



Tyme Management™

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Are You Your Own Distraction?

When you've got a long work session ahead of you, it can be easy to get distracted and put the job off. In most cases, these distractions are internal. **Here are some strategies to avert self-sabotage:**

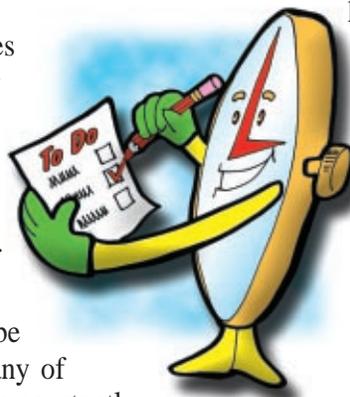
- ◆ Know your weaknesses. Identify the distractions that you're prone to, and make a plan for how to avoid them. If you're tempted to talk to everybody who passes by your desk, turn your back, so you won't make eye contact with people. If you want to read and reply to unimportant E-mails as they come in, turn off the chime that notifies you of new messages.
- ◆ Keep yourself sufficiently fueled. Avoid working for long periods of time on an empty stomach. Bring some healthy snacks and drinks with you to work, so you won't make unnecessary trips to the break room for something to munch on.
- ◆ Pace yourself. Allow your mind periodic interruptions, so you can focus on the task again. Get up for 10 minutes each hour to stretch, walk around, or get some fresh air. Look through a joke book, chat with a coworker, or rest your eyes for a moment.

Focus and Finish the Job at Hand

Do you tend to jump around from one task to another without getting any of them done? Or, do you stop working on one item to do something else that you just remembered? If so, your work habits may be preventing you from being as efficient and effective as you could be. **The following are things you can do to help you focus and finish what you're working on:**

- ▲ Designate specific times to work on each of your projects. If you thrive on variety and change of pace, you may like juggling several tasks at once to keep yourself challenged and motivated. However, it can be difficult to complete any of these tasks when you're constantly jumping back and forth. To make significant headway on tasks, break them into steps and set a specific amount of time to finish the next step before doing something else.
- ▲ Stay in tune with your priorities. People who like to be in constant motion often feel that they aren't productive unless they're always doing something. While you may be busy, you may also be expending your energy on things that aren't worth your time. Highlight the top three items on your "to do" list and concentrate on tackling these things.

- ▲ Minimize visual distractions. Sometimes everything you look at can remind you of something you need to do. For example, you see the stack of mail on your desk and drop what you're doing to go through it. If you're visually oriented, keep your desk clear and block your view of passersby. Program an alarm on your watch or computer to go off periodically to remind you to stay on task.



- ▲ Write down ideas in your planner. When a thought or "to do" item pops in your head that's unrelated to what you're working on, make note of it in your planner rather than jumping to do it right away.

- ▲ Build tangible accomplishments into your day. If your top-priority jobs involve delays or intangible results, you may spend too much time working on other tasks that give you more of a sense of accomplishment. Allow a limited amount of time for working on tasks that provide immediate gratification, such as administrative paperwork, but spend the majority of your day working on long-term, high-payoff projects. Enjoy the feeling of checking items off your "to do" list!

Working Together

Conflict is a natural part of marriage. It's not the differences that hurt a relationship, but the way you handle them that matters. **To resolve arguments successfully:**

- ◆ *Cool off first.* When feelings become intense, take a break, and arrange a time to get back together later and discuss it.
- ◆ *Work together.* Instead of seeing your partner as the enemy, focus on the issue as a problem to solve together. Direct your energy toward finding a solution and not at getting back at each other.
- ◆ *Express your point of view clearly and positively.* Avoid throwing in criticisms, put-downs, names, or sarcastic remarks. State a direct request instead of merely complaining about a situation.
- ◆ *Listen to your partner's viewpoint.* Ask questions to help you understand. Be able to listen to other's perceptions of you without it damaging your self-esteem.
- ◆ *Be aware of how you react during conflict.* Do you shut down, flare up, or get defensive? Choose to face situations and to take responsibility for your actions.
- ◆ *Propose solutions until you both agree on one.* Work on one issue at a time, and be willing to make compromises. If you try to win the disagreement, you may still lose the relationship.
- ◆ *Relax.* Avoid taking things too seriously or thinking that it's the end of the relationship. Forgive, and receive forgiveness.
- ◆ *Be selective in your debates.* It's not wise to fight over every minor issue. Instead, discuss the ones that are really important to you, and let the other ones go. Make an effort to get along.

Build Up Your Child's Self-Esteem

Your time and affection are powerful tools in building a healthy self-concept in a child. When children know that they're valued and important, they develop the self-esteem they need to grow to their full potential.

The following are ways you can build up children's self-esteem:

- *Give your full attention.* Avoid "That's nice" or "Uh-huh" responses that tell children they're not really important. Instead, take a break from what you're doing, get down on their level and look them in the eyes. Nod your head, smile and repeat back to them what they've said, so they know that you're truly listening.
- *Encourage children to ask questions and express themselves.* To instill confidence in their mental abilities, answer the questions they ask, and tell them that they ask good questions. Let them know that what they think and feel is worth expressing by allowing them to share their thoughts, opinions and ideas.
- *Praise often.* Be specific and genuine in the praises you give. Praise them one-on-one and in front of others. Emphasize character qualities and not just physical appearance or achievement. For example, when a child makes a good grade, say, "Good job! I'm impressed at the effort and diligence you put into this project."

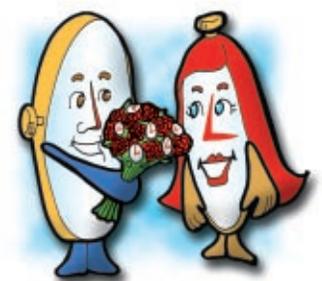


- *Let children know that they don't have to be perfect.* Children should always feel accepted even when they make a mistake or don't do something very well. Explain to them that everybody has strengths and weaknesses.
- *Avoid criticizing, and admit when you're wrong.* Allow children to explore their thoughts without being called stupid or unrealistic. If they're criticized too much, they won't want to open up to you. Show them that you care about their feelings by saying, "I'm sorry," when you lose your temper or make a mistake.
- *Express your affection.* Say, "I love you," with your words and by doing things that show you care. Laugh together. Give hugs and kisses. Let them know that there's no one else like them in the whole world.

Give Your Valentine the Gift of Time

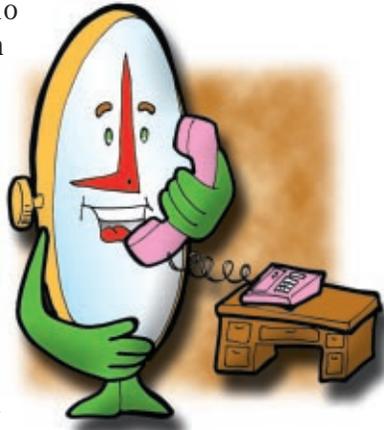
More than giving flowers or chocolate candies, you can show your loved ones how much you care by being thoughtful every day. **You can:**

- ♥ Stop and listen with your undivided attention.
- ♥ Do chores without being asked.
- ♥ Give a spontaneous compliment.
- ♥ Leave a note in an unexpected location.
- ♥ Call them by a special nickname.
- ♥ Call or send an E-mail just to say, "Hi."
- ♥ Bring a little something home just for them.



Handling Customer Complaints

Believe it or not, the people who call you to complain can be worth their weight in gold. Rather than being mere irritants, they may hold the very information you need to make your company more efficient, profitable and pleasing to your customers. **The following are ways you can turn a negative complaint into a positive outcome:**



- ▲ *Keep an open mind.* Avoid assuming that customers are automatically wrong. They may have a valid point. Give yourself some emotional distance from the situation, and don't take it personally.
- ▲ *Ask them if you may write the information down.* This demonstrates that you're giving them your full attention, and it also provides angry customers the chance to calm down a little bit.
- ▲ *Listen.* Allow customers to describe the situation in detail. Interrupt only to clarify or to ask for more information. Be empathetic, and tell them that you're sorry that they experienced this problem.
- ▲ *Seek specifics.* Ask questions until you get a complete understanding of what's wrong. Break the complaint down into the specific pieces of information that the person is trying to communicate.
- ▲ *Find out customers' expectations.* Ask what you can do to make the situation better. Never volunteer to do something until you know what's expected. People may actually expect less in recompense than you thought.
- ▲ *Follow up promptly.* The faster you resolve the issue, the more likely you are to keep your customers. Try to settle the problem at the initial conversation. If it will take longer than this, keep them informed every step of the way.
- ▲ *Be courteous and friendly.* Treat people in such a way that they'll want to do business with you again. Thank them, and tell them that the company will try its best not to repeat the same mistake in the future.
- ▲ *Learn from it.* Identify exactly what you can use in the complaint. Then, use it to make improvements. If part of the complaint doesn't have any merit, ignore it, stay confident and proceed on with your work.

Pat Answers

Dear Pat: How do I keep my co-workers from eating or drinking my snacks, frozen lunches, soft drinks that I pay for, bring from home and leave – labeled – in the break room? I've tried to be nice about it and have asked people to please stop taking my food, but they just ignore me. What can I do?

Pat Answers: These same people would be outraged if you implied they would steal cash from your wallet, yet what they're doing amounts to the same thing. There are a few approaches you can try. If you know who's taking your food, confront them as soon as you discover the theft. Keep your tone serious and tell them how it affects you (your time and effort, special dietary needs you may be accommodating, the extra cost and inconvenience of replacing the food, and your anger at being treated so disrespectfully). Make the offender listen to your entire lecture. Normally I suggest confronting people in private, but in this case, public shaming might have a greater impact. Your goal is to make the consequence of stealing more unpleasant than it's worth. If you don't know who is taking the food, your options are to bring it up at a staff meeting or in a group memo, or to ask the boss to issue a stern warning about taking another employee's property, including food items. Or you could purchase a small ice chest and keep it in your locker or work area. It's not the most satisfying solution but it may solve the problem.

Completing Your Difficult Jobs

Do you have a big project looming overhead? **Here's how to complete the difficult jobs waiting on your desk:**

- Reduce the project into smaller steps.
- Block out specific time slots in your planner for each step.
- If possible, do the worst part of the job first.
- Avoid putting off the job for too long.
- Try not to spend too much time on minor aspects of the job.
- Picture what the project will look like when it's finished.



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.

Prevent Time Theft at Work

Time theft can be a serious threat to your business. While everyone needs a moderate amount of rest during the workday, some employees can take this too far. When people get in the habit of not being honest about the hours they work, your company's productivity level will suffer.

Examples of employee time theft include:

- Arriving to work late or leaving early
- Extended lunch hours or coffee breaks
- Eating lunch at the office and then going out for a lunch hour
- "Playing hooky" or taking unnecessary sick days
- Making several or long personal calls
- Excessive socializing with coworkers
- Reading magazines or newspapers
- Surfing the Internet or sending personal E-mails
- Daydreaming or inattention to work
- Taking care of personal business on company time
- Slowing down work to necessitate paid overtime

The following are things you can do to prevent time theft:

- ▲ Explain the nature of time theft and its consequences to your employees. Define what constitutes time theft and describe how it hurts

the productivity and profitability of the company.

- ▲ Communicate your expectations to new employees from the beginning. Let them know that time theft will not be tolerated and consider creating a disciplinary policy regarding it.



- ▲ Ensure that all employees have enough work to do. Check that your department isn't overstaffed and redistribute workloads when some people have too much or too little to do.

▲ Foster team goals for productivity. When everyone is motivated by group objectives, there will be more incentive to do one's share of the work and not hold the group back.

- ▲ Offer people resources to improve their time-management skills. Provide books, tapes, videos and training seminars that will teach people how to use their time more effectively.
- ▲ Reward productive employees. Supply positive reinforcement to people who don't deliberately abuse the system. Give them added time off or a cash bonus for their hard work.

Asking Questions that Count

As a manager, making the effort to ask questions lets employees know that their opinions count. The answers they give will also suggest ways to improve how your organization operates. **Ask your staff the following questions regularly:**

- ◆ What activity took you too long to do today?
- ◆ What task requires too much work?
- ◆ What task involves too many people?
- ◆ What job is more difficult or complex than it has to be?
- ◆ What did you waste today?
- ◆ What procedure costs too much money?
- ◆ What made you or others complain today?
- ◆ What made you or others angry today?
- ◆ What caused misunderstanding today?
- ◆ What do you consider unnecessary or trivial about your job?



Promoting Employee Health and Safety

To promote the health and safety of your employees:

- ❖ Communicate company health and safety rules and standards to all employees. Post these rules in a prominent location and update them regularly.
- ❖ Brief new employees on health and safety rules before you allow them to start working. Ask them to sign an agreement that states that they understand the rules and will observe them.
- ❖ Anticipate potential accidents. Make changes to prevent these accidents and create step-by-step procedures for dealing with accidents if they do occur.
- ❖ Provide proper training for using equipment. Provide protective gear, but don't rely on it as a substitute for operating machinery safely.
- ❖ Keep several people on staff who are certified to give first aid. Appoint a safety coordinator to monitor safety and review current practices and statistics.
- ❖ Report all accidents no matter how minor they may be. Investigate the cause of near accidents to help pinpoint potential problems.
- ❖ Maintain a safe working environment. Repair damage to floors, windows and equipment immediately. Provide adequate lighting and replace old, unstable furniture.
- ❖ Allow employees adequate break time and time off. Fatigue from overwork reduces concentration, making employees more vulnerable to accidents.
- ❖ Always look for ways to improve safety. Ask employees for input on how to make the workplace safer. Take action to correct unsafe practices as soon as possible.

The Right Time for Press Releases

Press releases are another way to communicate the benefits of your products and services to the public. **The following are timely opportunities for sending out press releases:**

- ◆ When your company wants to announce a new product or service or changes to a current one
- ◆ When customers have testimonials of how your product or service benefited them in a specific way
- ◆ When you have recommendations from experts that indicate a new trend in your industry
- ◆ When you want to present results from a survey or study that are favorable to your company
- ◆ When you need to address a rumor or news event that could damage the company's name
- ◆ When your organization wants to explain a decision or express its opinion about an important government or business trend

Expand Your E-Leads

To connect directly with potential prospects, include a place on your company's website where people can express interest in learning more about your products and services. Offer visitors to your site a "call back" button that they can click on to request a salesperson to call them.

These "E-leads" can be some of your most valuable ones. Research shows that people who respond to this method often have a definite budget and time frame in mind for buying.



Perfect Your Phone Technique

You can waste a lot of time and effort on the phone when you don't have a plan. **To get the information you seek when making sales calls:**

- Be prepared before you place the call. Know why you're calling by defining the goal or purpose for the call in one sentence or less. Make a list of the questions you'll need to cover to help keep you on track during the course of the conversation.
- Be polite and considerate of other people's time. After stating your name and company, ask for permission to speak before giving the reason for your call. If you notice commotion in the background, ask people if they would like to put you on hold so that they can handle this first.
- Pinpoint who you should contact for the information you're seeking. Find out who is responsible for the area you need help in, so you can be connected quickly without wasting anyone's time. If you're transferred several times, give the name of the department that just transferred you to emphasize the importance of your request.
- Ask questions to move the conversation in the direction you want it to



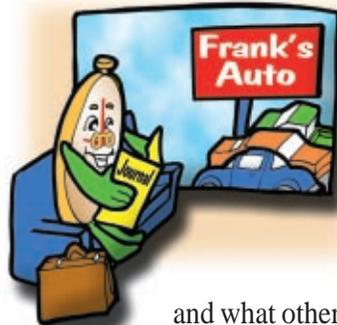
go. When asking a question, wait for people to respond and then clarify what you just heard them say. Keeping your goal for the call in mind, ask another question that will continue to lead the conversation in the right direction.

- Schedule a time for a telephone appointment. If the person you need to speak with is busy, ask when a good time to call back would be. Suggest options such as in the morning or afternoon or on one day or another. Then set a specific time that you'll call.
- Persevere until you accomplish your goal. You may get the runaround or be put on hold several times, but if you remain persistent, you'll eventually get an answer. The time you spend making calls can be well worth the results if you don't give up!

Capitalize on Time Spent Waiting

Although sometimes you must wait on other people, this doesn't mean that your time has to be wasted. **Here are things you can do to profit from the time you spend waiting:**

- Brush up on your sales techniques. Keep a newspaper or magazine article that you've been wanting to read in your briefcase, and pull it out while you sit and wait.
- Get ready for your next sales presentation. Review your notes and files. Mentally rehearse what you'll say



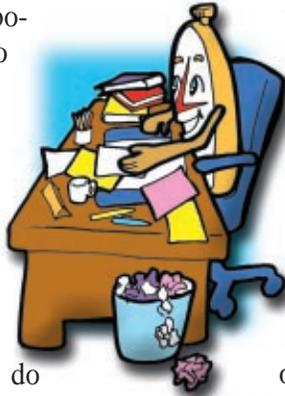
and what others might say.

- Catch up on your correspondence. Carry a stack of thank-you notes and stationery with you for writing notes to prospects and clients.
- Make a few calls to prospects. Use your cell phone or ask to borrow a phone in the area you're waiting. Make sure you don't disturb others.

Why People Aren't Organized

You know that you need to get organized and you even have organizing gadgets galore, so why is your home or office still a mess? Chances are that you're sabotaging your own efforts to get organized. **Common reasons why people are unorganized include:**

- ◆ **Perfectionism** – When you feel like you must do everything perfectly, you may put off unimportant tasks until you'll have time to do them right. To avoid letting paper and work pile up, know which tasks you can get out of the way by doing an adequate – not “perfect” – job.
- ◆ **Avoidance** – You may keep your life disorganized so that your time will be preoccupied with dealing with your mess rather than your real problems. Or, you may be afraid of the success or failure you would experience if you did get on top of your life. If this is the case, face the real problem.
- ◆ **Crisis management** – You may thrive on coming to the rescue and managing crises. As a result, you may like a disorganized environment that causes problems for you to solve. But when



your home and office are organized and under control, you'll have more energy to tackle the real problems.

- ◆ **Creative qualms** – You may fear that your creativity will be stifled if you're too organized. In fact, an organized environment can actually facilitate creative thinking because your supplies and resources will be easier to get to. Organize in a consistent system that suits your personality.
- ◆ **Comfort** – Having a lot of things can make you feel rich and secure, especially if there have been times in your life when you've gone without. The result, however, is unnecessary clutter and duplicate items. Get rid of what you can and keep the rest labeled and neatly organized.
- ◆ **Nostalgia** – When objects become associated with special memories, they can become difficult to part with and can accumulate rapidly. Find a way to keep your memories without having to keep the object. Take a picture of it, keep a part of it, or move it to an off-site storage location for a little while until you're ready to get rid of it.

What to Do with That Paper

You may not have time to handle every piece of paper as it comes across your desk, but you should at least sort this paperwork. By sorting papers instead of stuffing them in an “inbox,” you'll save time having to resort or look for them later. **The following are the five types of paper to sort:**

- ▲ “To do” – place these papers in a tray on top of your desk.
- ▲ “To pay” – put this paperwork in another tray on top of your desk.
- ▲ “To read” – store these items in a basket on your credenza or beside your desk.
- ▲ “To file” – keep these papers in a large basket under your desk.
- ▲ “To trash” – move these papers to your “circular file” immediately.



Briefcase Briefings

Do you waste undue time digging through your briefcase? Keeping your briefcase organized will help ensure that you stay efficient and productive outside the office. **Here's how to organize your briefcase:**

- **Create permanent files for your briefcase.** Use these folders or envelopes to keep everything sorted and labeled. File names might include: “To Do,” “To Read” and “Letters to Write.”
- **Take advantage of pockets.** Store your umbrella, books, newspapers and other reading material in an outside pocket where you can access them easily.
- **Divide small items and supplies in compartments.** Make sure to keep your briefcase well stocked. If your briefcase doesn't have compartments, use clear pouches with zippers instead.
- **Leave your briefcase next to your desk at work.** You can then add items that you want to work on outside the office as you come across them throughout the day.

Keeping the Company in Order

It's one thing to try and keep yourself organized, but it's quite another to keep an entire organization organized. **The following are tips for making your company more organized:**

- Institute retention guidelines for the contents of both paper and computer files.
- Create an inventory and index of files and other types of information.
- Appoint one employee to be in charge of overseeing the overall organization of the company.
- Schedule an officewide cleanup day for cleaning out files.

Bridging the Gender Gap in Communication

Much research in the last 30 years has been done on gender communication issues. The result? Men and women communicate differently. You knew that. Some researchers previously theorized that all differences could be explained by differences in power and status in our culture. They argued that when women have more power and status in the workplace, their language will change. To some extent, that has been true.

Nevertheless, differences remain in the conversational styles of men and women. There's no right or wrong style – just a different style. And awareness of the differences goes a long way in minimizing the cross fire when cross-gender conversations veer off-center.

In general, women's language tends to be indirect, discreet, tactful and at times manipulative. Women tend to give fewer directives and use more courtesy with those directives. They often ask questions meant to make someone rethink his or her position on an issue rather than just state outright opposition to the idea. And when it comes to delegating tasks to subordinates, a female manager often couches directives in terms of questions.

Do the following statements and their interpretations from a woman sound familiar? *"The approach is not exactly foreign to our designers,"* meaning, *"They are familiar with it."* *"Mary may not be available to handle the project,"* meaning, *"Mary doesn't want to handle the project."* *"Jerry, I have complete confidence in the way you deal with such customers – I trust you completely to make these kinds of decisions,"* meaning, *"I hope you'll keep taking care of these headaches without bothering me about them."* *"Do you really think we should participate in that trade show again next year?"* meaning, *"I don't think we should participate in that trade show again next year – unless you can persuade me otherwise."* *"Could you have this report to me by Friday?"* meaning, *"Please have this report to me by Friday."*

On the other hand, men's language tends to be direct, powerful, blunt and even offensive. Men generally give more directives with fewer courtesy words. And when it comes to controversial issues, they rarely hesitate to state their opinion.

Do the following examples and interpretations coming from a male friend or coworker sound familiar? *"Tom blew the deal with that client because of his stubborn refusal to negotiate on the delivery."* *"I will not approve that expense – it's unnecessary in my estimation."* *"That's a half-baked idea if I ever heard one."* *"You're dead wrong."*

When a woman senses that it's in her best interest to adapt to the male conversational style, she'll find the following tips useful:



- Tip #1: Use straightforward language if you want to make sure your message gets heard.
- Tip #2: Be objective and to the point, so you don't dilute your performance feedback to colleagues and subordinates.
- Tip #3: Use more nouns and verbs than adjectives when you want your comments to sound more factual than subjective.
- Tip #4: Use direct, forceful language when you want to sound authoritative, competent and confident.
- Tip #5: State objections directly.
- Tip #6: Determine whether to build consensus or to dictate decisions on a case-by-case basis.
- Tip #7: Make sure subordinates know when you're giving an opinion or making a request versus when you're stating a decision or directive.

Directness versus indirectness in conversational style often creates a gulf between the genders. Keep in mind that all differences in conversation are a matter of degree and that all differences may not exist in all men or all women. People are first individuals, of course, with their own idiosyncrasies and ways of conversing. But awareness of key gender differences can increase your chances of adapting your style to that of the other person in order to reach a common goal.



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TIMESAVERS

Wake Up on Time

For some people, one of the perpetual struggles of the day is getting up and leaving on time. **The following are some methods for helping you to get up and going:**

- ◆ *Get enough sleep.* It can be even more difficult to face the morning when you aren't well rested. Make your health a priority by going to bed early enough so that you're rested and refreshed when you wake up.
- ◆ *Use two alarm clocks.* If you have a hard time waking up, set one clock to go off about five minutes after the other. Just in case, make sure one clock doesn't need batteries or electricity to operate.
- ◆ *Buy alarms without a snooze button.* Snooze buttons are a temptation that's hard to resist. If you don't have one to begin with, however, you'll know that you must get up when the alarm goes off.
- ◆ *Trick yourself.* If you have a hard time getting ready in time, set your clock ahead by the amount of time that you're usually late. Then, even if you're late according to this time, you'll still be on time.

Calculate the Value of Your Time

Your time is a precious commodity. Once it's spent, you can never get it back. For many people, however, much of their time is spent on things that aren't a major priority in their lives. Instead of spending time with their kids, they have to mow the lawn. Instead of working on the manuscript that will start their writing career, they have to clean the toilet and scrub the floors. They spend too much of their time on what doesn't really matter.

One solution to free up more time for yourself is to "buy" time. By paying others to do your time-consuming tasks for you, you can then invest the time saved in pursuing your goals. The trick is knowing when to pay somebody to do a job for you and when to do it yourself.

Here's how to decide when to hire someone else to do a job for you:

▲ *Determine your discretionary income.*

Do you have any money to spend on hiring someone to do your work for you? If your budget is too tight or you're trying to save money or pay off debt, do the job yourself. Just because you don't have money available doesn't mean you have to waste time, however. You can still do the job less often or less thoroughly.

▲ *Determine the value of your time.* How much would someone have to pay you to do the job for it to be worth it? If it's more than what someone else would charge you to do it, then hire someone else, and enjoy the satisfaction of knowing you saved yourself some time. If it's less than what you'd be billed, however, do the job yourself, and enjoy the satisfaction of saving yourself some money.



"Money mistakes can be corrected, but time is gone forever."

David B. Norris