



Tyme Management™

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Making a Plan of Action

Although similar to a “to do” list, an action plan focuses solely on the tasks needed to complete a single goal or objective. **Here are some practical steps to help you develop an action plan:**

- ◆ Define your goal or objective clearly and concisely, including a specific deadline.
- ◆ List all of the steps necessary to achieve your goal in no particular order.
- ◆ Remember to include the initial steps of preparing and organizing, as well as the final steps of wrapping up and evaluating.
- ◆ For each step you list, add the tasks and details it comprises, and break these down into separate steps to simplify them.
- ◆ Highlight or put an asterisk next to the steps that will be the most important in sustaining and completing the project.
- ◆ Look for how the various steps are related to each other, and then put them in the correct sequence.
- ◆ Note in parentheses the approximate time that each step will require, and factor in time for interruptions.
- ◆ Examine your planner, and write down when you’ll do each step.

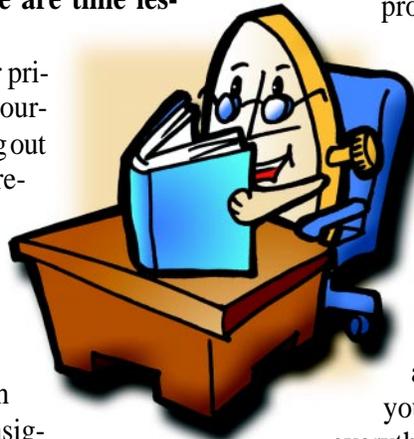
Time Lessons Worth Learning

When it comes down to it, time management isn’t a complex science that only rocket scientists can figure out. To manage your time successfully, all you really need is knowledge of basic time-management principles and a commitment to apply them consistently. By practicing these elementary principles until they become habits, you can go to the head of the class. **Here are time lessons worth learning:**

- ▲ Set and stick to clear priorities. If you find yourself constantly putting out fires, you may be pre-occupied with urgent, but not necessarily important, tasks. Or, if you’re a perfectionist, you may expend too much time and energy on insignificant tasks. To avoid this, know your priorities and devote the majority of your time to these activities.
- ▲ Establish long-term goals. When you know the direction you’re headed in, it’s easier to make the daily decisions that will help you get there. Long-term goals can help you stay mindful of your priorities and track your progress in a measurable way. They also curb the tendency to focus on short-term tasks that produce immediate results. Set specific goals for each area of your job and review your

progress regularly.

- ▲ Plan your day proactively. If you don’t have a plan for your day, you’re likely to waste your time on unimportant activities. Schedule your most challenging work for the beginning of the day and leave easier tasks for the end of the day when you may be more tired. To make headway on important projects, work on them a little each day before attending to trivial tasks.
- ▲ Gauge your time realistically. People generally underestimate how long it takes to complete a task. Time how long your various activities take, so you can allow enough time. When you don’t have time to do everything, delegate part of the job if possible.
- ▲ Maintain motivation. If you find yourself slowing down, losing concentration, or procrastinating on what you’re working on, introduce some variety to perk up your motivation. Stand up and take a walk around the office or discuss the project with a coworker to get outside input. Or, change your focus and work on a different project for a little while and then return to the original project.



Managing with Authority

In large part, the amount of authority you command as a manager is in direct proportion to how well you communicate your instructions to others. When you communicate directions well, people will look to you for orders and perform them to your specifications. **To use your authority effectively:**

- Tailor your instructions to the individual. How you communicate directions will depend on the knowledge, experience and personality of the person. For some people, you need only suggest that they do something for them to do it while others will need you to give them clear instructions.
- Give specific instructions. When assigning a task, know the exact objectives you have for it and explain the precise method you want people to use. In many cases, employees will do the job incorrectly when they don't receive clear enough instructions.
- Try not to overload people with too many orders or details at once. When people get too much information at one time, they're likely to forget something. If your instructions are complicated, put them in writing to help make them more understandable.
- Avoid delivering orders in an angry or sarcastic manner. Be calm and composed when interacting with others. Make sure that your orders don't contradict any of your previous rules or directives and that they don't infringe on any lines of authority.
- Confirm that your instructions are understood and monitor progress. When giving instructions, ask people to repeat them back to you to ensure that you're "on the same page." Monitor people's progress without interfering to delegate your authority while still maintaining the responsibility.



Effective Employee Surveys

Employee surveys can be an excellent tool for improving how your organization operates. **Here's how to conduct surveys that produce results:**

- Guarantee that the survey will be confidential. Make sure that questions aren't specific enough for the answers to reveal who people are. People will hesitate to be completely honest if the survey isn't anonymous.
- Customize the survey to your organization. Avoid using standardized surveys. Create a survey that addresses the specific issues and needs of your company or department.
- Include open-ended questions that will encourage an honest response. Limit the number you include in your survey, however, since they can also be difficult to answer and draw conclusions from.
- Ask questions that apply to all the people participating in the survey. Avoid questions that are only relevant to a specific area or department.
- Communicate survey results to your organization. Distribute the information to your staff without publishing any person's responses word for word. Provide a forum for employees to discuss the results.
- Follow up on the issues identified from the survey results. Devise an action plan for improving the areas addressed in the survey. If management doesn't act, people won't want to answer another survey.



Pat Answers

Dear Pat: I would like to get suggestions on how to address a co-worker who shares too much personal information. He shares details about his ex-wife and their marriage. He's constantly saying negative things about her and calls her disgusting names. I don't want to be rude to him, but I really don't care and don't want to know about his personal issues. It's getting to a point that I just want to get up and leave the minute he starts. What can I do?

Pat Answers: Many of us are subjected to more personal information about our co-workers' lives than is necessary or comfortable. And it's a problem for organizations when it interferes with harmonious working relationships, as it seems to be doing in your case. Your co-worker is doing what's called "venting." He's apparently feeling a lot of strong emotions regarding his marriage and divorce, and he's trying to deal with them by talking about it. If he were writing me, I'd suggest that he talk to a trained counselor who might actually help him move on. But as it is, he's trying to get support by criticizing his ex-wife to anyone who will listen. You don't have to be one of those people. But you will need to tell him that. He is probably so caught up in his own drama that he has no idea of how his "sharing" is affecting others. Talk to him privately. Tell him you're sorry for his troubles, but that it makes you uncomfortable hearing so much personal information. Tell him you'd prefer to keep the conversation lighter and more professional. Then, if he starts discussing his personal life in front of you again, simply say "Excuse me," and politely walk away. Letting him know that his behavior is alienating his co-workers isn't being rude; it's doing him a favor.



Are co-workers driving you crazy? Is your boss out of touch? Complex personnel problems demand Pat Answers! Send questions to: pat@patgrigadean.com. Pat

Grigadean is a professional mediator, trainer, and employee-relations specialist. She writes Pat Answers in consultation with Haven Street-Allen, SPHR. © 2007 Pat Grigadean.

Boost Company Cash Flow

To achieve a positive cash flow, a company must have a sound strategy for accelerating cash inflow and delaying outflows. **The following are tips from the Illinois CPA Society to boost company cash reserves:**

- ▲ Consider leasing equipment. In the long run, leasing equipment generally costs more than buying it, but the cash flow benefits may justify the increased costs. Expensive equipment purchases can tie up cash that could be used for day-to-day operations.
- ▲ Manage suppliers. While most suppliers want payment in 30 days, some may be willing to extend terms if you have a good payment history. Avoid buying more than you need or expect to sell, regardless of how favorable the price is.
- ▲ Monitor inventory levels. Maintaining inventory levels at less than what is needed to support demand may result in lost sales and delays for customers. On the other hand, excess inventory places a burden on cash resources. Compare your inventory turnover to industry norms and rely on historical sales data and forecasts to set inventory levels. Sell off outdated, slow-moving merchandise.
- ▲ Check credit information. Obtain at least three trade references and use a commercial credit reporting service to verify a company's creditworthiness. Never grant credit until you're comfortable with the customer's ability to pay. Request a deposit particularly if the order is large.
- ▲ Bill promptly. Mail invoices the same day you complete the work or ship the product. If you accept a job that will take a long time to complete, possibly bill in stages.
- ▲ Accelerate your accounts receivable. Consider offering a cash discount to fast payers. If a good customer is having legitimate financial problems, try to arrange to get at least a small payment each week. Whenever you receive payments, be sure to deposit checks quickly.
- ▲ Aggressively follow up on overdue invoices. When an invoice reaches 45 days beyond your terms, engage the services of a collection agency. The longer someone owes you, the less likely it is that you'll be paid in full.
- ▲ Pay bills on time, but not before they're due. When it comes to paying company bills, you should take as long as you're allotted without incurring late fees or interest charges. An exception to this rule applies when suppliers offer you a discount for paying early.



Making the Organization Work

Successful management is more than just telling people what to do. It's knowing how the organization functions as a whole and then facilitating an efficient workflow. **Here are ways to improve your organization's workflow:**

- ◆ Focus on the connections rather than on the individual parts. As a manager, you have a bird's eye view of how people's various jobs relate to one another. By knowing how these jobs are interconnected, you can plan and assign tasks to accommodate everyone involved.
- ◆ Look for areas where work isn't running smoothly. Identify how one person's job helps others to do their jobs and know the boundaries between people's work responsibilities. Pinpoint ways that one person's job hinders the effectiveness of others' and initiate improvements.
- ◆ Pay attention to recurring problems. Never allow yourself to become too busy to deal with repetitive problems. If a problem repeats itself, it probably means a change is in order. Take time to think through how things are done in order to eliminate these problems.
- ◆ Be prepared for the unexpected. By knowing how the pieces fit together, you can foresee what will need to be done when an employee or piece of equipment is unable to do part of the job. Stay aware of progress on tasks, so you'll be ready as soon as a problem crops up.
- ◆ Create an outline of procedures for doing various tasks. Specific instructions help people work more effectively because they know the results expected of them and can measure their performance accordingly. Be flexible to exceptions to the rule, and when problems emerge, focus on solving the problem rather than on blaming someone for failing to follow procedures properly.



Stay in Touch with Coworkers

To keep in touch: • Plan to visit a few of your colleagues in other departments each week. Find out what's going on in their part of the company and think of valuable information you can exchange. • Schedule periodic managers' meetings. Gather the managers in various departments once or twice a year to discuss the topics of interest that you have in common. • Bring communication problems to other managers' attention. Notify the managers of other departments when your staff doesn't receive the information it needs.

Get Rid of Unwanted, Unnecessary Reports

Reports are notorious for cluttering desks with unnecessary paperwork. One of the simplest ways you can keep organized and cut down on paper is to eliminate the reports you don't need and streamline the ones you do. **To decide which reports you can do away with, consider the following checklist:**

- ✓ *Do you really need this report?* If the report doesn't contain vital information you need to do your job, ask the sender to take your name off the distribution list. It will save both of you the time and effort.
- ✓ *Do you use this report to make decisions?* If you don't have to take action on any of the information in the report, this is a good indication that it isn't necessary for you to read.
- ✓ *Would you suffer any adverse consequences if you didn't receive this report?* If it merely contains interesting information, your time could be better spent elsewhere.
- ✓ *Does the report consistently arrive to you late?* There's no sense getting a report if the information is too outdated to make a difference. Ask the sender to either deliver it on time or else stop sending it.
- ✓ *Does the report come too often?* It may suffice to receive the report once a month or week rather than more frequently. Or, request a printout of the report only when you need it for something.

When reports are necessary, here are tips for keeping them as lean as possible:

- ✓ *Condense information as much as possible.* Ask people to skip background information and irrelevant facts and to only include pertinent information.
- ✓ *Arrange information in an action-oriented format.* Use subheadings, bullets and underlining to present problems, suggest solutions and request follow-up action.
- ✓ *Forgo needless graphs and charts.* If visuals are redundant and don't significantly aid in understanding the material, don't require them. Or, use them as a substitute for lengthy text and lists of figures.

"Next to the dog, the wastebasket is your best friend."

– B.C. Forbes



When to Print Out

Hitting the print button can become a reflex if you're not careful. While computers make it possible to reduce the paperwork of traditional files, many people are still in the habit of printing out a hard copy even when it's not necessary. The result is just as much, if not more, paper as before. **You don't need to print a computer file if:**

- You can work with the file on screen.
- You can save it on disk for your records.
- You won't need to refer to it again.
- You can E-mail the file to others.

How to Reuse Waste Paper

When you make a mistake printing or copying a document, this doesn't mean that this paper must go to waste. Place a bin next to your printer and copier for people to put waste paper in and then **recycle this paper in one of the following ways:**

- ◆ Print on the other side of it if your printer can do so according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- ◆ Use the back side for scratch paper for memos, lists and notes.
- ◆ Take it home to give as doodle paper for children.
- ◆ Give it to a local day care or library for children's art projects.
- ◆ Deliver it to the recycling center in your community.

Clean Out Your Junk Drawer

Every home or office has one. And while it may house many helpful items, a junk drawer can also annoy and frustrate you when you can't find what you're looking for. The only way to convert your junk drawer from a hassle to a help is to organize it. **Here's how to clean out the junk drawer in your home or office:**

- ❖ Empty the contents of your junk drawer.
- ❖ Divide all of the objects into categories of similar items.
- ❖ Toss out items you can't identify or that aren't needed.
- ❖ Select dividers or containers to separate items by category.
- ❖ Return items to the drawer in their new compartments.
- ❖ Resist the tendency to just shove items into your newly organized drawer. Put them where they belong.



Facilitate New Ideas

New ideas are the lifeblood of a dynamic, growing organization. **Here's how you can encourage your employees to generate new ideas:**

- Hang a bulletin board in the hallway or break room. People can put work-related problems on the board and have others post possible solutions.
- Host a monthly idea drawing. Give your employees a ticket each time they have a creative idea or solution. At the end of the month, put all the tickets in a jar for a prize and draw a winner.
- Plan brainstorming luncheons. Arrange small groups of coworkers to get together every other week to discuss problems, solutions and new ideas for the company.
- Require them to put on their thinking caps. Ask your staff to make a list of the top five most difficult or problematical tasks. Then ask them to come up with solutions for them.
- Assign people a different job. Have them work in a different position or department one day. Ask them to report back on the problems they observed and how to change them.



Give a Pat on the Back

Giving people the recognition they deserve encourages them to keep up the good work. **The following are times to give your employees a pat on the back:**

- ⌘ When people provide creative ideas or solutions. Innovation is a core element of companies that will grow and succeed today and tomorrow.
- ⌘ When people work together to accomplish company goals. Cheer on the teamwork you see among your staff and reward them for their efforts to work together.
- ⌘ When people take risks that pay off. Risk taking is a healthy part of improving procedures and results. Welcome it.
- ⌘ When people surpass your expectations for the job. Whenever people go the extra mile, let them know that their extra effort is genuinely appreciated.
- ⌘ When people demonstrate excellent work consistently. Never take good work for granted. Doing so gives people unspoken permission to lower their standards.

Boost Your Staff's Productivity Level

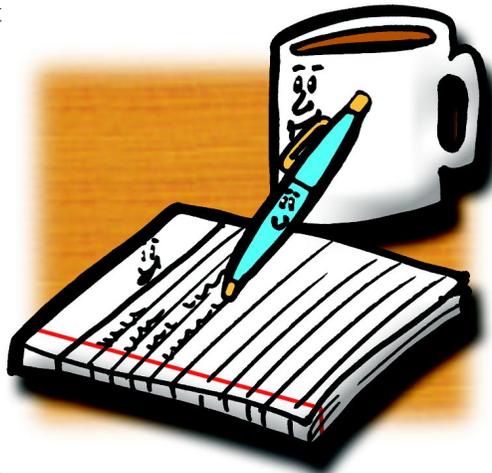
Setting a goal to be more productive won't do much unless you have a plan to practically implement it. **To help your staff be more productive:**

- ▲ Explain your expectations clearly. When goals are unclear, people's efforts are often hit or miss. Communicate the tasks each person is responsible for and the specific goals, deadlines and standards of performance involved with each.
- ▲ Teach people to prioritize their tasks. Without priorities, people can waste valuable time on unimportant activities. When assigning tasks, note which ones are of high and low priority, and give criteria that will help people to distinguish these priority levels on their own.
- ▲ Match people's personalities to the jobs they do. People are most successful at their jobs when they do tasks that maximize their skills, talents and temperaments. Watch for the different areas that people flourish in and assign them tasks in these areas.
- ▲ Offer employees the chance to grow. Provide the tools, training and equipment people need to do their jobs well. Look for opportunities to assign jobs that will allow people the chance to learn new skills or gain more experience in an area they're interested in.
- ▲ Foster employee commitment. People will put more effort into work that they're committed to. To help foster employee commitment to a project, involve them in the planning and decision-making process. Explain how each person makes an important contribution to the team.
- ▲ Grant autonomy to your staff. Give people the authority and freedom they need to do their jobs unhindered. Allow them to make minor decisions on their own without a supervisor's approval. Let them know that you trust them to act as intelligent, responsible people.
- ▲ Provide consistent, positive feedback. Be on the lookout for ways that people are doing their job well and ways that they could do even better. Use accurate feedback to encourage your employees to maintain or improve their performance. Reward people for good work.
- ▲ Identify obstacles to effectiveness. Ask your staff what prevents them from doing their jobs well, and come up with ways to remove these obstacles.



Make the Effort to Get the Most Out of Meetings

With so much time and effort put into meetings, it's unfortunate that they're often forgotten about as soon as they're over. By making the effort to get the most out of them, you can ensure that your time spent in meetings isn't wasted. **Here are several ways that you can make your time in meetings more productive:**



- Take notes. Reserve one page for each person speaking, and return to it to jot down the main points each time that person has something to say. When you review your notes later, you'll then be able to summarize each person's point of view.
- Listen actively. Pay attention not only to the actual words being said, but also to the nonverbal cues in the message. The more you understand people, the better able you'll be to communicate with them.
- Take immediate action. After the meeting, write down what action steps you need to take. What responsibilities were you assigned? With whom will you need to follow up?
- Pass it on. Report the pertinent news and information discussed in the meeting to the people who need to know about it. Also share any facts or in-

sights that will help motivate and challenge them.

- Review your notes. Put the notes in your inbox, and schedule time in your planner for reviewing them. After you look over them, place a check mark on the notes, so you'll know that you've already reviewed them.
- File reference information. For notes that don't require action, file them where they can be put to good use. Or, keep all of your meeting notes in a special notebook or binder that you can refer to when needed.

How Much Stress Do You Manage?

Stress is a major part of a manager's job. And unless you know how to cope with it healthily, this stress can take its toll on your health, job performance and overall well-being. **To determine whether you're suffering from the effects of job-related stress, ask yourself the following questions:**

- Do you often get irritated with co-workers and clients?
- Do you frequently blame your company or coworkers for your poor performance?
- Are you feeling more and more unsatisfied with your present job?
- Do you fantasize about leaving your company to get a better job?
- Have you begun to withdraw from coworkers and to neglect your work responsibilities?



If you answered "yes" to several of these questions, too much stress on the job may be the reason. Make a list of the stressors you experience in your job. Put a star next to the ones that you can do something about, and work with others to change these things. In addition, practice effective stress-management techniques that can help create more balance in your life. **These include:** • regular exercise • a healthy diet • adequate sleep • social and leisure time • a positive attitude.

Phone Service

To provide better service to the people you call and who call you:

- ❖ Make a list of the points you want to cover. Do this for complicated or important calls, and keep a generic list on hand for things to include during routine calls.
- ❖ Keep important information at your fingertips. If you have information that you need to update, for example, keep it visible on your computer screen or index.
- ❖ Be friendly, but not too personal. Avoid dumping your work or personal problems out on your clients. This may send them the message that you and your company are incompetent.
- ❖ End the call when appropriate. Talking on and on wastes the other person's time and yours. Take the initiative to end a call when both people's reasons for calling have been discussed.

"A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds."

– Francis Bacon

Select the Right Medium to Communicate

Customers and coworkers long to be treated as special, important individuals. It's been a long time since having people's names inserted into the middle of a direct marketing letter impressed them. In an age of impersonal "customization," people want personal communication. The E-mail, letter and proposal writers who can make a positive emotional connection with their writing will win people's attention, business, goodwill and loyalty.

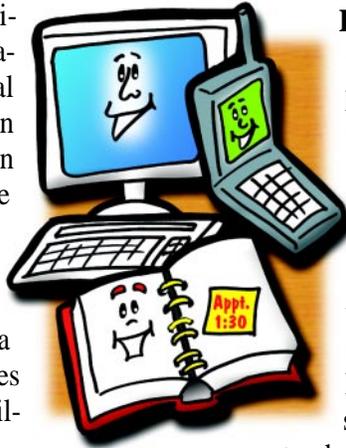
Impact, reference, speed and distribution are key criteria in knowing which medium of communication to use. **When deciding whether to send an E-mail or a formal letter or report, consider the following:**

- ◆ **Impact.** It's an image decision: tux or blue jeans? Protocol may demand a formal letter or report. When introducing yourself, product, or service to a new organization or to a new individual within the organization, most people still expect a formal letter, proposal, or other literature to arrive in hard copy, so it can be read at their leisure. In other words, if you're writing to the CEO, he or she will generally consider an E-mail a breach of etiquette as a first-time means of communication from an outsider.

Protocol aside, consider the look. Prepare a formal letter or report if the content requires editing and formatting capabilities not available through E-mail software.

Finally, consider the formality. Because E-mail is commonly used for routine day-to-day business, the recipient won't attach as much importance to an E-mail message as to a formal letter, report, or proposal.

- ◆ **Reference.** Will the recipient need to find your information three years from now? With most software programs, you can easily delete all E-mails older than a preset date with a few keystrokes or routinely during the archiving process. Although E-mails can be kept indefinitely, most users don't bother to make an exception with their file command on a document-by-document basis.
- ◆ **Speed.** You can send a report by courier in a few hours, but E-mail takes mere seconds. Of course, when the E-mail may be read is an altogether different matter.
- ◆ **Distribution.** Yes, you can make 50 copies of a 20-page report and distribute it around the building or fax it cross-country. But that's definitely more expensive and more trouble than hitting a few keys. Second, consider the ease of a recipient forwarding your information to others. That's easier done and you control the quality of the "reprint."



On other occasions, the telephone should be your medium of choice instead of an E-mail or letter. **Choose to phone when:**

- ◆ *You need an immediate response.* You can't guarantee when people will answer E-mail, but if you catch them answering the phone, you may get an immediate response.
- ◆ *You want to hear someone's tone of voice to "read between the lines" about the message, information, personal commitment and so forth.* People are typically less on guard when speaking than when writing.
- ◆ *You need to ask questions and negotiate issues,* and the answers to these questions determine your immediate direction in the negotiations.
- ◆ *You're concerned about the privacy of your comments.*

However, prefer E-mail to the phone when:

- ◆ The information is complex and warrants repeating.
- ◆ A written copy is more convenient for later reference.

Nothing makes people as angry about the wrong choice of media as the following situations: 1) when someone leaves a voice mail with detailed information that needs to be transcribed almost in its entirety; or 2) when someone E-mails about a situation that has too many discussion points, requiring either an ongoing saga or an extended, time-consuming response.

For all its convenience, E-mail has a few drawbacks. First, humor doesn't travel well in typical E-mails unless the reader knows you well. In the absence of tone of voice, facial expression and body language, readers may interpret your flippant or witty remark as literal or stupid.

Second, you risk losing control of what you've written. Yes, others shouldn't forward your sensitive messages without your permission. But they often do. Forwarding other people's E-mail tempts those of even the highest integrity.

Two good questions to ask yourself before putting anything in an E-mail are: 1) What might happen if this E-mail were forwarded to everyone in the company? 2) What might happen if a client or supplier sued us and all our E-mail records were subpoenaed for court? Commit your information to E-mail accordingly.



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TIMESAVERS

How Often Do You Say "No"?

Saying "no" is essential to having enough time to do the things that are worthwhile to you. To examine how well you use this important word, **ask yourself the following questions:**

- What activities do you currently do that you don't really want to?
- What have you said "yes" to that you wish you'd said "no" to?
- What things do you do to please others, but resent having to do?
- What are a few things you want to do, but never have the time for?
- How much time do you spend with the people who are the most important to you?
- How much time do you spend on the activities, goals and projects you value most?
- If you had more time, what would you spend it on?
- Do you feel tired and burned out a majority of the time?

The art of living rightly is like all arts; it must be learned and practiced with incessant care. – Goethe

Calculate the Right Time

Spending too much or too little time on a task can be a waste. If you continue working too long, the results may be little in comparison to the additional time you invest. Likewise, if you don't spend enough time on a task, you may not make significant enough headway on it for the initial effort to be worthwhile. **To plan the optimal amount of time for each of the tasks on your "to do" list:**

- ▲ *Determine the minimum and maximum ranges for your tasks.*

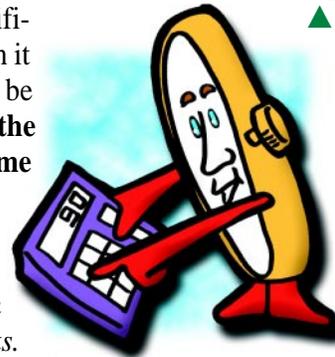
To set a minimum time, decide how long it takes you to prepare for and become fully engaged in the task to make notable progress on it. To set a maximum time, estimate how long it takes you to complete the task and at what point further work produces little results. Also consider how important the task is and the level of excellence required.

- ▲ *Identify which tasks you do that aren't within the minimum and maximum ranges.* For the tasks you don't spend even the minimum amount of time on, decide whether you should plan more time for them, delegate them, or do

away with them altogether. For the tasks you spend the maximum amount of time on, check to make sure that these activities warrant such careful attention. Could some of this time be better spent elsewhere?

- ▲ *Schedule sufficient time for the tasks you do and delegate.* Low-priority work only requires the minimum time, while more high-priority items need a time somewhere between the minimum and maximum ranges, depending on how important they are. When delegating an assignment,

establish a minimum and maximum range. Explain the results you expect before having someone commit to doing the job. This will save both of you wasted time and frustration in the end.



Set a Group Reading Deadline

The next time you pass around an article for people to read, write a return deadline at the top of it. This will keep people mindful of time, so it gets read and keeps circulating rather than becoming buried in someone's inbox.