

# The Ultimate Time Management Guide

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## Chapter 1: Warming up to the concept of Time.

“Now go on and enjoy yourself, dance to your heart’s content and win the Prince’s heart. But remember, you have to be back before the clock strikes twelve at midnight.”

We all are familiar with the words of the Fairy God Mother in the evergreen fairy tale ‘Cinderella’. It’s these words that probably made us aware-for the first time in our lives-of the value of time. We all sympathized with Cinderella when all her splendid gown and other finery turned to rags at the stroke of midnight. Our first acquaintance with the villainous Time!

But then, is time such a villain, who should always be painted in black? We have heard the proverb that says “there are no wounds that time cannot heal.” Here of course we get the image of a wizened old woman who comes hobbling up to us with a pitcher full of balm and gentle fingers that soothe away all our pains and sorrows.

But that’s enough! This book was not written to eulogize time. There is no need of the romance of Cinderella or the soothing finger of an old lady when we are talking about time. And do you know why? It’s because we do not have the time for it.

We are going to try and understand time in its many faces. No, I was not referring to the faces of watches or clocks. I was referring to the many meanings that time has. Oh yes it does! You thought that time meant the same to everyone. Well think again; or maybe you could try to explain the logic behind the following cases.

Picture a farmer who plants a sapling of a tree that would probably take ten to twelve years to reach the stage when it would start to bear fruit, by then the farmer would in likelihood be under the soil himself.

Picture a jailbird in bird counting on the bars of his cell waiting for the seconds, minutes, and hours, days, weeks, months and years to go by before he can be free again.

Now picture a young couple madly in love with each other cherishing the few minutes they get to spend with each other every day, cursing time because it flies so fast when they are together and never the other way round.

So what does time mean to you?

When was the last time that you realized the value of time?

The answer is probably the last time you watched one of those Hollywood thrillers in which the hero is driving a car in which a time-bomb has been planted and the hero is unaware of this. But we being the getting-to-see-it-all audience watch with bated breath

as the tiny needle of the timer ticks towards the point at which the explosion is sure to occur.

But just before that, the hero hits the brakes screeches to a halt to avoid hitting that old lady crossing the road. And when he jumps out to help her cross the road the needle reaches the point and the bomb is exploded. And our hero is safe. It's funny how the hero always escapes without a scratch in these movies. But I expect that's why they call them heroes.

Now we are really transgressing aren't we? So back to our subject that is Time Management.

Do you know what is interesting about the concept of Time? It is absolutely uncontrollable.

Personally I believe that there is something very humbling about this concept. Just imagine, man with all his power is just like a helpless babe before time. There it is Time stands tall and strong before man and man remains vulnerable and weak before it. Man, the big strong man who tamed rivers and seas, who reached out to the skies and beyond, who harnessed wind and water and dug up the bowels of the earth is but a worm before Time.

The best he can do to win the battle against time is die is hair and use some anti-wrinkle cream on his face. In fact, the closest that man has got towards conquering time is those many history books that have been penned; they are of course chronicles of events that happened long ago and that is certainly not much to boast about.

And so now we come to our subject that is time management because after all the illustrations given above, I hope that I have made one point clear, that is that Time cannot be controlled, it can only be managed. And that is what we are going to do. We are going to learn the art of time management. I don't want you to have an air of helplessness. You might begin to feel that if the battle cannot be won, then what is point in putting up a struggle? Ah, but there you are missing out on a very important point. In all the illustrations that I used above, I was referring to man in general and not to one particular Tom, Dick or Harry.

So you can see that this aspect of time is applicable to every human being and there is no running away from it. Every person has only twenty four hours in a day and no force on earth can alter that. So in order to get the cutting edge what you have to do is to be able to manage your time in the most effective way possible.

And that is what Time management is all about. It's about managing your time effectively and if I may I would like to add the word efficiently too.

Now, when we talk about our resources, every one knows that we are referring to the resources like fossil fuels, forests, mineral wealth, and water bodies and so on. But surprisingly time is never included in this list. When we talk about non-renewable

resources, fossil fuels like coal, petroleum and natural gas top the list. But what about time? A point that most people tend to forget is that time is the most valuable resource that we have, and time once lost, is lost for ever. We can think about alternate sources of energy for fossil fuels like electricity, fuel cells, solar energy and the research goes on. But is there any alternative for time that is lost. Again I stress on the point that time once lost, is lost forever. And hence we have the proverb, “time and tide waits for no man.”

## Chapter 2: We live in our own Time cages.

You might remember the earlier which I had quoted in which I mentioned the farmer, a jailbird and the couple in love. It might have been difficult to figure out the differences behind the same concept of time applied to three different instances. In order to clear that up, I would like to introduce you to two people. The first person is Ben and the second person is Bob. Please say hi to Ben and Bob. Ben and Bob say hi to you reader.

Right, now that you have said hi to one another let me proceed to tell you a little more about these two fine gentlemen. Ben lives in the city. He works as a Market Analyst for a firm called @\$#& Oops! For privacy reasons, Ben has asked me not to reveal the name of his company. Well, I guess that that's ok with us Ben. We aren't too nosy are we? So getting on with Ben, Ben loves his job and he is one of the best in his field.

He has an office on the 56<sup>th</sup> floor of one of those skyscrapers down town. In fact, even if he takes an elevator, it would take him a good 2 minutes to reach his floor. I need not say that Ben has a very busy life. He does a lot of running around, he does market surveys, he doesn't do it directly; he has people to do the dirty work for him. But still he does a lot of running around and he is on his toes all day long. No he is not a ballet dancer; that was just a figure of speech that I used to tell you how busy he is. So let's take a closer look at Ben's life without appearing nosy.

Ding-a-ling-a-ling! That's Ben's alarm clock gone off at 6 in the morning and Ben is up already. Just look at him, though he is in his...well...underwear, he still looks as large as life and as right as rain. What makes a man all perked up than a good night's sleep. There, Ben is already out of the bathroom and he has put on a track suit. At half past six, he is already in his car and heading for the gym.

I forgot to tell you that Ben is one hell of a looker and is very conscious about his trim body. And in order to keep it that way he works out in the gym every single day and that too for an hour. So that means at quarter to eight he is on his way back home. There is a fifteen minute drive from his apartment to the gym. At 8.15 he has had a shower and dressed and is going down the elevator holding his morning paper in his hand. His office is only a ten minute drive from his apartment but at this rush hour, the traffic just crawls. So Ben chooses to use his electric razor in the car while he is driving, dangerous though it may seem. Did you really think a man could have a shave and a shower in just 15 minutes? Well, think again. And so the traffic crawls on and Ben reaches his office at ten minutes to nine.

There is hardly time for him to grab a bite to eat, so what he does is that he runs to the cafeteria and gets a sandwich and coffee. The coffee he manages to gulp down but the sandwich remains in its wrapper as he notices an interesting article in the newspaper that was still tucked away under his arm. He reads it in the elevator on his way up and reaches his office just in time for his secretary to tell him that there is important meeting for him

with the Board Members within half an hour. Ben suddenly realizes that the meeting is about some projects that he had done but the paper work was in no way complete.

There is something like a whirlwind in the office as Ben and his secretary strain themselves to get things done and finally just in the nick of time, Ben is able to walk into the Board room with the necessary documents with which Ben is in no way satisfied. It happens with most last minute jobs you know.

The meeting goes on till noon, you know how people love to talk, and Ben leaves the room with a lot of praises and even more new assignments. He has had one more coffee, but the sandwich that he had ordered is now fit for the waste bin. And mind you this is the third time this week that Ben missed breakfast. Just before noon Ben gets a seemingly endless number of calls from this agent and then that. Oh yes his secretary had been screening the calls, you should see the number of calls that she didn't send his way.

At last by half past two Ben leaves his office and makes a beeline to the cafeteria. Just as he takes a big bite out of his monster burger, his cell phone beeps. He answers the call to find out that it is a call from a very important client whom he had been trying to fix an appointment with.

The client had agreed for an appointment which was to be had immediately. Out rushes Ben and into the waste bin goes his burger. The meeting turned out to better than he expected and a beaming Ben returns to his office and sits down to a host of pending paper work which keeps him occupied till seven in the evening. At half past seven he remembers his date with Kellie and though he rushes to the spot, he reaches there half an hour late and goes home without meeting Kellie and with an empty stomach and a weary body. So much for working out and being health conscious!

Now that you are acquainted with Ben I would like you to meet Bob. Bob lives in the country. He has a farm. It is not a very big farm; it is one of those medium sized farms from which you can get enough produce to make both ends meet. Bob is up at when the cock crows at five in the morning. As soon as he is up, he goes to his dairy and milks his three cows. I must add that Bob does not walk, he ambles. Having milked the cows he heads back to the farm and sits down with his morning paper. He chats leisurely with his wife who is going about her daily business. Around 8 he hops into his tractor and drives to the nearby dairy to deliver the milk. There he meets a couple of his friends and spends a good half hour exchanging news with them. He gets back to the farm at nine and has a relaxed breakfast.

When breakfast is over, he puts on his straw-hat and taking his dog along starts his daily excursion among his cornfields. His corn has a couple a weeks to go before harvest and now there is nothing much to do but walk around inspecting the rat traps. At eleven he is back at the farm and settles down to listen to his radio playing some old favorite tunes. He has lunch at 1 and then settles down in his favorite chair for a long afternoon siesta. In the evening he again goes to milk his cows, gives them some fresh feed and has one more walk around the farm.

After dinner by seven, by eight he is in bed and the lights are out.

Let's admit it, Bob's life is so leisurely that we feel like screaming when we watch the pace at which he gets along. He is happy and contented and the only clock in his farm stopped ticking a few years ago. We cannot even draw a parallel line between the lives of Bob and Ben. They are two worlds apart. The point I was trying to drive home is that it is our life style that decides how much time we have for each thing. The way we live and what we do decides how we spend our time and how much time we have to spend. We choose our life styles and that decides what we do with our time and that is why I said that we live in our own Time cages.

(Psst...I do not think there are many Bobs alive in the world today.)

So what kind of life do you live? We, that is most of us live in a world of aero planes, and jets, and fast cars and supercomputers and elevators and escalators, and electric trains and a thousand more contraptions and machines that are all intended to save time and do things faster.

Yeah, yeah we talk about convenience, but the fact is that all these machines were the result of man's endeavor to get things done faster. And the result is that life moves so fast that we could get dizzy if we were to take a minute break and just look around at all the people whizzing around in the daily business called life.

Twenty four hours is hardly enough for us to finish a day's work. And so what most working people do is that they start compromising on the other seemingly not so important thing like eating and getting eight hours sleep in the night. And so we have such a large number of people suffering from stress related diseases like ulcers, high blood pressure and heart problems.

We cannot do much about the life style that we have chosen. It's simply impossible that we suddenly decide to take a break, quit the job, go to the country and live like Bob on his farm. For one thing, there are not that many farms in the country and for a second thing, most of us would die like fishes out of water if we were to settle down in the country. After all, how many of us know how to milk a cow?

What does that mean, are we all doomed to suffer as ulcer patients and blood pressure patients? Far from it; if we are able to manage our time effectively we can live a city life that is as enjoyable and comfortable as Bob's life in the country. And that is the purpose of this book.

But that is not all. The main purpose of this book is to help you manage your time better so that you can become more productive and bring a lot of organizing into your life. You will be surprised to find out how much one can do provided one has the time for it and one can have the time only if one's time is organized and managed well.

So if you must build yourself a Time cage, go ahead and do so but make sure you make it big enough so that you have time for every thing and do not feel all cramped and cluttered in a single celled prison.

## Chapter 3: Where does all the time go?

It is quite surprising when you sit and think about where all the time in one day goes. Twenty four hours is really a lot of time. But on most days it scarcely seems enough. But this is because of certain misconceptions about time. Let us proceed to carefully examine where all that time goes and find out if twenty four hours really is. For that I have listed out certain points which will help you to get a realistic view about how much time you really have in a day.

### Point 1

We do not really get twenty four hours in a day. Maybe it's because we always talk about the twenty four hours in a day, we get the feeling that we really do have twenty four hours to finish our daily business and the fact is that we do not. Assuming that you hit the sack at least by twelve in the night and taking for granted the fact that you need at least seven hours of sleep; let me fix your waking time at seven in the morning. That means that you have already lost seven hours, which we can deduct from twenty four, giving us only fourteen waking hours. Waking hours does not mean the hours you take to wakeup but the hours that you are awake. So let us get that straight, we have only 14 hours in a day. Now if you think that all those fourteen hours can be used for productive work, you are wrong again. For we come to our next point.

### Point 2

The fourteen waking hours cannot be used completely for productive work. There are many things that a human being should do in order to continue to live like a human being and some of these things do take up a lot of time. Now the following list that I have drawn up is sure to vary from person to person. But I have taken the times for each action on what I felt to be reasonable times as far as any normal human being is concerned.

➤ Taking a shower.

Most of us take a shower at least once in a day and the time I think we can put down for that is ten minutes. For those of you cleaner ones who shower twice a day put that as twenty minutes.

➤ Answering the call of nature

Oh yes, we are all very cultured people who have the best of manners and upbringing. We dress ourselves properly and conduct ourselves with the utmost poise. But there are several times in a day when we have to go back to nature and summing up all those things we do in the bath room I think a good half hour should be enough.

➤ Getting ready and tidying ourselves.

When we move about in society definitely we have to look our best and adding up all the minutes that we spend in front of that mirror, we get another ten minutes. For some people of course, this figure comes up to half an hour. But I think ten minutes is good enough.

➤ Eating

We need to eat to live and though I accept the fact that people have different eating habits and times, I think that and I'm sure doctors will agree with me that a person needs three meals a day and should take at least ten minutes to ingest a meal and not just gobble it down. So that makes it 30 minutes for food.

➤ Time to relax.

Please do not raise an argument now. I promise to deal with this bit later on. But right now I would like to put down one hour as the time to relax, and this includes the time that you get to yourself for prayer or meditation or just to stare out of your window or perhaps the few extra minutes that you spend in your bed after waking up, waiting for the last traces of sleep to go away.

➤ Time with family and friends.

Please we are human beings, aren't we? And we certainly cannot get along with our business of life without chatting a few minutes every now and then with our friends and the family too. So with your permission, I would like to deduct another hour from your waking time.

So now what do we have left?

We started off with 14 hours of waking time. And we proceed to add up all the time that we accounted for in the above mentioned points; let us see how much time we have left for productive work provided we still want to exist as human beings.

The activities mentioned above would take when put together a good three hours and twenty minutes. That is 3 hours and 20 minutes. I put it down in both numerals and words so that you can get a real taste of the figure.

Now if we proceed to subtract this figure from our 14 hours of waking time, what do we get? We are left with just ten hours forty minutes. In figures that is 10 hours 40 minutes.

And that is a fact. That is all that we get. So from now on don't you think that it would be more realistic to say that we have just ten hour and forty minutes to accomplish a day's work and not twenty four hours. For if we continue to believe that we have twenty four hours, then we are in effect deceiving ourselves.

But wait there is more to this story than meets the eye. I hate to disillusion you but these crucial hours that we have painstakingly added up are not really put to constructive use. There are certain things called time waster which you have to look out for and that is what we are going to deal with in our next chapter.

## Chapter 4: How to identify ‘time killers’ that waste your time.

Till now, we have been harping about how valuable time is and how time lost is time lost forever and so on. But now we come to a strange concept and that is ‘Time Killers’. The very word sound like sacrilege doesn’t it? How can one talk about killing such a valuable resource. But that’s the way the story goes. There are a lot of time killers in this world and what you have to do is that you have to identify these time killers, look out for them and stay wary of them. Only then can you put your available time to the maximum possible use.

The time killers that I have listed below are more or less general. They are things that most of us encounter. But apart from these, each one of us may have unique time killers that are particular to our style of living and way of work. Be smart and identify these killers. When I talk about killers, do not get the impression of masked men lurking in shadows brandishing guns and knives. The killers that I am referring to are quite ordinary every day things that we see and use in our lives but often do not realize how much of our time they take away.

### **Seven terrible Time Killers**

- ❖ Telephone calls
- ❖ Chatter boxes
- ❖ Traffic jams
- ❖ Finding parking spaces
- ❖ Meetings
- ❖ Bad machinery
- ❖ Long queues

The list could of course go on. But before we keep adding to the list, I would like to elaborate on certain of the items listed above.

### **How to handle Time Killers.**

- Telephone calls.

The funny thing about telephone calls is that these instruments are indeed great time savers. In fact the amount of time that people get to save thanks to telephones is stupendous. The problem arises when telephones are not used properly. Most people do not understand and even if they do they forget that telephones are not to be used for lengthy conversations. For one thing, another person may be trying to reach you and there

is nothing as exasperating as trying to reach a person over the telephone and being confronted with a busy tone. So the first thing about a telephone conversation is that it should be brief.

Another thing about telephones is that most people do not know how to use a telephone properly. In stead of immediately identifying themselves and asking directly for the person they want, some people go on playing a lot of “who is speaking” games once they make a call or answer the telephone.

Now coming to mobile phones there is a lot to be said and done. What should be done is turn off your cell phone when you are having a conversation or a discussion with more than one person. As soon as you get a call, you may ask the people you were talking to excuse yourself but you leave them waiting while you chuckle and giggle over your phone. Often we tend to give ore importance to the caller than to the person we were having the discussion with. Again the same rule applies here. Be brief. A mobile phone is to be used to get an important message across to a person who you were not able to reach on the land line.

- The next point is about those chatter boxes. Haven’t we all met them? They simply love the sound of their own voices and once they open their mouths, there is no stopping them. They waste not only your time but their time as well. Steer clear of such people. Believe me, it is much easier to avoid such people than to tell them to shut up and if you get a telephone call from such a person, use a caller ID facility or ask your secretary to divert the call.
- Traffic jams and finding parking spaces. Any one who has lived in the city for at least a day will know what I am talking about. There is no getting past a traffic jam at the rush hour. And will someone tell me whit is called the rush hour when that is the time when the traffic is the slowest.  
The only thing you can do is anticipate the traffic jam and leave your home a half hour or one hour early. But that does not really keep the time killer at bay. It just helps you to avoid being late. In this respect you have two options. Either you could find something constructive to do while you wait for the traffic to move along or the traffic light to change or a better option would be to take subway and walk the rest of the way. You can get a long a lot faster on your feet and it is a lot better for your health as well. By doing so, you can also get rid of the headache of finding a parking space.
- Not surprisingly lengthy meetings and discussions can prove to be awful time killers particularly if the meeting does not have a clear agenda and if there are people who love top talk among the group. It has been found that most middle and senior level mangers spend nearly 70% of their work time talking. And in most organizations, parleying has been made into a fine art.
- Bad machinery is a time waster. How many of us have wanted to sit and scream and bang the daylights out of a pc that does not give us the required data or information. A computer that takes a long time to start up, a photocopier that gives shamefully faint

photocopies, even a leaky faucet or a stubborn drawer or door knob can waste a lot of time and send us up the wall. If you have such equipment or machinery, get it changed at the earliest possible date. It is worth the amount of time and energy that you waste on it every day.

- Long queues certainly waste a lot of time. That does not mean that you have to jump the queue. If you can get the job done over the telephone or can reserve your ticket in advance, do it, even if it means a few extra dollars, it is worth the time you may have to spend waiting.

Apart from these each person may have particular time wasters, like for instance, a car that refuses to start in the morning, difficult hair that insists on looking like Medusas head on a bad snake day, an elevator that takes for ever to reach your floor. Use your common sense and try to find alternate methods or even better, if you cannot find an alternate method, you could put the time to some use like read your morning paper in the elevator.

You will get a better idea of how to get over time killers once we handle the section called the time savers.

## Chapter 5: Organizing is the key to Time Management.

### Tips on Office Organization.

Now this is fact that I think would not raise any arguments. If you are better organized you have a better chance of managing your time effectively. So what is this art of getting organized? There have been enough and more books written about the art of getting organized. And I do not want to give my modest contribution to this much hyped about topic.

Instead of working on somebody else's definition let me ask you, how organized do you want to be? When we talk about getting organized people generally get an impression of a spick and span office with not a paper out of place. But my experience has taught me that a neat office does not necessarily have to be a very organized office. If you throw away every single piece of paper that comes to your office, certainly your office will be neat but not organized. I believe that organizing is a relative term. It is all a matter of convenience.

In an organized office there will be a place for every thing and everything will be in its place. But at the same time you should be able to lay your hands on the object you need the moment you need it. And in this respect a little bit of clutter is ok.

And it is not enough that you know where every thing is, somebody else should know it too. In case you are not able to come in person and get something, somebody else should be able to do the job for you. It is here that labels and tags can prove to be vital. Every single file should have a name tag and every thing should be filed properly. It is not enough that you name things according to your convenience. The names should be intelligible to others as well.

Often we tend to use codes like ARCS, CRBER, WHOSH which might make sense to us but may sound like double Dutch to every one else. Now that's enough about office organization.

Let's now move on to getting yourself organized.

### Tips on self organization

The best way to get organized is to find out the loop holes where we usually end up in a mess and see whether we can get around them.

For every working man or woman, the following are often pitfalls:

1. Forgetting Appointments
2. Forgetting Deadlines
3. Being Unable to meet deadlines
4. Being late for meetings and Appointments
5. Forgetting Names
6. Forgetting Telephone Numbers
7. Forgetting to take important documents and things along
8. Misplacing Objects and so on

I have used the following tips in my life and they have proved to be quite effective. Maybe you too could try them out and see whether they work for you.

### **Nine hints to become a more organized person**

- Accept the fact that we cannot rely too much on our memories.

The human mind is exposed to a hurricane of information every day. As a result the mind does a very nice filtering process and very little of what we see and hear is retained in our minds. So instead of depending on our very selective memory why not depend on a piece of paper.

- Carry a tiny scribbling pad and a pen with you all the time. The moment you fix an appointment or are asked to attend a meeting, jot it down in the scribbling pad. Do not bother about others laughing at you. You will have the last laugh in the end.
- It is a good idea to write it down orders in your book. Each time you tell somebody to do something or when somebody like your boss asks you to do something write it down in your book along with the date and the time. Do not be afraid of being thought about as a person with a very poor memory. It won't be long before people start thinking of you as a highly organized person.
- If you have an electronic pocket organizer be sure to use it. Each time someone gives you his or her telephone number, immediately enter it into your pocket organizer, along with the person's name of course.
- Use the backside of business cards to help your memory.

Usually we get a lot of business cards as we go about our daily business of life. The business card of course contains the name of the person, his or her telephone number and probably the name of the firm for which the person works. But the problem is, the next time we meet the person, the face may seem familiar but we won't have the foggiest idea as to where we met the person. The best thing to do would be to jot down a few points about the person and probably the reason for meeting him or her and the place as well. This will certainly lessen the load on your memory centre. But take never to do it in front of the person.

- Keep away the business cards properly

As soon as you get back to your office take care to keep away the business cards you collected properly. Don't just stuff them into your card folder. Take care to read them properly and perhaps keep the cards of important clients separately. If you do not find much use for a person's card, toss it.

- Prepare a to-do list everyday.

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of to-do lists in getting yourself organized. It is probably the most sensible thing that a busy person should do. In fact I thought of devoting an entire chapter for to-do lists and I think that is just what I will do.

- Plan what you have to do well in advance.

It is a good idea to have daily, weekly and monthly plans. No this is not about expanding your business and things like that. I am not referring to a strategy plan that involves takeovers and mergers. Those things are beyond the scope of this book. I was referring to having plans about the daily, weekly and monthly activities of your business and yourself as well.

- Have a fixed timetable.

It may seem kind of mechanical but it would be wonderful if you could have a fixed time for everything and try to stick religiously to the time table. Believe me it really helps because in that way you will have time for everything and everything can be done in the time for it.

And so you are now moving towards becoming a more organized person.

But there are still miles to go before mastering the art of time management. And that brings us to our next chapter.

## Chapter 6: To-do lists

I had mentioned earlier the importance of ‘to-do’ lists and this chapter is dedicated completely to highlighting the advantages of a ‘to-do’ list.

### The 6 advantages of maintaining a to-do list

- A to do list helps us know the different things that have to be done so that we do not miss anything.
- A to do list is more dependable than our memory.
- Once we have a written list of the things that we have to do, we can prioritize and decide which jobs should be done first.
- Sometimes one or more jobs may require that we go to another office or section. A to do list helps us to avoid repetition of labor. For example, if we have to deliver a document at an office and collect a document from another office which is on the same block as the first office, both these tasks can be done together. It saves us the time energy and effort of going to the same place twice. But only if we have a ‘to-do’ list can we know in advance that there are two jobs at the same place. This is the way post men operate when they deliver mail.
- A to do list enables us to cross out the tasks which have finished doing and towards the end of the day when we see the list of things that we have crossed out, it certainly will give us a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. It also has the effect of shocking us if nothing at all has been done and crossed out.
- If anything remains on today’s list, it can be carried over to tomorrow’s list and that is an excellent way of preparing a to-do list for the day, by examining the ‘to-do’ list of yesterday and carrying out any task that has been left without completion.

Now, when we talk about preparing a to-do list, there are two important points that should not be missed out.

- The ‘to-do’ list should be realistic.
- It is not enough that only daily ‘to-do’ lists be prepared.

We say that the list should be realistic because it should include only things that can be accomplished in a day. There is no sense in preparing a list that includes items that can

only be done over a week. And it is here that it becomes relevant to prepare a ‘to-do’ list for a week and a month and even a year.

It is best to pin up weekly and monthly lists instead of carrying them around. And then a very crucial point that you should bear in mind is that *a weekly list is not something to be done on the last day of the week and a monthly list is not something to be done at the end of the month*. I have put that down in italics because that is what most people do. If it is a task that has to be completed at the end of the month, it is on the 30th of the month that they take up the task.

So your daily to do list should include an item on doing a little bit on the task that is to be completed at the end of the month.

Does this help towards meeting deadlines?

## Chapter 7: Prioritizing helps in meeting deadlines.

It is not once or twice in the course of our work that we have to meet deadlines. They crop up every now and then. That is ok enough it is only that when we approach the deadline everything goes haywire and there is a mess everywhere. The things we do daily are thrown completely off gear and meeting the deadline becomes a big head ache.

Is there any way out of this? Of course there is. For one thing, if we are well organized and an urgent requirement, like the submission of a project or something like that crops up, there is nothing to sweat about. All we have to do is to compile the material that we already have with us. Easy enough it sounds!

But in real life we are not just called upon to submit reports of already completed projects. We usually get projects and fewer days than required to complete those projects. Then what do we do? The only way out seems to be having to work extra hours. That is not altogether harmful. It never hurts to work a few extra hours once in a while.

But another alternative is to prioritize. See whether you can arrange your work in such away that you get to do the more important tasks first. If there is some daily work that doesn't call for too much urgency, keep it aside. Concentrate on the more important tasks.

Similarly, while you are working there may be a thousand and one distractions at your work place or office.

You will have to decide which is more important, attending to those distractions or focusing on your work. If you can afford to turn off your cell phone, go ahead and do it. Similarly, you could even keep your land phone off the hook if that won't create a ruckus in your office that is.

Another thing you could do is put up a do-not –disturb sign in your workstation to ward off those disturbances.

You might also have to remind yourself to stay put at your workstation and not linger around either mentally or physically.

It is not necessary that you do all the jobs yourself. If you have a secretary or subordinates, it is about time that you started trusting them with not so very important jobs. The word over here is 'delegate'.

Delegation can be a managers best time saver.

**The three advantages of delegating are:**

1. Delegating gives us more time to concentrate on more important issues.
2. Delegating is a very good method of giving practical training in the real situation to our staff.
3. It is a good method of fostering decision making among subordinates.

But at the same time all tasks cannot be delegated. There are certain criteria to be taken into consideration before delegating a task.

The criteria for deciding whether a task can be delegated are.

1. If the task is repetitive, by all means delegate.
2. If the decision can be reversed quickly and easily, it is safe to delegate. For example if is rearranging the furniture in your office or deciding on the Christmas celebrations at the office, then it is quite safe to delegate.
3. Check and see if the impact is not too much on others in case the decision is wrong
4. Check and see if there is too much money or physical resources involved in the decision.
5. Check if delegating is within the companies existing policies.

In this way, if you prioritize you can decide which jobs should be done first, who should do it and what should be done when. Before you know it, meeting deadlines will stop being such a headache.

## Chapter 8: Accomplishing more in less time

We have all experienced those days which were full to the brim and at the same time we have experienced days when a few time consuming tasks have taken up all our time. Why is it that on some days we can do so much while on other days we seem to do practically nothing though we were busy the whole day?

In order to provide an answer to this question, I would like to give you a small illustration. You have been to the beach, haven't you? There you might have seen kids building sand castles with sand. You can only build a sand castle with sand of course, but I hope you have seen those kids at work. What they do is that they dig up sand with their spades and fill up their pails with sand. Then they turn over the pails and hey presto they have the base of the castle which can then be shaped.

No, we are not concerned with building castles in the sand or in Spain or wherever. We are concerned about those pails which the kids use to build their castles. If you have such a pail with you, you can understand what I am talking about. Try putting a few small rocks into the pail. When I say rocks I mean rocks probably the size of medium sized cabbages. The most you can put into the pail would be three or four and even these would stick out into the air.

The pail is full isn't it? It is full of rocks. But does that mean that it is really full. Now get some pebbles probably the size of table tennis balls and see whether there is room for a couple of the in the pail. Definitely four or five of the pebbles can slip in to the spaces between the rocks. Is the pail full now? Yes it is full of rocks and pebbles. Now if you will oblige me, see if you can get some glass marbles or beads. Slide them into the pail. You don't have to try too hard; they will find their own paths.

If you think that the pail is full now, think again. Just wait till you get some sand and pour it into the pail. You will be amazed at the speed with which it trickles in. And we are not done yet. You are not going to believe this but the pail will actually accommodate something more. Try pouring a glass of water into it and you will find the water disappearing into the depths of the pail. If you want, you can keep pouring water till the pail brims over. But that is not our intention.

The purpose of this experiment was to show you that what you thought to be full could in fact accommodate much more, but of a different kind of course.

This is exactly what happens to most of us on most of our days. We take on big tasks. That's well and good. But we get so occupied with these Herculean tasks, which may take more than a day to get over with anyway, that we tend to forget those smaller tasks which may be just as important. This is where we can understand the importance of prioritizing. The big things are important, but the small things may be just as important.

While you are trying to handle those rocks, do not forget those pebbles, marbles, and grains of sand and drops of water. Some people have asked me to give specific examples for these materials. So I would like to take a minute to compare. I believe that things like saying good morning and greeting others generally are very important if you are working in an organization. These things I would compare to the water. Just because you have had a busy day, it doesn't mean that you have to be a grouch.

Telephone calls (remember to be brief) I would liken to the sand. They keep coming all the time. And if you do not answer your telephone calls people will start thinking you do not work there anymore. Responding to emails and dispatching bills and payments can be compared to the marbles Meetings and discussions are the pebbles and major projects and things like audits and presentations are the rocks.  
There should be time for everything and everything should have it's time.

And with this I would like to tell you to please discard the myth of perfection. It does not exist in this world. Nothing and I mean nothing is perfect. So, it is not really important that everything has to be shipshape. As long as it is presentable you don't have to lose sweat about a project that you have done. But that does not mean that your work should be shabby. Make it as presentable as is possible within the time frame allotted.

And in order to accomplish more within lesser time it's about time we took a look at those time savers and that takes us to our next chapter.

## Chapter 9: Time savers

Everything in this world has something to balance its existence. If there is white, there is black; if there is darkness there is light, if there are time wasters, there are time savers. So now let us focus our attention towards those time savers because they are our best friends when we talk about Time Management.

Again, as in the case of time killers, I am just listing out a few general examples over here. These are by no means the only time savers in the world.

Here we have

### The Top Ten Time Savers

- ✓ Telephones
- ✓ Computers
- ✓ Elevators
- ✓ Fax Machines
- ✓ The Internet
- ✓ Coffee Machines
- ✓ Bulletin or Notice Boards
- ✓ Photo Copiers
- ✓ Efficient Filing Systems
- ✓ Good Secretaries and Junior Staff

Let's take a quick look at all these.

- ✓ Telephones.

Surprise! Surprise! I had included telephones under the list of time killers but telephones are in fact one of the best time savers that man has invented. Just imagine the amount of time you get to save by just making a telephone call!

Suppose you are to have a business lunch (sometimes called a working lunch) with an important client. Obviously you have to reserve a table in your favorite restaurant. Now, imagine you have to go there in person and get things done directly. The task would easily take away at least two or three hours of your time when you take into account the

journey, the traffic and all that. On the other hand, this is something you can easily do over the telephone while you are comfortably seated in your office. So telephones are certainly one of the best time savers in this world. But of course, it all depends on how you use the telephone.

✓ Computers

I don't think that enough can be said about the time saving roles of the computer. But then I don't think that I have to say much. I suppose every one will agree that computers are indeed time-saving machines.

✓ Elevators

Next we come to elevators and elevators too we know save a lot of time that we would otherwise have to spend plodding up flights and flights of steps. Elevators save not just time but energy as well. But one annoying thing about elevators is that sometimes even if we punch the button repeatedly, the elevator takes for ever to reach or floor. Now, if you just have to go two or three floors up or down in such cases it is always better to take the stairs instead of waiting ten or fifteen minutes for the elevator to come to your floor. It's better for your health too, to climb a few stairs every day.

✓ Fax machines

Like telephones, fax machines too save a lot of time by enabling us to send important documents across continents if needed and that too within a few seconds.

✓ The internet

It goes without saying that the internet has revolutionized our concept of time itself. With facilities like email, scanners, voicemail and video conferencing, even the fax machine has become outdated. Talk about fast...

✓ Coffee machines.

I did it on purpose. When people see that a coffee machine has been included among the list of time savers, they tend to screw up their noses and raise their eyebrows. But would you believe that earlier, before coffee machines had made their presence felt in offices, people used to take coffee breaks that lasted up to half an hour?

✓ Bulletin or Notice Boards

Bulletin and Notice Boards are very time effective way of reaching out to a large number of people. Instead of conducting one of those long meetings in which every one gets a chance to go on and on, it's better to convey messages with the help of notice boards and bulletins which can be displayed at a place accessible to all. Oh yes, then comes the question of how to make sure that the message is read by all those concerned. Simple, include space on the notice where the concerned people can put down their initials as proof that they have read the message.

✓ Photocopiers

Often we tend to underestimate the importance of photocopiers in an office. Those machines just sit there and take copies of what is fed into them all day long. It does seem

like a job which does not require any brains. And that is why we do not give these machines any credit. But once these machines fail, we understand their worth. Of course we can take multiple prints using a printer, but cost wise and time wise a photocopier is much better. It is really faster than a printer and it costs nothing to take copies.

✓ **Efficient Filing Systems**

This had already been dealt with under office organization, but I just want to add that a good system of filing definitely saves a lot of time. Being able to find an important document or file should not be a matter of luck. There should be a proper place to keep the files something which people call a cabinet. And the files should be kept in a proper order with easy to read and intelligible name tags and labels. And in the files, the documents should not be filed in a haphazard order but should have an order that makes it easy to locate a paper.

The same thing applies to the files you have on your computer, you should name the files properly and not use abbreviation that could stand for anything. People tend to try and save time by using abbreviations which sound quite ridiculous once they forget what it really stands for.

✓ **Good Secretaries and Junior Staff**

Good secretaries are always an asset to an office. If your secretary is as dependable as a screen saver, then half the battle is won. But on the other hand if your secretary is as feather brained as a hen, then heaven help you! The advantage of having good secretaries and junior staff is that you can delegate a lot of things to them.

I told you earlier that it is not always necessary that you do everything by yourself. You should be able to delegate a lot of things, but first of course you have to be sure that the people you are delegating to do something are good enough.

Once you are able to share your work load with someone, you will have at least one hand free, and I am sure you will be able to put that hand to some good use.

Now, over here I have just highlighted ten time savers. It would be a good idea for you to look around and identify things that could save your time. Answering machines for one save a lot of time. If you really are too busy to attend your calls, let the machine do the talking for you.

In this context I think it would be appropriate to talk about one thing that most people often go wrong with in their quest to save time, and that is trying to do two things at the same time. But that takes us to our next chapter.

## Chapter 10: Doing two things at a time

This is something that should be handled very carefully. In fact it is in all senses a balancing act. It may very well for domestic things, but in your professional life, if you are not careful while balancing, you could end up flat on your nose.

Let's take an example. At home I want to iron my clothes and it takes a couple of minutes for my electric iron to heat up. At the same time I want to make myself a cup of coffee so while the iron is heating up, I might as well put the coffee maker on the stove. I need to make some toast for my breakfast and after popping two slices of bread into the toaster; I can go back to the ironing.

After ironing one shirt perhaps, I can take the boiling coffee off the stove and remove the pieces of toast from the toaster. And at the end of five minutes, I have my coffee, two slices of toast and a freshly ironed shirt. But if I am not careful, I could end up with two pieces of burnt bread, coffee that has boiled over and spilled all over the stove and probably a singed shirt.

There is too much balancing of actions involved here and it could get you quite worked up. I would suggest that if you feel that you can do more than one thing at a time, go ahead but limit the number to two or else you might end up messing a whole lot of things. There are a lot of people who read their newspapers in the loo. Well... I have my reservations about that, but if it saves time for them, well and good.

Let's us now check out a couple of things which can be done simultaneously at the office. In today's hectic world, where is so much fret and fury, most of us hardly get any exercise. And since we are so busted for time, the question of taking time off to get some exercise seems completely out of question.

I think it would be a good idea to try and get some exercise while you are in the office itself. When you are making a couple of telephone calls together, it would be a good idea to get up and walk up and down. If you have to sit down, stretch out your feet and try to wiggle your toes. This exercise has been proved to be a great stress reliever.

If you have a cell phone, try and get one of those hand free sets which you can attach to your body so that your hands are free while you are talking. This gives you a chance to do something useful with your hands instead of just supporting a hand set.

The essence of this lesson is that if you choose to do two things at the same time make sure that one of those things is not very important and does not require much attention. Otherwise, what will happen is that by dividing your attention to both those things, you might end up with two half baked pies, i.e. two finished tasks that are in no way complete. The human brain is a remarkable thing, there is no denying that. And some of the luckier

ones have better brains than others. But all the same, trying to focus your attention on two important things at the same time, is really asking for too much.

If you want to get a real feel of what I mean try tapping your foot and snapping your fingers at the same time but to a different beat. Before you know it, one will have reached the beat of the other.

But of course, it is all a matter of common sense when it comes to choosing which two things that you can do together at the same time. It certainly will be ridiculous for you to choose to clip you nails while you are attending a board meeting. And it would be in bad taste to use a tooth pick while dictating a letter to your secretary. But you can carry your lap top while you are traveling and work on it during a flight or train journey.

The concept of doing two things at the same time is the underlying idea behind a working lunch. You get to eat and at the same time you get to do business. I will let you in on a small tip as far as working lunches are concerned. It is always better to meet and do business with an important client over lunch. I mean a lunch for which you are footing the bill of course.

One of the advantages is that there is lesser chance for disturbances at a restaurant. But the most important advantage is that when two people sit together and eat together and probably have a glass of wine or two, they kind of open up. Warm food has that effect on people.

Generally speaking, if your stomach is happy and contented and your taste buds are tickled, then you are happy. In such a circumstance you feel happy with whole world. And as for the person who treated you such a good lunch, oh well, the deal is his. There, you got your business didn't you?

At such times, you may try to remember that though your intention must have been to conclude a good business, you must not forget to enjoy your meal; after all, you are paying for it!

## Chapter 11: Your Time-A Self Analysis

We have talked about time wasters and time killers; we have talked about getting organized and we have talked about prioritizing. But one vital point that we yet to talk about is how much time each one of us take for our various activities. We are truthful people aren't we? We wouldn't dream of lying and telling false hoods. But often in our daily life, when it comes to matters of time in particular, we do tell a lot of lies. How many times have we made statements like...?

*"I'll be with you in a minute"*

*"I need only a moment to get dressed"*

*"Just give me two minutes, all I have to do is take a shower and get dressed."*

*"I'm on my way; I'll be there I a couple of minutes."*

Do these words sound familiar? We all say them and we never do what we promise. That is not because we are habitual liars who get our kicks by lying though our teeth. It's simply because we do not realize the actual time that we take for the activities that we do.

For instance, how long do you need to have a shower? I do not mean the exact time down to the microsecond. I just want a general idea. Maybe it's 5 minutes, maybe 10. But you should understand that different people need and take different times to take a shower. The word itself is miss-leading.

When you say "I need a shower," what exactly are you talking about? If you mean to just step under the shower with your clothes off, turn on the shower, soak yourself thoroughly and dry yourself after turning off the shower then you are right. But if you are talking about shampooing and conditioning your hair, using soap and body shampoo on your body, then it is a different story. This is going to take you nearly half an hour and is not a 'shower' but an elaborate bath.

So you should be well aware of what you are talking about and mention the time accordingly.

Just like the shower, you should have a good estimate of the time that you need for various activities.

Let's see whether you know how much time you need for the following actions.

### **10 actions done at every office**

1. How much time do you take to draft a short letter?
2. How much time do you take to type a short letter?

3. How much time can you take for a paper presentation?
4. How much time can you take for a seminar?
5. How much time can you keep talking to a group of people?
6. How much time do you need for a smoke?
7. How much time do you need to have a cup of coffee?
8. How much time do you take to sign a paper?
9. How much time do you need to read a printed document A4 size?
10. How much time do you need to send an email?

No, no I cannot give you the correct answers. There are no correct answers as such. It varies from person to person. I like my coffee cold. That means I let it stand for five minutes before I drink it. And then I just gulp it down in 5 seconds. But that is by no way the right way to drink coffee and I cannot tell you that the correct time for a coffee break is 5 minutes 5 seconds.

That was not the purpose of this exercise anyway. What we were trying to do is to find out whether you have a more or less good idea about how long you take for each of the above mentioned actions. If you do, then you are quite time conscious. If you do not, then you had better start working on it with a stop watch right away.

Once you understand how long you take for the various activities that comprise your work, you will be in a better position to understand how long you will need to accomplish tasks and naturally you will be able to manage your time better.

But one thing that we may miss out here is the most important question. And that is

### **How long do you spend talking to people?**

This question clinches it all; because in most cases, that is where all the time goes. I don't mean that you should behave like a hermit and stay away from people. But ask yourself if you really talk too much.

Or a better way would be to try and remember everything you say the next time you talk to somebody. You could even try carrying a voice recorder in your pocket and press the record button the moment you start speaking.

And once you get back to your own ground, replay the tape and hear what you said. What you have to do is find out if there is a shorter and faster way of saying what you did. If there is a shorter way, then certainly you do spend a lot of time talking.

Work on that and try to bring down the time you spend talking because that is where all our time goes. We have absolutely no idea how much time is lost by mere parleying.

Such a self analysis is certainly a positive step towards effective time management.

## Chapter 12: Saying “No”

The idea might sound strange but being able to say ‘no’ is fundamental to any scheme of Time Management.

Yes you have the master plan for time management, you have everything worked out, you have a time table which you stick to religiously, and you have a ‘to do’ list as well. But just when things are beginning to work out fine, a colleague or friend comes your way and asks you to help them out by doing certain jobs which are really their jobs.

The person smiles very sweetly at you and showers sugar coated words on you, and before you even know what hit you, you have said yes and agreed to do the work for the person. Now what is the relevance of your well thought out timetable? Where is your scheme for time management? Your work is waiting in the pantry while you are sweating over somebody else’s work. And it’s because of the simple reason that you could not say no to the person. How many times have you had a similar experience?

I’m not saying that you should not be civil. If you find a colleague in distress and have the time to spare, by all means help the person. Who knows, tomorrow you might be in that persons position and you may need somebody’s help.

But that does not mean that you should let yourself be taken for a ride. If you are going to help a person at the expense of your work and schedule, then you are going to end up in hot water. It is human nature to shirk work and if word gets around that you are a very helpful guy (read that as s-u-c-k-e-r) then before you know it, requests for help will be coming from all sides.

Unless you want to take up from where Mother Theresa left off, you had better put your foot down and say “sorry boss, but I just don’t have the time.” Behave like a diplomat. I remember reading somewhere that a diplomat is a person who can tell you to go to hell in such a nice manner that you will actually start looking forward to the trip. I also came across the definition that a diplomat is a person who can say the nastiest things in the nicest way.

So that is just what you have to do. Done the mask of the diplomat and the next time someone approaches you with sugar coated requests to help them out, smile back at them. Give them a sugary sickly sweet smile. So much that anyone in their normal senses would want to throw up at the sight of your smile.

Then you could try telling them how much you love them. Extol at length what you think of the person and your relationship with him or her. And then tell them that what you are going to say is going to be a life long sorrow for you. It is something that will plunge you into the depths of despair and all that. And then put it painfully across, “no, I’m terribly sorry but N-O.”

And then when the person leaves your presence with a crest fallen face, wait till he or she is out of hearing range and then you can start that war dance. Or if you want you could try the hoola hoola.

Common face the facts, in today's world of cut throat competition your very existence may depend on your ability to say "no."  
And its miles better being a selfish pig than a sucker.

## Chapter 13: Procrastination-The Final Enemy

Now let's get something straight. I have been preaching, moralizing and waxing eloquent about Time Management for quite sometime. But before I began this discourse, I forgot to ask you, what kind of person you are. No I'm not bothered about your physique or your eating habits. Nor am I bothered about your interest in water beetles and rock formations. I just want to know if you are a procrastinator, because if you are, then there is no point in talking about time management.

### **So, are you a procrastinator?**

Indeed this is a very silly question because we all are. Procrastination is as fundamental to human beings as the insatiable appetite for sex. No, you are not going to admit that either, but it's the truth. The old guy Adam who was chased out of Eden by God had them both. I mean the appetite for sex (how else do you think Eve coaxed him into having that fruit) and the habit of procrastination.

In fact, there is no official record that says that Adam was a procrastinator, but I think we can take it for granted since it is present in every human being that came after that.

Now, before you start thinking that the word 'procrastination' has a sexual connotation, let me proceed to explain what the connection is between procrastination and time management. Procrastination is simply the habit of putting off for tomorrow what you can do today. Does it ring a bell now? The fact is that nine out of ten of us have this habit. We tend to postpone jobs and tasks. And procrastination is the villain, the unsuspecting sneak that upsets every plan connected with time management.

The interesting thing about procrastination is that we tend to put off only those tasks that seem unappealing to us. If the task is boring, or monotonous, or involves too much hard work, then it stands a very good chance of getting postponed. It is not because of the lack of time that we do not do the task. On the contrary, we might have plenty of time to do it but we tend to postpone it and justify ourselves saying that we do not have the time for it.

Take for example a visit to the dentist. How many of us go for monthly checkups to the dentist? The answer would be almost none. Over here the reason is pretty simple. Since childhood, dentists have been associated with physical discomfort. It's not just the physical pain that we associate with a dentist's clinic.

There is also a lot of stress involved. It certainly is an uncomfortable experience to spread oneself in a completely vulnerable position on the dentist's chair with one's mouth open too as if one is resigned to one's fate. The dentist, at such moments seems to have a sneer on his face as he approaches you in his spotless, white attire and contemplates on which

of his shiny pointed instruments displayed before you he should use first to prod and poke.

As a result, a visit to the dentist, as far as I am concerned, is something that sends a shiver down my spine. It's because of this that I keep avoiding visits to the dentist's clinic. Even if I start having a tooth problem I would rather depend on forces like voodoo and witch craft than go to my dentist.

That's something that I and I think a lot of others as well tend to procrastinate. Let's see if we can think of some things that are likely to get procrastinated in our professional lives. I know that for most people, cleaning up clutter is an unpleasant task. Over time, a lot of clutter gets collected in our workstations. Our drawers get stuffed with a lot of odds and ends. There will be piles of papers on our desks or perhaps under our desks so that no body sees it.

Some people even have a difficulty in clearing their mailboxes until a warning message pops up on the screen. Visiting card holders are another such area that gets neglected. Over, we stash so many cards into our card holders, most of these cards belonging to people who may have migrated to another planet for all we know. And though we know that it is a good thing to dump half these cards every now and then we never get down to doing it until the card holder literally starts bursting in the seams.

These are some of the jobs that we put off for tomorrow, a tomorrow that never comes. Now, there are some problems that arise out of procrastination that are detrimental to time Management.

### **The 5 bad effects of Procrastination**

- ✓ A feeling that a job has been left undone is bad for our morale
- ✓ Unfinished jobs leave a lot of clutter around which affects our efficiency.
- ✓ Putting things off means accumulating jobs and urgency could crop up on the same day.
- ✓ Procrastination when it comes to the notice of other people maybe branded as laziness and lack of interest in the job.
- ✓ The job becomes more unpleasant the more you postpone it.

The only thing that you need to get straight is that you have to do the job any way so why not do it right now. Do not wait for that day when-you-will-have-more-time. It will never come. The chances are that you will be busier tomorrow than you are today. Most of

those jobs that we procrastinate are the-sooner-done-the-better kind. And the sigh of relief that escapes from our lungs once the job is done and over is worth it.

All it takes is some will power, make up your mind to do a task and then do it while your mind stay made up, and believe me, the human mind does not stay made up for too long.

But then, there is a chance that you might be confronted with a strange feeling, you might start finding your job to be monotonous and boring and that is what we are going to deal with in our next chapter.

## Chapter 14: How to stay Motivated

Just look around you, it's a beautiful world out there. Life is wonderful provided you have the time and can afford to sit back and enjoy the simple pleasures of life. This is a feeling that hits us every now and then. And then when we realize that we have to be confined within the floor walls of our office, doing some work that has no scope for imagination, we end up depressed.

Every job loses its charm after some time if nothing out of the way is done to make the job interesting. To make things worse, there are too many distractions around us. We end up thinking that this is not the job that I wanted to be doing. And when we realize that we will be doing this same job probably till the end of our lives, we will want to scream.

It is a human tendency to get bored with something after some time. When we get a new job, ten for the first couple of weeks we are like the peasant boy who walked into a new palace. Every thing is new and interesting and our interest is completely captured. We try to learn things as quickly as possible and are eager to impress and prove to the world that we are perfect for the job. But after a few months we get used to everything and slowly everything begins to lose the charm. We get bored and start looking for greener pastures.

It is at this stage that procrastination starts raising its villainous head. If the tasks that we are doing are repetitive and monotonous, the picture becomes bleaker. Along with this, if the requires that we remain on toes all day long, then the future is sealed. It is in such situations that we need to keep ourselves motivated.

Speaking from the Organizational Behavior point of view let us take a look at what motivation is all about. The human brain as I mentioned earlier is a virtual store house of energy. There is nothing that we cannot do once we put our mind to it. Yeah, sure, all that has been proved time and again. But along with it comes a string attached. The same brain is easily distracted.

In fact our imagination is probably the one thing that can travel faster than light. And so it is no easy task to keep the brain occupied in the same task for an extended period of time. If the job is monotonous the task becomes more difficult and if the job is demanding and involves a lot of pressure to keep time then you are done for.

*Motivation can be thought of as the process of channeling the surplus energy of the brain towards a definite goal or purpose.*

So how long can the human mind focus on the same thing. Studies have shown that the maximum attention span of an average human being is just 45 minutes. **45 minutes?** So much for those meetings and discussions that lasted for three or four hours! No wonder nothing much comes out of such meetings. In all likelihood most of the audience conked out after the first 45 minutes and after that focused their attention on staying awake.

If you have a good boss or superior, then the task of keeping you motivated rests with them. But even then you have the responsibility to keep yours self motivated, and believe me, self motivation is the best motivation because it comes from within.

So here are a few tips on how to ward boredom away and keep you motivated.

### **12 Tips to stay motivated and keep procrastination away**

1. Never keep doing the same task for two long
2. Try to take breaks every half an hour. Get up and walk or do some stretching exercises
3. Try to alternate between two boring tasks. This will reduce the boredom in both tasks by 50%
4. If you have someone else with you who is doing the same job, try exchanging jobs with the person
5. Talk about your job to a sympathetic listener who can give you encouragement
6. Reward yourself once you have done a job well
7. If you have an uninteresting job left to do, write it down and pin it somewhere in your work station so that you can see it and get constantly reminded about it till you do it.
8. Try to make your work environment more attractive by pinning up some motivating words or some pleasant wall posters, preferably something that can make you smile. Those ‘Dennis the Menace’ posters are really wonderful for this.
9. If you are allowed to, try playing some soft music while you work.
10. Write down a list of not-so-interesting tasks that you have done and pin it up. It just tells you that if you have done it before, then you can surely do it again.
11. If possible keep a small potted plant near your work station; watching it grow is a wonderful source of inspiration. But take care to look after it properly. If you are going to watch it wilt and die, then it is going to have the opposite effect.
12. Take time to relax, just sit back and close your eyes and hum a favorite tune for a minute or two. But do not fall asleep!

Most of the points mentioned above are self explanatory but I would like to elaborate on one point that is rewarding your self.

This is one tactic that I have found to work wonders with me. If you have finished doing a job, you have every right and reason to reward your self. All the more if the task was a boring one or one that involved a deadline.

The reward does not have to be any thing great. It can be something like treating yourself to a good dinner in a favorite restaurant or it could be a simple chocolate bar if you have a sweet tooth.

But most of you weight watchers, it would be best if you could buy yourself something material that does not just go down your throat. If it is something that can be displayed in your work station, then it's all the better.

Many such cute (but practically useless) baubles are available in most gift shops.

## Chapter 15: Plan for Success

Before you are going to do something, there is nothing as sensible as a plan. A plan as we know it is something thought about and chalked out in advance before the real action takes place. Pretty good definition, huh? I made it up myself.

But then, the word ‘plan’ does not need much of a definition. It has been used so much that it has become quite hackneyed. So, we all know what it means, but how many of us really resort to planning before we start a course of action.

No, I’m not referring to a mental picture that we cart out in our minds that is in one word VAGUE. I mean a real plan in black and white, that is, put down on a piece of paper. Please do not underestimate the importance of a written down plan. Once we write down something it clears up a lot of hazy areas and opens aspects that we probably overlooked.

And the most important of all is that with a plan and only with a plan can we get a rough estimate at least of how much time the course of action would take. Plans should always be time bound and there we get the relation between time management and planning. In fact planning is as fundamental to time management as organizing and prioritizing. The advantages of planning are given below

### **The 8 advantages of planning**

1. Planning helps us to have a better idea about the course of action that we propose to take.
2. Planning better defines the course of action that we propose to undertake.
3. Planning gives a rough estimate of the time required for a project.
4. Planning gives us a fairly good idea about the expenses involved in the project. In fact a budget is only a financial plan.
5. Planning helps us to get prepared for emergencies that may arise during the course of the project.
6. A well thought about plan gives us a clear idea about what is to be every day, every week and every month.
7. Planning helps avoid duplication of labor.
8. If a plan is followed every one will have a clear idea about his or her role.

A point that I would like to add while we are talking about planning is that we should have both sort term plans as well as long term strategy plans. At the same time we should also try to draft out contingency plans to deal with a crisis if it arises.

I thought it would be useful for you to have a brief overview of the different steps involved in planning.

### **The six steps in planning are**

1. Set objectives
2. Assess you present situation
3. Survey your alternatives
4. Decide on the course of action
5. Provide for control
6. And Implement the plan

**But whatever be the plan I again want to stress the point that a plan should always be TIME BOUND.**

But as the project moves along, the plan should be flexible in the sense that it should incorporate any changes that might prove necessary ounce the project is put into action.

### **Planning the work in your office**

You have to understand that there is nothing like a very routine work that doesn't require any planning. The belief that it will go on by itself is wrong. Even tasks that ca be done on an everyday basis can be improved if there is good planning involved.

Everywhere there is scope for improvement, better methods that are yet to be implemented and problems that have to be solved. And for all this you need proper planning. Let's take a look at the different steps involved in planning for a week.

The best way to plan the work for a week is to maintain a planning sheet. Now, please remember that this is apart from the routine work that is done in the office. The following steps will help you to make a planning sheet.

1. Take a fairly big sheet of paper and divide it into the number of working days in your office.

2. The column for each day should further be divided in to the morning and afternoon sessions.
3. Divide the job to be done and assign each part to a concerned person.
4. Decide on which part of the task is to be done on each day and at which part of the day.
5. Put a cross mark followed by the concerned person's initials on that section of the day on which you propose to do the decided part of the job.
6. At the end of the day, if the job is done put a circle round the cross.
7. If the job is not done, carry over the cross and add it to the next day's cross.

In this way, at the end of the week, you can find out how much of the work was done each day and subsequent plans can be made for the following weeks

In this way you can plan for a week or a month, depending on your requirement.

While you are drafting your plan and estimating your expenses, you must never forget the fact that time means money. But your plan should be realistic as well. In order to finish the task at the earliest possible date, there is no sense in chalking out a schedule which would mean that you will have to break your back in order to meet the deadline. And that's about planning.

## Chapter 16: Workaholics Beware

There is nobody as good as a person who keeps time. That person is a man of his word, he is dependable and every employer's dream come true. It is a pleasure doing business with such a person and the list goes on. But over here, there is the scent of a problem.

Sometimes the preoccupation with time can make a person a workaholic. Now, this is no joke in fact it is a phenomenon that is very much on the rise especially among executives. Are you a workaholic? Well, why don't you find out? There are a series of questions given below, if you have the time, why don't you go through them and find out if you are a workaholic or not.

All you have to do is answer yes or no to the following questions.

Do you find yourself constantly preoccupied with your work?

Do your family and friends complain that they hardly get to see you?

Do you take your work with you when you go home?

Do you find it increasingly difficult to get time to relax and have fun?

Do you find it difficult to have food at the correct times?

So what are your answers like? If your answer to all the questions was 'yes', then you might as well join the club of "Alcoholics Anonymous". If three of your answers were affirmative, then you might send in your membership request. If you gave only two yes answers still you are not safe, none of your answers should be yes!

But I have bad news for you. Becoming a workaholic is not all that good. I suppose you have heard the proverb, "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." Man is not a one-dimensional piece of glass. He has a lot of facets and sides, interests and drives which must all be developed. He is more like a diamond that must shine and sparkle when viewed from different angles.

It's almost as if money becomes the only thing that motivates a person. Now, I want to make one point very clear. Workaholism is very different from meeting deadlines. We all get deadlines and times when work just piles up in the office. But that should be a passing phase, probably like when an audit or an inspection is taking place; then of course all the people are just flying around.

That is not workaholism. In such a situation everyone just joins the team and works as hard as possible to get things done in the best possible way within the limited time. Though every one may groan and swear, it is something that gets over within a few days

or in a week at the most. That is not an unhealthy thing. In fact the, very though t that there are lot of people working along with us is something that gets the drudgery out of the job.

Workaholism on the other hand is very different thing. It means that you are going to miss out on a lot of the good things in life. And before you even know what happened to you, you will end up like one of those steel collar workers, or in other words a living robot.

Work is important in life. We need to work to earn our daily bread. But work is not the only important thing in life. Being a person who is very time conscious does not mean that you have to end up being obsessed with your work. In fact if you are time conscious and are really concerned about getting things done on time, then there are very little chances that you will end up as a workaholic.

Getting things done on time means working well within the office hours. And that in turn means having enough free time to enjoy your leisure hours. Every body need time to unwind. And unwinding must certainly be there. Or else you will end up totally worked up.

Contrary to popular belief workaholism is in reality counter productive. That's because when it lasts it might seem good enough, but nothing in this world lasts for ever. Sooner or later you will experience what experts now refer to as the Executive Burnout. I will deal more with the executive burnout in the next chapter.

Before I conclude this chapter, I just want to raise a point for you to ponder on.

Imagine that you have been working a little more than harder the whole day. You have been on your toes doing this and doing that. Towards the end of the day you realize, or you just come to know that there is some urgent work to be done that must be dispatched the following day.

You have two alternatives before you, you can tell the security that you will be working a few extra hours while the others pick up their bags and leave. The very thought that you have to stay back when the others are leaving is going to weigh down on you, though you might feel kid of grand when you look at others with the air of a person who has to do his duty.

Then you have to telephone your spouse or friends and tell them that you will be late and may probably have to call off the date that you had fixed for the night. That itself is going to make you grumpy especially if you hear an unenthusiastic grunt from the other side of the line.

After that with a private sigh of resignation you have to sit down to finish that @#%^& piece of work. (I'm sure you will think of unprintable words to describe the work at this juncture). You have to remember that you are already exhausted with the busy day that

you had. It goes without saying that if at all you finish the task, the work will be far from satisfactory.

Your other alternative is that you take a quick look at the work and estimate how long it will take for you to finish it. Then you forget completely about it and pack your things and clear up your workstation and leave with all the others, bidding a cheerful goodnight to every Tom Dick and Harry, and every Jane Susan and Mary. You reach home in the best of spirits and have a nice time with the kids or enjoy yourself with your date. You go to sleep early and wake up thoroughly refreshed in the morning. You work out for sometime, have a shower and a good breakfast and try to reach your office a little earlier than usual with a song in your heart and a spring to your step.

Now if you sit down to do the work, not only will the quality of the work be much better but in all likelihood you will take less time than is really required for it. Well, what do you think, isn't it worth trying out?

## Chapter 17: Executive Burnout

We have experienced it haven't we, the din and bustle of modern life, the fret and fury of life in the city, tensions, worries, anxiety, deadlines... This is going to pay off some day and if you are not careful, before you know it you will be experiencing the scourge of the modern executive that is the Executive Burnout.

You will be amazed at the number of executives who are hard hit by the burn out syndrome as some psychologists call it. It has become an almost universal phenomenon among executives across the globe. So what are the symptoms of Executive Burnout? If you would like to find out if you are on the verge of a burnout, try answering the following questions.

1. Do you experience flashes of memory loss?
2. Do you sometimes get that 'BLANK' feeling when you cannot get head or tail of what you have to do next?
3. You know that there is a lot of work to be done but you have no idea where to start
4. You find that you are becoming increasingly irritable and lose your temper quite easily
5. You feel mentally and physically exhausted at the end of the day but still you are restless in the night and cannot get a good night's sleep.
6. Even after remaining in bed for 6 to seven hours you wake up feeling weary
7. Your eyes start having dark circles around them
8. You tend to forget meal times and even if you remember them you eat at the most insensible times
9. Instead of eating square meals you find that you are sustaining yourself on caffeine and nicotine, which means you are drinking too much coffee and smoking too many cigarettes.
10. You find yourself working too hard but unable to accomplish all that you want.

Jeepers brother! If at least five of the above statements are true for you then you are in BIG trouble. You have got to do something about it or you are going to ruin your health.

You will soon start experiencing condition like insomnia (sleeplessness), loss of appetite and stress. These things will manifest themselves in diseases like hypertension (high

blood pressure), ulcers and even a mental break down. And if you are not careful before long you could end up in an asylum.

Tell me is your life and work worth your job? Shouldn't it be the other way round? You should decide what your job should be and not let your job rule your life. It's really not worth it.

The underlying principle of this argument is that time management is not about doing your job well. It is about living your life well. You should have time for everything. And everything means work, play, enjoyment, freaking out and just time to sit and stare; because that is when the most creative ideas are born.

## Chapter 18: Tardiness

It goes without saying that tardiness is a no-no in any professional establishment. Even if you are standing at a booking office or in a queue and you notice that the person in front of you is taking his or her own sweet time, you might start counting to ten so that you do not lose your temper. Most of us cannot tolerate slowness. Sometimes even if the person who is taking a long time is a senior citizen and is incapable of making haste we produce a range of sounds to show our exasperation.

So we have so much impatience with others, how much patience will others have with us. I believe that there are three groups of people in this world. They are:

1. The people who always are on time
2. The people who make an honest effort but more often than once fail to reach on time
3. The group of people who make a living by selling used toothpicks.

Actually there is no group like the third group. The people who really come in that group are the people who do not make any effort at all to be on time. But then they cannot be considered as people at all and are better off selling used toothpicks and my blessings into the bargain.

I used to find it very difficult to believe that there could actually be people who didn't care two hoots for time. But there are! I don't know about you, but I really believe that people who consciously waste their time and because of them, the time of others as well, are real criminals. They should be made to walk the plank! While the rest of us are struggling so hard to make the maximum use of the time that we have, there are people who don't care a damn about things like being late or making others wait.

I suppose most of us fit into the second category that is the group of people who do make an honest effort to reach on time and do things on time but often fail mainly due to reasons beyond our control. So is there any way out of this? Of course there is and that is what we are going to talk about.

The first thing that we have to do is to develop a deep concern for the time of others. Of course we have the liberty to waste our time. (I consider even that wrong, but opinions may be different). But we have no right to waste the time of others. It is just very, very bad manners to keep a person waiting. It shows inconsideration and selfishness on our part.

Once you instill this thought deep into your mind there is a lesser chance that you will keep another person waiting because we all want other to think and speak good about us.

The second thing that you have to do is understand that if you are late for something that involves more than one person than the severity of the situation is raised several fold. Like for instance you are late for a meeting that involves, say, 12 people and they are waiting for you to reach to begin the meeting.

You might be just five minutes late. That seems ok enough because five minutes is not such a big deal. But a crucial point that you may be missing out there is that it is not just five minutes that is wasted. Since there are 12 people who are waiting for you, you are in effect wasting

**12 times 5, which is 60 minutes of productive time!**

Now that looks bad doesn't it, wasting one hour of productive work?

These two thoughts are enough for any normal person to make some haste and see that there are no unnecessary delays because of that person.

But still in the course of our daily life, we come across what we call emergencies. Unforeseen events take place, like your car might refuse to start, or the car might be a puncture, or some guests might walk in just when you are leaving. Hey, we are only human and catastrophes are bound to happen. Just see to it that others are not kept waiting because of a slight misfortune that you encountered.

If you have a cell phone (everybody has a cell phone nowadays) it would be best to call the other person and inform that you are late. So long as you can inform the other person your offence becomes pardonable.

In case you are unable to inform the person then you really must make amends. Do not, and I repeat it, do not take it for granted that the other person will understand. Too many things have been taken for granted in today's world. You have to go out of your way to apologize for being late.

If you are unable to meet the person on the said day, it would be an excellent idea to send the person a sorry note to make up for your mistake. At least in the way the person can know that you did make a sincere effort but things were beyond your control. Such gestures really streamline our relationships with others.

So what do you do if you make good efforts to be on time but still do not, because, well because ...of no reason in particular! It happens you know. You start to get ready to go well in advance and everything works out fine without any catastrophes on the way. But yet you reach the place a couple of minutes late and everyone stares at you in disapproval.

In such cases the solution is to work your time backwards. Sounds strange, huh? Well, let me explain how it works. You should start to calculate the time you need to reach your

destination not starting from your home but from the destination itself. You could try writing it down till you become comfortable with such a mental chart.

Your charts will look something like this.

Time needed to reach the office in the elevator: 1 minute

Time needed to park car and pick up things: 1 minute

Time needed to find parking space: 5 minutes

Time needed to drive to office from home: 10 minutes

Time needed to reach car park from apartment: 3 minutes

Time needed to lock apartment: 1 minute

Time needed to dress and get ready: 15 minutes

Time needed to shower and dry yourself: 10 minutes

Now you just have to add up these figures and you will get an exact idea of how long it takes you to get to office. Again there is something left to do. You may have to make allowances for certain things where crises may crop up.

Like for instance the drive to office. It would be a god thing to anticipate a traffic jam and give your self some grace time over there. Similarly finding a parking space can sometimes prove to be more trickier than a treasure hunt. So you could give yourself a couple of minutes extra time here and there if such activities are involved. Again I would like to remind you that the figures given here are just random figures. The figures may vary from person to person.

At the same time I can't help wondering why a person would want to shower for than 10 minutes!

If you work backwards like this, you can get a very accurate idea of how long you will need for something. Then how can you possibly go wrong?

### **Some tips on making meetings less time wasters.**

Meetings have a very bad reputation of being time wasters. How many of us have had to sit through long hours of meetings and had to listen to people who ramble on and on about issues which in fact need probably five or ten minutes to be decided.

As a result, meetings are seldom looked forward to. I thought it might be useful to you to include some tips on how to make your meetings more time effective. The fact is that meetings are not really all that bad and if meetings are well planned they can prove to be

the best way to brief a group of people on matters like policies, progress, and points of action.

Meetings, in which brain storming sessions take place, bring out the best ideas from people on how to solve issues.

**So here are 9 tips on time saving for meetings:**

1. The participants should be aware of the subject matter of the meeting. Instead of just announcing that a meeting is to be held, it would be a good idea to inform the participants as to what why the meeting is being called and what are the matters that are going to be discussed in the meeting.
2. Try to get the members seated in time, if one or two members are going to be late and everyone else has to wait for them, that is going to upset the pace of the meeting.
3. Try to provide all the members with the necessary papers and equipment for the discussion. Instead of passing round one paper for every one to see, try and make copies, the extra cost is worth the time.
4. Interruptions should be avoided as much as possible, but the members must feel free to air their views once a person has finished speaking.
5. Care must be taken to avoid eating around the bush and digressions. The presiding person must not hesitate to point out if a person is digressing too much. The members too must be cautioned to stick to the point as much as possible.
6. The members of course must display the high degree and patience expected from professionals.
7. A person must give a summary at the end of the meeting, so that the members leave with the knowledge that something was accomplished and it was not just a meaningless discussion.
8. Cell phones of course must be switched off and external calls on land phones must be deferred.
9. Refreshments if required must be laid on the table prior to the beginning of the discussion and not served in between. If it is a very long discussion and hot beverages like tea and coffee need to be served, take a break it saves more time.

## Summing up

Time management is not such a big deal. It's just because people tend to take time for granted that everything becomes such a big mess.

Hey guys we only get one life in this world so shouldn't we try to live it to the fullest. So where is the time to waste?

Time management is essentially a part of, or I should say the result of self management. If you are well organized and your life has a definite order then the chances are that time management will come naturally for you.

I would like to sum up everything that we have talked about in the following poem.

Take time to work-  
It is the price of success  
Take time to think-  
It is the source of power  
Take time to play-  
It is the secret of perpetual youth  
Take time to read-  
It is the fountain of wisdom  
Take time to be friendly-  
It is the road to happiness  
Take time to love and be loved-  
It is the nourishment of the soul  
Take time to share-  
It is too short a life to be selfish  
Take time to laugh-  
It is the music of the heart  
Take time to dream-  
It is hitching your wagon to a star.

Anonymous