on the back of their business cards. You then only have to ask once for directions, which saves you invaluable time and makes you look super-organized. Be sure to write down the name of the receptionist, assistant, spouse names, or other helpful information you can use in your sales or business call.
- There are so many simple ways to save time during our busy day that they are easily overlooked. Sometimes we just overlook the obvious. But being prepared with lists, notes, ongoing files, and systems will help you screen out those unwanted distractions and focus on the important matters at hand. So let's get down to business!