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Remind Yourself

It can be easy to forget what to do when there's so much to do. **Here are some simple ways to remind yourself what to do:**

- ◆ Write it down. Make a note to yourself in your planner or on an erasable marker board.
- ◆ Alarm yourself. Set the alarm on your watch, clock, or computer to go off before you need to do something. For crucial appointments, set a second alarm to go off as well.
- ◆ Leave yourself a message. If you're at home and don't want to forget to do something at work tomorrow, call the office and leave yourself a voice mail reminder.
- ◆ Post sticky notes in strategic locations. Stick them on your bathroom mirror, front door, computer terminal, or steering wheel to remind yourself to do errands and chores.
- ◆ Put it on tape. For the times when it's inconvenient to write something down, use a small tape recorder instead. Record ideas, phone numbers and "to do" items to play back later.
- ◆ E-mail yourself. Use your computer to send yourself E-mail reminders of important dates and appointments.

Prevent Last-Minute Panic Cases

Misplaced files, missing keys, lost memos... these are a few of the things that can steal time and peace of mind from your day. If this sounds familiar, you may be convinced that your forgetfulness is beyond remedy. However, with a little planning and organization, there's much you can do to prevent frantic last-minute searches for your belongings. **The following are strategies for curing a chronic case of forgetfulness:**

- Designate a spot to return items. Choose a specific location to put each of the items you tend to misplace, and get in the habit of returning things back to where they belong.
- Organize and label items in a simple and consistent manner. Put frequently used items where you can see and reach them easily. Create a logical system for labeling files, and separate computer files into different folders that will make them easier to locate.
- Duplicate essentials. Make a list of things that could cause a disaster if they were lost. This list may include confidential papers, computer files, account numbers and keys. Make a copy of these items, and store them in another

location, such as in a safety deposit box or with a trusted person.

- Arrange for the return of lost belongings. Write your name, address, telephone number and E-mail address on valuables, such as your wallet, briefcase, suitcase, or laptop computer, in case they become lost. Offer a reward if the item is particularly valuable to you. Carry important papers in a large self-addressed, stamped envelope so that people can mail them back to you if you accidentally leave them somewhere.
- Use reminders. Tell someone where you plan to put the things that you often misplace. This person can then help you track down missing items if necessary. You can also write a note in your planner or on a sticky note to remind yourself where you put something in case you forget.
- Slow down for a moment. Many cases of misplaced belongings are the result of unnecessary haste. Before you rush off to your next destination, check your present location to make sure that you haven't left anything.



Concentrate on Productivity

The following are common productivity blocks that may be present in your organization:

- Lack of team awareness. Although everyone doesn't have to understand the intricacies of every part of production, people do need to know how everyone's job contributes to the final product. Tell people how their job plays a part in accomplishing company goals and how the results will suffer if they don't do their job.
- Insufficient feedback. When workers don't receive feedback on their work, they can become disgruntled and feel unappreciated for their efforts. Give the people in your charge the praise, correction and guidance they need to continue improving their skills.
- Ineffective quality controls. Sometimes quality control checks create unnecessary red tape that slows down production without enhancing quality. Make sure these procedures focus on finding and correcting the cause of errors and not just on where they're occurring.
- Overspecialization. When employees are limited in the jobs they do, they may feel a sense of insignificance, depriving them of the sense of pride in their work that will motivate them. Seek to incorporate a variety of tasks in people's jobs that will allow them to feel a vital part of the organization.
- Management without authority. When supervisors are responsible for results, but lack authority, they can only tell people what the boss says to do – even when those involved know it's not the best thing to do. Grant managers the freedom they need to make and implement effective decisions.

Create a Good Work Environment

Keeping employees satisfied with their jobs is the best insurance against losing them to other firms. The investment of time, money and energy you make now will be far less than what it would cost you to find and hire a replacement later. **To sustain a stimulating and satisfactory work environment for your employees:**

- ◆ Poll for problem areas. Ask people at least once a quarter what's frustrating, difficult and inefficient about working for your company. Then take action to fix these problems to show that you value their well-being.
- ◆ Provide opportunity for enrichment. Survey employees to find out if they have the training they need to do their jobs. Meet one-on-one each year to discuss people's career goals and how you can help them achieve them.
- ◆ Revise and revamp. At least once or twice a year, meet individually to talk about what people currently like and dislike about their jobs and to brain-



storm ways to improve them. Consider adding or removing certain tasks to tailor the job to the person.

- ◆ Promote. If a vertical promotion isn't feasible, try moving people laterally to a position that gives them a new job without a change in salary or level of responsibility. If people need more time for personal matters, move them to a less demanding position.
- ◆ Mix it up. To introduce more variety and a change of pace to their current jobs, have employees devise a schedule for rotating some of the tasks they do among each other. To add challenge and excitement, assign people tasks that get them outside of their normal realm of operation.
- ◆ Get personal. Recognize that people have their own lives outside of work. Take time to get to know people's outside interests. Demonstrate your respect and support by being flexible when people need time off to attend to their family.

Qualities of a Superstar Manager

To be a superstar manager:

- Listen attentively. Put yourself in the other person's shoes, and aim to understand what he or she is trying to say.
- Be assertive. When necessary, exert your authority without resorting to intimidation or bullying. Remain composed, direct and forceful when you have to call the shots.
- Resolve conflict. Sometimes cooperation comes only after conflict has brought problems to the surface. Look for constructive solutions to these problems, and take action to do something about them.
- Entrust the right job to the right person. Superstar managers are adept at knowing what skills are needed for the job at hand and who should do it. Call out the qualities that you see in people.
- Incorporate the group in your decisions. Make collaborative decisions that take everyone into account without compromising company objectives.



Are Your Papers Out of Control?

How many times have you cleaned your desk only to have it snowed under with paperwork again the very next day? To keep paper chaos at bay, there's only one attitude you can take with it: complete ruthlessness. Taking swift action on the paper that comes your way will ensure that you maintain order in your office. **To keep paper moving instead of piling:**



- ❖ Open your mail as soon as you receive it. You don't have to read or act on it yet, but you should sort through your mail pronto, so it doesn't build up indefinitely. Using a letter opener will help you to whiz through your stack more efficiently.
- ❖ Toss junk mail first. Skim advertisements and unsolicited correspondence briefly if you're interested, but otherwise toss junk mail in your trash can, or "circular file," at once. Select a large trash basket or recycle bin for your desk that won't require emptying often.
- ❖ Place papers needing action in your "to do" basket. Start each day by looking through these items and ordering them according to priority. If

you find yourself procrastinating on some of these items, write a date in your planner for doing them, so they won't stay there permanently.

- ❖ Separate reading material into a "to read" basket. Store magazines, journals and other items that you want to read separately from your other paperwork, and find a time in your schedule for reading these items.
- ❖ Transfer bills and bank statements into a "to pay" basket. Schedule a regular time – monthly, semimonthly, or weekly – for paying bills. Until then, you'll have all of your financial paperwork in one place in case you need to refer to something.
- ❖ Move papers not needing action to a

"to file" basket. Keep a large, shallow container on the floor under your desk for these items. A small file cabinet placed to the side of your desk will allow you to pull the files you use often without having to get up.

- ❖ Beware of filing unnecessary paper. Up to 80 percent of the papers people file are never referred to again, so consider carefully whether or not you really need to keep what you file. Avoid making a pending file, which is usually a trap for losing or intentionally forgetting things.
- ❖ Designate a storage area for heavy paper loads. If you have projects involving massive amounts of paper, use a table, credenza, or bookcase to organize these papers into neat stacks. Or, try using a small cart with wheels to file these papers temporarily until the project is finished.
- ❖ Keep your desktop clear of papers, and never stuff pending paperwork in drawers. Make sure all paperwork ends up in your "to do," "to read," "to pay" and "to file" baskets. Spend the last five to 10 minutes of your day gathering up the papers you've been working on and putting them back where they belong.

Taking the First Step

Starting is often the most difficult part of getting organized. **Here are tips for knowing where to start:**

- ▲ Consider storage space. If your filing and storage areas are too full, work on weeding out these spots first to clear space for the items you'll want to move there later as you continue cleaning.
- ▲ Begin with what's in front of you. Finish sorting through this stack of papers, and proceed on to the next until you make a complete circle around your desk.
- ▲ Start with the messiest place. For an alternate approach, target the spot that causes you the most stress when you go there to find something.
- ▲ Focus on tackling and completing one area at a time. Once you've cleared your desk, for example, move on to the next piece of furniture clockwise until the entire room has been covered.
- ▲ Allow adequate time. To avoid creating a bigger mess, spend half of your time sorting, and use the remaining half to put these stacks away.



Tips on Filing

- Put large, bulky items elsewhere. If something is too large to be placed in the file, leave a note in the file folder that says where you stored the item.
- Break up overstuffed files. When a file becomes too full, create another one, and label it with a sub-heading according to the date.

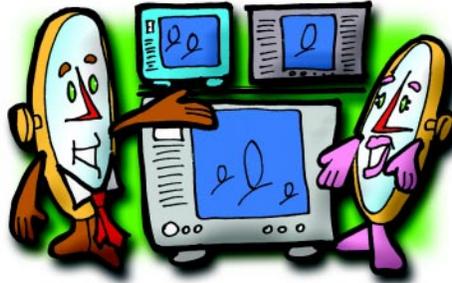
“We shape our dwellings, and afterwards our dwellings shape us.”

– Winston Churchill

Selling Against the Competition

Your company doesn't exist in a vacuum. Alongside your organization are many other companies that are vying for your customers' business. In order to sell successfully, you must know your competitors' products and services as well as you do your own. **The following is a list of important questions to consider about your competition:**

- ❖ How many competing companies are there in your industry? Are there several or only a few?
- ❖ How large are these other companies? Are they small or large firms?
- ❖ How do your competitors distinguish their products or services from the others on the market?
- ❖ Do competitors have similar or varied strategies in appealing to customers?
- ❖ How do these companies limit costs to make their product or service less expensive?



- ❖ How do your competitors strive to meet the time and convenience needs of their customers?
- ❖ How extensively do these other companies invest in product research, design and development?
- ❖ How good is the quality of customer service, support and warranties that these companies provide?
- ❖ How diverse are the products or services that your competitors offer?
- ❖ Do these companies have a substitute product or service? Do these substitutes cost less and work better?

Once you've studied the competition

thoroughly, begin looking for ways to set your company apart from the rest. By knowing how to differentiate your product or service from the others, you can create a winning sales strategy. **Here are common methods for making your company stand out from the others:**

- ◆ Uniqueness. This approach emphasizes how your company offers a one-of-a-kind product or service. Salespeople focus on how quality, features, appearance, customer service and other aspects are unique to your company.
- ◆ Price. This approach highlights how your company guarantees the lowest price for your product or service. Salespeople stress the price comparison with other products and the value of your product.
- ◆ Niche. This approach targets a particular audience and shows how your company can meet the specific needs of this group. Salespeople appeal to the wants, needs and desires that these customers have.

Planning Your Sales Schedule

Good planning skills and sales techniques go hand in hand. **To maximize your potential for sales this month, plan for the following:**

- Wrap up loose ends. Look over your list of customers who placed orders in the previous month. Double-check to make sure that these orders were fulfilled satisfactorily.
- Make appointments. Call to schedule appointments with customers at the beginning of the month. This will allow you enough time to make the subsequent calls necessary to close a deal by the end of the month.
- Schedule client care calls. Set aside time to call customers and ask if they're satisfied with your product or service. Listen to them, and let them know that their comments are important to you.
- Pursue referrals. Ask clients who are happy with how your company is serving them to give you a referral. Also consider other products or services that might be beneficial to them.
- Look ahead. In addition to maintaining your current customer base, plan time for contacting new prospects and securing new leads to ensure future success.



Stay Motivated

To encourage yourself to keep up the good work:

- ❖ Keep your goals in sight. Stay focused by reminding yourself of what you want to accomplish.
- ❖ Focus on the benefits. Remind yourself of the benefits of achieving your goals and objectives.
- ❖ Reaffirm your mission. When you know why you believe in what you are selling, you'll be more convincing to others.
- ❖ Look for the little things. Relish in your small achievements and steps of progress each day.
- ❖ Pinpoint the source of your successes. Find ways to maximize these things and apply them to the other areas of your work.

Keeping Track of Your Family

In the hustle and bustle of daily life, is your family in a constant state of disorganization? If so, it may seem virtually impossible to keep track of what's going on in your family.

To make sure your family stays organized:

- Schedule regular family time. Plan times during the week for touching base with each other. It may be a daily meal such as breakfast or dinner or a special outing or activity each week. Use these times to discuss upcoming plans and events.
- Share a family calendar. Hang a large calendar in a place that everyone passes by frequently, such as the kitchen, den, or bathroom. Have everyone write on it their appointments, practices, activities and special days so that no one else will forget.
- Institute a check-off chart. List the routine activities that must be done every morning, afternoon and evening in your home. Enlarge this list, and put it where family members can review it each day to make sure that they've done their part.
- Keep a running shopping list. Post a list on the refrigerator, and ask family members to write down items needed as they run out of them. By buying things all at one time, you'll avoid making last-minute trips to the store.
- Assign individual storage space. Give each family member a labeled container for his or her belongings. Leave these containers by the door for putting shoes, coats, backpacks, books, keys, or other items in that clutter up space or become lost easily.

Back-to-School Organization

Back-to-school time is a perfect opportunity to teach your children time-management skills.

Learning simple strategies for organizing their time and belongings can

enhance their ability to

learn in the classroom as well. **To teach your kids skills that will help them excel in school:**

- ▲ Introduce methods for keeping supplies organized. Show your children how to arrange supplies in their desks and book bags so that they can find things easily. Teach them to label folders and notebooks, and suggest using different colored folders for different subjects.
- ▲ Ask about their homework each night. Find out what assignments they have to do and how long it will take to complete them. Then help them set up a schedule for getting them done. Include a fun activity as a reward for after homework is completed.
- ▲ Plan larger projects in advance. Provide children with a calendar that they can use to write down due dates



for big projects. Teach them to break these projects into smaller steps that they can do a little each day.

- ▲ Create a homework spot that's conducive to study. Furnish your children with a desk and a comfortable chair placed in a quiet, well-lit area away from the TV. Purchase a dictionary, atlas and other reference materials needed for their work.

▲ Establish a routine for school nights. Get your kids into the habit of a consistent schedule that includes time for study, play, meals and bedtime preparation.

By having a routine, they'll learn self-discipline and how to plan and structure their time wisely.

- ▲ Make time to listen. More than any planning or organizational skills you teach, it's the love and confidence you instill in your children that will help them to succeed. To help them build confidence, listen to their thoughts, feelings and opinions, and praise them daily. Spend time reading and talking together each night.

Get Rid of Grime in No Time

No time to clean? Think again. With a speedy cleaning routine, you can tackle dirt and grime in no time. **To clean bathrooms and kitchens in a hurry:**

- ◆ Cover the major areas of the room first, carrying supplies with you as you go.
- ◆ Pull objects toward you on counters to clean behind them.
- ◆ Use a sponge to wipe down cabinet doors and other surfaces.
- ◆ Let cleansers soak on hard-to-clean spots while you work on other areas.
- ◆ Use a toothbrush to scrub fixtures and sink edges.
- ◆ Circle the room clockwise to dust tables, shelves, and fixtures.
- ◆ Sweep or vacuum the floor and take out the trash last.



Manage Time the Smart Way

Consumption is time-consuming. In the quest for convenience, many people rush to buy the latest gizmos and gadgets that promise to save them time. In exchange, these items often require even more time to shop for, learn how to use and maintain. The result is more hassle and less time for what's really important in life.

To save yourself both time and money, get rid of the nonessential possessions that demand too much of your time, and learn to live with less. The fewer things you have to maintain, the more time you'll have to enjoy yourself. **To simplify your life, consider the following before you make a purchase:**



- ▲ How much time will the item cost me? Determine how much time will be needed to shop for, purchase and set up the item, as well as read operating manuals and service it.
- ▲ Is speed necessary for the task involved? Many gadgets may help you perform minor tasks faster, but they may not be worth the expense.
- ▲ Is there a comparable “low-tech” alternative? Many times, simple tools like pencil and paper will work more efficiently than electronic equipment.
- ▲ Is the item really worth the trouble? Decide whether it will truly make your life more convenient or only complicate it further.
- ▲ Will coupons and other special offers truly benefit me? Often, the trade-off of time for money when using coupons, rebates and bonuses is expensive.
- ▲ How much travel time do I spend going from store to store? If hunting for bargains or running errands eats up too much of your time, find ways to eliminate or consolidate these trips.

Managing Your Time Effectively

To get the most out of life, you need to know how to apply sound time-management principles. **To manage your time better:**

- ❖ Be assertive. Say “no” to doing additional projects that aren't a high priority or that someone else could do better. Explain that the new project would hinder your ability to accomplish your priorities.
- ❖ Exercise self-discipline. Stay focused on your priorities, and stick to your deadlines. Realize that there will be times when you must keep on working even though you don't feel like it.
- ❖ Kick the procrastination habit. Break big projects down into smaller, more manageable pieces. Put your goals and deadlines in writing, and aim to complete them on or ahead of schedule.
- ❖ Do no more than you can handle. Recognize the distinction between cooperating with others and doing their work for them. Set realistic deadlines that you can reasonably accomplish.

Relax after Work

By the end of the day, you're probably wound up from all of the stress and stimulus of the day. **To help you “unwind” after work:**

- ◆ Engage in a relaxing activity. Take a walk, or sit awhile in a favorite chair. If you won't have time to yourself once you get home, listen to soothing music on the way home from work.



- ◆ Think about your day. Define what you're feeling, and try to identify what happened in the day that contributed to these feelings. Let the negative feelings and mistakes of the day go.
- ◆ Put work behind you. Your work and its problems will still be waiting for you when you return to the office. Resolve to give yourself a break from thinking about them until tomorrow.
- ◆ Do something fun. At some point in your evening routine, take time to do something enjoyable. Play with your children, read a book, or talk with a friend.

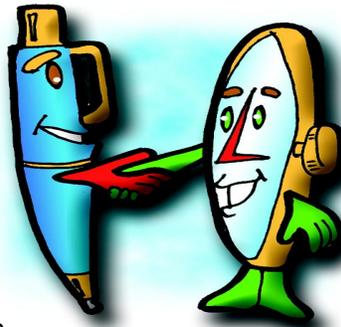
“Keep in mind that you are always saying “no” to something. If it isn't to the apparent, urgent things in your life, it is probably to the most fundamental, highly important things. Even when the urgent is good, the good can keep you from your best, keep you from your unique contribution, if you let it.”

– Helen Keller

Communicate the Message Clearly in Writing

Success in business often rests on your ability to communicate concepts clearly in writing. Writing isn't window dressing: Effective writing is essential to readers' understanding and perception of the validity and accuracy of the content. **To improve your business writing:**

- *Use overviews instead of introductions.* Many documents begin with an introduction that's little more than a table of contents. Such introductions are not informative. Instead of just mentioning the topics, an overview serves the same purpose as the summaries in the "What's News" column of *The Wall Street Journal*. In other words, readers should be able to read the opening section of a module or topic and have a summary of the key concepts.
- *Make the dialogue sound real, not stilted.* The spoken word is far different from the written word. For starters, note sentence patterns. Spoken words come out in tidbits and fragments. Speakers use contractions, slang, colloquialisms, and unusual pauses and intonation. A script punctuated with dashes will be read differently than one with commas or parentheses. And nothing makes a script more amateur than overly descriptive tags, such as "he yelled" or "she complained." To paraphrase Hemingway: If you feel the need to write more than "he said," that's a good clue that the words in the actual dialogue aren't strong enough.
- *Create intriguing case studies and role plays.* Although it's tempting to use clever names for people or places, such as "Drew Do-nothing" or "Little Upstart Organization," real-sounding names are preferable. To help readers take on the situation and mind-set of the characters in a role play, create vivid scenes with appropriate details that will appeal to people's emotions. Then provide a clear, succinct statement of the issue to be resolved. Last, provide a launch statement for participants to begin their own dialogue.
- *Use specific words and phrases.* The more technical the topic is, the more important it is that you select the words carefully. Consider how the meaning of these phrases might vary from reader to reader: "meaningful activities," "safe operations," "optimal conditions," "storage units," "marketing opportunities," or "invoicing irregularities."
- *Position ideas for emphasis.* Position the ideas and information so that they get the attention they deserve. The most important spot in a document or section is up front. The most important spot in a paragraph is the first sentence. The most important spot in a sentence is at the end. To convey to readers that "this information is the most important,"



take advantage of the impact of climactic sentences.

- *Link to show relationships.* Little words matter. "Turn the lever to the right, and depress the cylinder that opens the air chamber." Is that one action or two related actions? How ideas or actions are linked can obscure the meaning of a sentence. Ask yourself: Is this an equal link? A time link? A cause-and-effect link?
- *Vary sentence pattern and length.* Sentence pattern is to writing what voice inflection is to speech. Vocal variety keeps listeners awake when you speak; sentence variety keeps readers awake when they read. Although a simple declarative sentence is one of humanity's most noble inventions, it's tiresome when used page after page. In addition to the subject-verb-object order, vary the length: Follow a 28-word sentence with a three-word sentence. You'll cause readers to take notice.
- *Make every word count.* Use strong verbs and active voice. When you feel the need to toss in an adjective or adverb, consider it a red flag that your nouns and verbs may lack precision or else you wouldn't be seeking a modifier. Make every word contribute. Eliminate such redundancies as "important essentials," "serious crisis," "past history," or "previous experience."
- *Pay attention to grammar.* Grammar isn't a nitpicking matter. Errors can change the meaning of your words and confuse readers. Watch for pronouns and verbs that don't agree with their subjects, and avoid unnecessary tense changes. Make items in a list parallel in construction; equal ideas get equal structure.
- *Create an eye-appealing layout.* When finished with the draft, take another look. Readers judge the complexity of content by the look of the page or screen. Ask yourself these questions: Would a reader who skimmed the headings know all of the key concepts (not just topics) in the course? If not, make your headings more informative. Do all of the graphs and charts have informative captions? Have you used sidebars and pullouts to emphasize key information? Is the white space or blank screen space sufficient to keep readers from being overloaded? Have you used typographical effects such as bolding, different font sizes and italics sparingly for impact and clarity?



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TIMESAVERS

Knowing When It's Smart to Wait

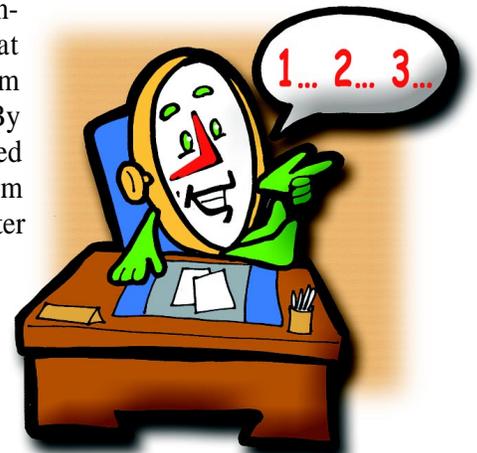
Believe it or not, there are times when you should actually put off doing a job. In some situations, the wisest thing to do is to wait until later to begin or complete a task. **The following are situations that may merit procrastination:**

- ◆ Higher priority items – Always set aside lower-priority work when something more significant or urgent comes up.
- ◆ Fatigue – Save difficult tasks requiring concentration or extreme accuracy for a time when you'll be more alert and motivated.
- ◆ Minimal time – When you only have a few minutes to work, it's often better to do a quick low-priority task rather than what's on the top of your "to do" list.
- ◆ Inadequate information – Give yourself more time to obtain the information and input you need to make a good decision or to accomplish an important task.
- ◆ Trivial tasks – If a low-priority item remains on your list for an extended period of time, you probably don't need to do it at all.

Staying on Track with Time

Too often people's minds are consumed with worries over what they have to do next. They rush from task to task anxious and overwhelmed. By contrast, people who maintain a composed state of mind approach the tasks before them with concentrated effort that produces better results. **To maintain composure and meet the demands of your day:**

- ❖ Focus on doing one task at a time. Trying to do two or more activities at the same time can make you scatterbrained.
- ❖ Practice presentmindedness. Rather than stressing over what you have yet to do, think about the present moment as you wait or work on what you're doing.
- ❖ Take breaks between tasks. Before rushing into the next item on your agenda, stop a moment to collect your thoughts and relish in your present accomplishment.
- ❖ Avoid reacting to beeps and rings. When the telephone rings or your beeper goes off, allow yourself to pause before answering or responding to it.
- ❖ Walk at a comfortable pace. Instead of charging down the hall or rushing to your vehicle, calm yourself and observe what's around you for a minute or two.
- ❖ Arrive early. Plan to arrive at your next meeting or appointment a little early, so you'll have a chance to quiet your mind and prepare what you want to say.



“Each morning when I open my eyes I say to myself: I, not events, have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday is dead, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet. I have just one day, today, and I'm going to be happy in it.”