

TIME MANAGEMENT

So much to do, so little time

BY ANTHONY SCHNEIDER

Just about everyone agrees that managing time well is vital to success.

While that's tough for all of us, small business owners and entrepreneurs really get the short end of the clock. Your businesses move faster, your roles change more often, your work force is more dislocated, tasks are more varied and support staff is thinner than your peers in larger companies.

Working longer hours is probably not the solution. We all need downtime and family time, and experts agree that time spent away from the office is good for perspective and creativity.

So how do you juggle everything and still come out ahead of the clock?

Strategy first

Time management is complex and thorny. So get your strategy straight. In the words of Yogi Berra: "You got to be careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there."

Think about who you are, how you work, when you're not productive, why you procrastinate and what your goals are. Then work out your own personal time strategies and priorities. Plan your work and work your plan.

Toronto-based human resources consultant Sarah Gayer puts it this way: "You have to know yourself first and understand your own personality."

Technology can help. Cellphones and BlackBerrys allow you to work on the move, while personal digital assistants (PDAs), scheduling software and timesheets allow you to create a master schedule that maps your habits and goals.

Career consultant Marjorie Blanchard stresses the importance of taking a proactive approach to time management: "If you're not working on your ideal day, you're working on someone else's."

Save time

You know how you're really efficient the day before your big holiday? You get everything done in less time and somehow nothing falls through the cracks. You can and should manage your time like that every day.

David Teeger, founding partner of Teeger Schiller, a systems consulting firm, believes efficiency is paramount: "Don't reinvent the wheel." He sticks with tried-and-true time-savers: he uses master checklists to monitor projects, keeps invoicing simple yet precise, activates e-mail filters to speed through his inbox and uses templates for every client document.

Second, whenever possible, finish what you start. "Make a habit of completing every task you start without going back," advises Isabel Isidro, managing editor of PowerHomeBiz.com.

Of course, that's easier said than done. Some things are just too complicated to start and finish in one sitting. That's okay. Break up com-

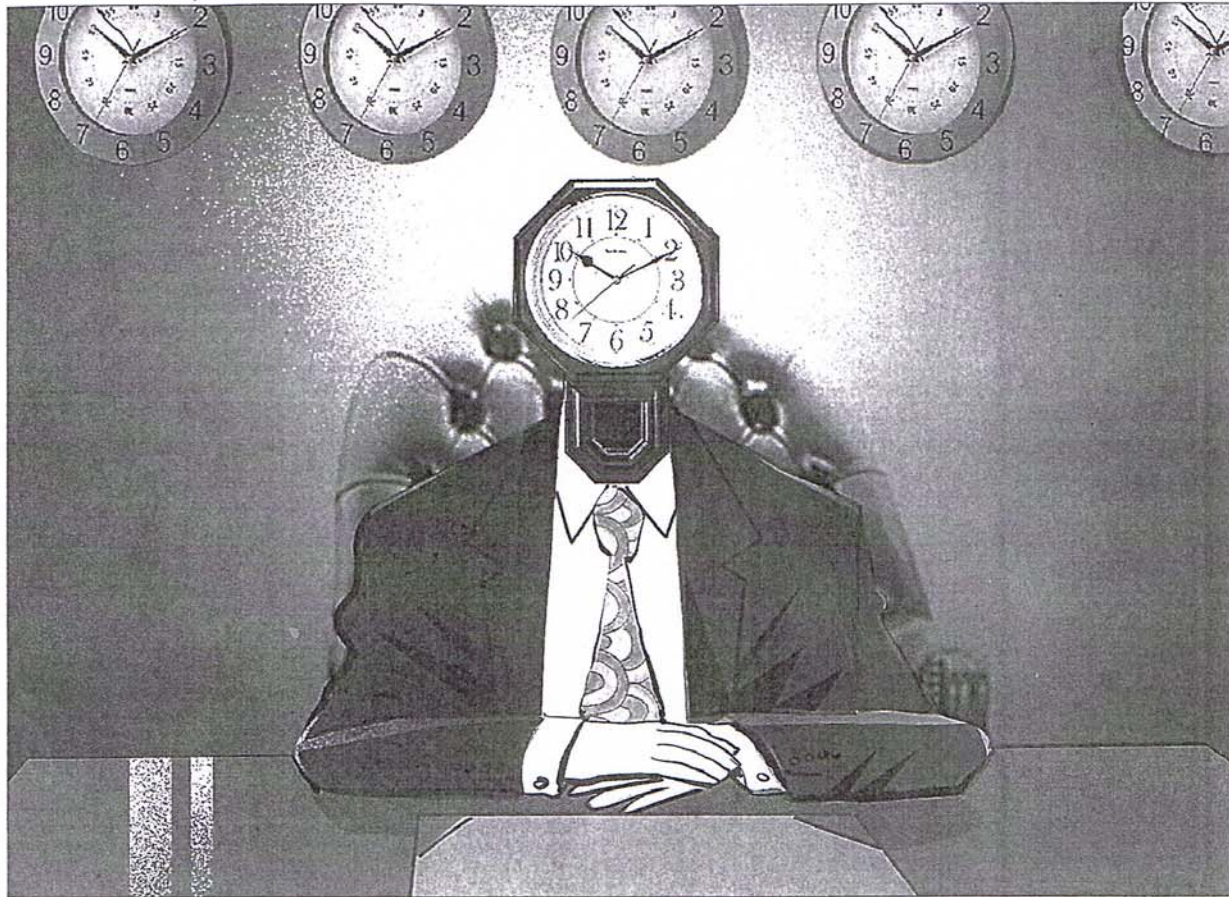


ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN GABLE/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

plex tasks into manageable chunks. That way you still get to cross it off the list and move on to something else.

Make time

Making time is like making money: Calculate how much of it you'll need and then spend it wisely.

Julie Morgenstern, author of *Time Management from the Inside Out*, believes poor time management stems from overscheduling and the inability to predict how long tasks will take.

"You don't want to schedule everything down to the minute," she says, "because something unexpected always comes up."

You also don't want to micro-schedule the macro tasks. Things such as planning and brainstorming take time, so devote big blocks of uninterrupted time to them. Hey, if they end up taking less time than you budgeted, sit back and enjoy the windfall.

Delegating is also essential. Don't spend your precious time if the job isn't worth it or if someone else should be doing it. If something needs to be done, decide which of three responses to apply:

- Do it, if it can be done quickly.
- Delegate it, if someone else can and should do it.
- Defer it, if it takes longer than two minutes and you are the right person.

Figure out what and when to delegate and you will save time. Trust and support people to whom you delegate and you will see results.

Prioritize

Prioritize and reprioritize. If you get it right, you're working intelligently, not just efficiently.

Donald Wetmore, author of *Beat the Clock*, preaches daily actions. Prioritize tomorrow's to-do list before you leave the office today. Re-assess as you work to make sure that you tackle items in order of their importance. Also, give yourself the pleasure of ticking things off, or crossing them out. It's fun, it's satisfying and it doesn't waste any time.

And don't forget the big picture. Prioritize weekly and monthly, not just daily. Analyze your plans, make sure your priorities match the needs of your job and reflect personal and professional goals.

Rapid response

The longer you wait to send out that proposal, the better it has to be. Don't plan to skimp, but don't write a big status report if a quick e-mail will suffice. Get it done once; get it done now.

Alan Kwong, managing director of PharmEng Technology, is a proponent of fast, focused e-mails. "Short e-mail will take care of 80 per cent of all messages that need to be

conveyed," he estimates.

Rapid response means that everyone wins:

- It's good for you, because you're better able to master your workflow, conserve mental energy and focus on bigger issues.
- It's good for the client (or team or partner) because they get what they want sooner rather than later.
- It's good for the organization because you help your entire organization to become more efficient.

Eliminate distractions

Procrastinating is like eating junk food: We all secretly like it, even though we know it's bad for us.

No surprise, we're all pretty good at wasting time. Whether it's online shopping or 20-minute coffee breaks, we all have black holes that suck time out of our days.

Chances are you know how, when and why you procrastinate. But if you don't, keep a time diary and you'll soon find out. For me, it's compulsive e-mailing, Web surfing and on-line shopping. I know it's been a bad week at the office when there are little brown boxes at home, and I have no idea what they contain.

The last step out of the quicksand is figuring how to break the habit. Maybe you get overwhelmed because tasks are too big. Okay, break them down into manageable chunks.

Maybe you just hate doing something and need to suck it up, or hand it off to somebody who doesn't mind it.

Bend time

This is the 21st century. You have the technology in your pocket or on your desk that will allow you to bend time. Increasingly, people are doing just that. Three-quarters of so-called "knowledge workers" will be on the move 25 per cent of the time or more by the end of the year, according to the Meta Group.

So use the force Luke. Spending too much time at work? Use a BlackBerry to get e-mail done away from the office. Stuck in traffic? Practice that presentation on the way home and you won't have to do a trial run in front of the mirror.

Chances are you'll know when you get it right. The rewards of successful time management range from more time at home to less stress to increased productivity and profit.

Time management may be complicated, but success is easy to measure. "I know I'm succeeding," Mr. Kwong says, "when I spend more time with the family during the week."

Anthony Schneider is the CEO of a New York-based Internet strategy firm and author of *Tony Soprano on Management*.

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David Teeger

Director

David Teeger C.A., C.A. (S.A.) graduated as a Chartered Accountant in South Africa, and upon arrival in Canada he obtained his Canadian C.A. designation and joined Richter & Associates, a management consulting firm, where he concentrated his practice on various business sectors including household goods, fashion, automotive parts, public associations, and retail chains. He performed many roles in his 15 years at Richter, including managing the professional services organization in North America and all business operations throughout Europe.

David's professional capabilities include computer audits, feasibility studies, system analyses and assistance in the selection, negotiation and implementation of computerized solutions.

As a founding partner of Teeger Schiller Inc., he has focused his practice on consulting to management. His team of professionals has helped businesses select and successfully install a variety of ERP business solutions and add-on systems including business intelligence solutions to give new life to existing computer systems. David's clients not only rely on him to successfully manage the implementation of their new systems, but to manage the change that occurs in their organizations as a result of the use of these new tools.



Elliot Schiller

Director

Elliot Schiller, Ph.D., C.M.C. began his career as a Chemical Engineer working for Grumman Aircraft, in Long Island, New York. He obtained his Ph.D. at the University of Pittsburgh with funding from the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, and, after being awarded a Presidential Fellowship, he went on to perform research and development activities at Brookhaven National Laboratory.

Since coming to Canada, he has primarily assisted consumer products and retail organizations in a variety of strategic management initiatives, traveling around the globe on behalf of his clients. In 1987, Elliot joined Richter & Associates, and it is here that he first met David Teeger.

As a founding partner of Teeger Schiller Inc., he has focused the SR&ED / Grant Division on obtaining grants and tax incentives for over 100 companies in the small to medium sized business sector. His team has provided services to the discrete / processing manufacturing, material development, textiles, apparel, automotive and computer sciences sectors. Annually, Teeger Schiller Inc. secures more than \$5 million in government funding to assist its clients in having their business initiatives supported by government funding.



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