

How to organize your work, home and life

Harold L. Taylor



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CONTENTS

	Introduction	7
1	Time management & organization go hand in hand	8
1.1	The value of time	8
1.2	Getting organized	9
1.3	How do we become self-motivated?	10
1.4	Make changes gradually	10
1.5	Control the things you can control	11
2	The need to get organized	14
2.1	The benefits of getting organized	14
2.2	Disorganized? don't blame it on your brain	16
2.3	Are you disorganized?	17

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3	How organized is your office?	19
3.1	Your office layout is important	19
3.2	Getting rid of the backlog	21
3.3	Organize your office for maximum productivity	22
3.4	The follow-up file	24
3.5	Organizing your books	26
3.6	Organize your electronic files	32
4	Merging time & organization for maximum productivity	33
4.1	Mobility in the office	33
4.2	Productivity revisited	34
4.3	Corporate productivity vs. personal productivity	35
4.4	Advantages of a written "to do" list	36
4.5	Are paper planners making a comeback?	37
4.6	A solution to shrinking planning times	38
5	Organizing your home	41
5.1	Getting rid of the clutter	41
5.2	The fate of unused stuff	42
5.3	Packrats lose time, money and space	43
5.4	The key to getting rid of clutter is to start	45
6	Organizing your home can be fun	47
6.1	A personal note from my past	47
6.2	A personal story of triumph over clutter	48
6.3	Organizing tips for the home	49
6.4	Getting an early start	52
7	Everything i know about getting organized i learned from my mother	54
7.1	Mother knows best	54
8	Organizing advice for seniors	59
8.1	Don't retire from life	59
8.2	Plan for your senior years	60
8.3	Seniors in the workforce	60
8.4	Advice for seniors in the home	61
8.5	For those working with seniors	62

9	Gaining control can impact health and longevity	64
9.1	Organization is an indication of control	64
9.2	Age has its benefits besides senior discounts	66
9.3	Purpose beats profit hands down	66
9.4	It is time to do what you really love doing	67
9.5	Take charge of your health	68
9.6	The greatest time management strategy is to live longer	69
10	Books referenced	71
11	About the author	73

INTRODUCTION

One of my other books, *How work environment impacts productivity*, touches on a few of the areas covered in this book; but it focuses on the impact of environmental factors such as exposure to sunlight, views of nature, office greenery, noise, music, colors and co-workers on personal productivity. I recommend that you read it, as well as this one, to benefit from a full range of factors that influence personal productivity, both physical and non-physical.

The focus of most of my books have been on time management – getting significant things done in minimum time with the least amount of stress. But the last dozen or so have been focusing on the newer concept of holistic time management, which also discusses the role of such things as attitude, lifestyle, the senses and other non-physical factors on efficiency and effectiveness. When I mention such factors in this book, I include links to a description of the corresponding book on the Bookboon.com website. This should help you decide whether pursuing the topic will be of benefit to you.

I also want to mention that there is no right or wrong way to organize your office, home or personal life. The suggestions in this book simply represent the tools and methods that have worked for me or others. Most of the opinions are my own. The only system of organizing that will work perfectly for *you* is the one you adapt to your own needs.

So feel free to pick and choose from among the suggestions presented here. Use what will work for you and ignore the rest.

And best wishes for a long, happy, productive and organized life.

1 TIME MANAGEMENT & ORGANIZATION GO HAND IN HAND

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZING & TIME MANAGEMENT

Organizing is the act of rearranging *items* that are in a disorganized, cluttered state so that everything can be retrieved quickly with less effort, maximizing both their utility and visual appeal.

Time management refers to increasing both the *efficiency and the effectiveness* of individuals and organizations through the organization of *tasks and events* by using tools such as planners and computers, and techniques and processes such as goal-setting, planning and scheduling.

The two activities are interrelated since disorganization normally wastes time. The major difference between *organizing* and *time management* is that, in general, organizing deals with *things* and time management deals with *activities* that have a time dimension. Both are important.

Time management in any environment, electronic or otherwise, involves working both efficiently and effectively. You are working efficiently when you complete tasks in the best possible way. You are working effectively when you concentrate your efforts on the best possible tasks. What you do is considered more important than how you do it. But when you get organized and work both efficiently and effectively, you are approaching excellence. Organization is our passport to productivity and time management is the vehicle that takes us there.

1.1 THE VALUE OF TIME

The three major resources that are necessary in order to operate a successful business are time, money, and people.

If you lose money, you can always earn or borrow more. If you lose people, you can re-hire. But if you lose time, you can never regain it – neither by working nor by borrowing. It is lost forever. And the sad part is, there is not an inexhaustible supply. You can dip into the time bank only so many times – then, once it's all gone, you're gone.

It stands to reason that since time is in great demand and it is in such limited supply, that next to your health, it is your most valuable resource. Therefore, if you want to be successful in business and in life, you must learn to manage the time at your disposal.

Unfortunately, some people can't even manage their money, let alone their time. And even those who *do* manage their money well do a relatively *poor* job of managing their time. The expression, "Look after the pennies and the dollars will look after themselves" is equally true for this precious commodity called time. We cannot afford to be spendthrifts when it comes to time. Spending time on impulse items such as dawdling over junk e-mail, thumbing through magazines, rearranging furniture and repositioning paintings when there are meaningful tasks to be performed is one way we can squander valuable minutes, which soon amount to hours.

We also waste time by constantly shuffling papers, searching for misplaced items, interrupting ourselves and others needlessly, procrastinating on jobs that *must* be done eventually, worrying about things we can't control, and saying "yes" to time-consuming activities that do not relate to our goals. Add to this perfectionism, idle time, and a myriad of bad habits, and we have the potential to waste hours each day – hours that would be spent on profit-generating activities, family time, or self-renewal.

1.2 GETTING ORGANIZED

Usually the first step in gaining control of your time is to get organized. Organize your office, your files and your procedures to eliminate those wasted minutes searching for things, shuffling papers and interrupting others. Then look for shortcuts when performing those necessary but routine activities such as checking e-mail, chairing meetings, and fielding phone calls. The resulting time savings can then be invested in those profit-generating activities and personal priorities.

Getting organized and time management are not one-time events. They are continuing processes of changing time wasting habits, streamlining the necessary activities, and focusing always on those key activities that generate the greatest return.

Time management and organization can be viewed as common sense; but common sense not consistently practised. It may seem easy. But it isn't easy; because we are forced to change working habits that we have developed over the years. It takes motivation, determination, and perseverance. But the rewards, a more productive and satisfying life, are worth the effort.

1.3 HOW DO WE BECOME SELF-MOTIVATED?

Some people shrug off their disorganization by claiming they were born that way. Others claim they are so organized they were born on their due dates. But personal organization is not hereditary. You acquire your habits, good or bad, as you grow older. The more bad habits you have acquired, the more difficult it is to get organized; but it *can* be done.

That's the good news. The bad news is it takes effort. Nothing worthwhile comes easily. Anyone can resolve to get up a half hour earlier, for example; but actually getting up requires effort. It takes varying degrees of effort to put things back after using them, purge files, develop the "do it now" habit, and tear yourself away from pleasant but non-productive tasks.

So you must want to get organized badly enough to endure some temporary awkwardness. You must be self-motivated. No seminar, book, or DVD is ever going to give you the incentive to persist in your efforts to get organized. That's a fact that you must accept.

So where does the motivation come from? Motivation is a product of the amount of desire to get organized multiplied by the expectancy that you will succeed. So if you are experiencing few problems the way you are, and are happy with the results you are achieving, you will have a low desire to change. But if you are convinced that you can get more accomplished and lead a better life if you were more organized and time-effective, your desire will be high. It only remains that you are convinced that certain changes *will* lead to personal organization.

And confirmation of that is available from individuals who have succeeded in changing habits and increasing their effectiveness. So read the books, many published by Bookboon.com, on goal-setting, organizing and time management authored by individuals who *did* succeed using their own methods. There are plenty of testimonials that goal-setting, planning, self-discipline and persistence pay off. If you believe it, and you want it for yourself, you will *have* the motivation.

1.4 MAKE CHANGES GRADUALLY

A word of caution: don't try to change too many things at once. Remember that getting organized, like time management, is a life-long process. Make changes gradually. Become comfortable with using a telephone log or follow-up file for example, before revamping the way you conduct yourself in other areas.

Where do you get your ideas? There are hundreds of books on the topic of organization. Articles appear almost every month in one of the thousands of magazines and blogs being

posted. There is no shortage of ideas on organizing and saving time. But what you must do is select those ideas you feel will work for you. Adapt them, if necessary, to suit your particular job or situation, then put them into practice.

1.5 CONTROL THE THINGS YOU CAN CONTROL

Time does not pass. We do. Don't try to control time or you will simply become frustrated. Time cannot be saved, stored, stopped, or stretched. So stop concentrating on *time* and focus your attention on something you *can* influence – *yourself*. Use time only as a measuring stick to determine how effective you can become. Can you increase the number of significant accomplishments within the same time frame? Or can you achieve what you are now achieving in a shorter period of time?

Once you start concentrating on something you *can* control – *yourself* – your work *methods*, *tools* and work *environment*, you eliminate many of the frustrations experienced when you try to control others, or time itself over which you have little or no control. Many of the problems you were blaming on the clock – or others – disappear.

If you ask yourself the following eight questions, and are not satisfied with the answers, read a few of the books on time management that have already been published by *Bookboon.com*, including mine. I have already covered all the above areas in detail with the exception of the process of getting organized. (Although some of the books refer briefly to some of the topics.) If you have a problem with getting and staying organized, read the following chapters and pick those ideas that will work best for you. Then put them into practice. After each question, I have included the title of at least one of my books (published by Bookboon.com) that covers that specific topic in more detail.

Ask yourself some basic questions:

Do I have a clear set of personal goals in writing?

Saving time is to no avail if you have nothing meaningful to spend it on. Examine yourself and your values. Determine what is important to you and what you would like to accomplish in your lifetime. Then, put these aspirations into the form of specific objectives that you can work towards. ([Develop a goal-setting mindset](#))

Do I use my planner properly?

Use it to record more than people appointments and meetings; use it to plan your week in advance. Jot down specific days and times when you plan to work on that project, report, article, sales call or counseling session. Fill your planner with priorities that relate to your goals so there's no room for the trivia. ([Time to be productive](#))

Am I writing things down instead of relying on my memory?

Many ideas and opportunities are lost, mistakes made, and communications stifled simply because we relied on our memories. Always carry a notepad or PDA with recording capability with you. Take notes on telephone calls, actions resulting from meetings, ideas that pop into your head, assignments given and received, deadline dates and dates of events such as birthdays, conferences, and reviews. ([Time to be productive](#))

Am I procrastinating?

Many people have goals that are really only intentions. Because they never get around to working on them. They are sidetracked by those urgent but unimportant activities that seemingly must be done. Or they gravitate towards those pleasant or easy tasks that consume their time. Reducing procrastination is essential if you are to lead a fruitful life and achieve a sense of accomplishment. ([Procrastinate less and get more done](#))

Am I a packrat?

Are you among the many people in this country who are drowning in their possessions? Do you have drawers, files, and cabinets filled with things you never use? Paperwork alone is still a real problem for many people. It is difficult to be organized when there is simply too much to organize. (*Organize your work, home & life*)

Do I work in a disorganized environment?

People waste valuable time searching for things, shuffling papers, interrupting themselves, and jumping from one job to another simply because their work area is disorganized. Spend a day – or evening – cleaning out your desk drawers, eliminating unnecessary paperwork, developing a simple file system, follow-up file and project files. Decide where you will store each item and stick to it. Stop using the desk top as a storage area, clear out your in-basket daily, and take the few seconds necessary to put away a project once you have finished working on it for the time being. You will work better if you are organized. (*Organize your work, home & life*)

Am I creating a work environment that maximizes my energy, productivity and creativity?

Until recently, most people have ignored such things as natural lighting, greenery, colors, music and other factors (besides the physical layout and organization) that have an impact on personal productivity, health and well-being. Take advantage of the facts revealed by research that will positively impact your success by keeping up to date on these areas and making changes where applicable. ([How work environment impacts productivity](#))

Am I working smarter rather than harder?

Are you using up valuable time on jobs that can be delegated, assigned, or contracted out to others? You have a limited amount of time; it never varies. So make sure you fill it with those priority activities that only you can perform. For example, don't spend three hours of your life washing your car when you can have it done for you for six dollars. (Unless, of course, your time is not worth two dollars per hour, or there's nothing else you'd rather do than wash cars.) Always search out better ways of doing things. (*The process of delegation.*)

Am I caught up in the tyranny of the urgent?

If you keep yourself busy enough you won't notice that you're not accomplishing anything. Are you constantly under time pressures, fighting to keep your head above water? You must divorce yourself from the rat race, modify your sense of time urgency, and concentrate on the 20% of the activities that produce 80% of the results. (My book covering the tyranny of the urgent will be available later in 2018. Meanwhile there are several good books on [managing stress](#) available from Bookboon.com.)

2 THE NEED TO GET ORGANIZED

2.1 THE BENEFITS OF GETTING ORGANIZED

Organization aids peace of mind, creativity, and attention as well as time effectiveness. Disorganization, on the other hand, causes stress, fractured thinking and wasted time. It could even contribute to obesity.

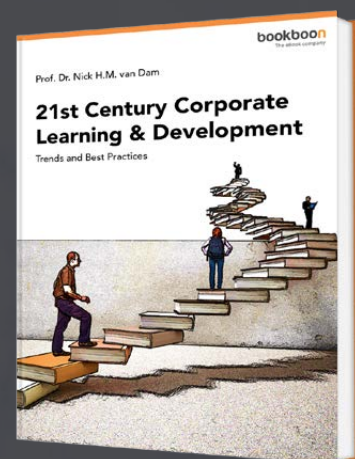
For example, a *Psychology Today* article posted on May 17, 2017 mentioned a study showing that people will eat more cookies and snacks if working in a messy and disorganized kitchen. A special edition of *Mindfulness*, April, 2017, reported that according to the recent study published in *Environment and Behavior*, we are likely to overeat up to 34% more when our kitchens are in a mess – such as old newspapers, unopened mail on the counter and so on.

Mehmet Oz and Mike Roizen, authors of *YOU: On a Diet*, claim that visual clutter slows down the brain. They say that's why clusters of road signs double the chances of missing the one you're looking for. It also explains why website designers aim for simplicity. So clearing clutter from your desk, office and home and leaving more wide open spaces also helps to clear your mind so it will be more productive.

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As we read more about the workings of our brain, we learn even more about the importance of getting organized. According to neuroscientist Torkel Klingberg, author of *The overflowing brain*, mental clutter is a suspect in the cause of age-related memory losses. Clearing clutter from your desk, office and home and leaving more wide open spaces also helps to clear your mind so it will be more productive.

To stay organized you must develop systems unique to your situation, whether it is handling paperwork, managing email, conducting meetings, using a follow-up file or scheduling in a planner.

Peter Bregman, in his book *18 Minutes*, describes a study showing that deciding in advance when you will do something increases your commitment to do it. That's one of the reasons I suggest to people that they block off times in their planner to actually do the priority tasks. This could include blocks of time to organize specific areas of your home and office.

Here are a few sample organizing suggestions for home and office that I have published at one time or another in my quarterly time management newsletter. For a free subscription to this electronic newsletter, [click here](#). (Or visit our website at taylorintime.com.)

Re-purpose storage space

When you sort through your belongings and donate or scrap the sweaters, blouses, scarves and other clothing items you never use, re-purpose the drawer for those non-clothing items that are causing your closets and other storage areas to overflow. You are re-purposing when you remove bottom shelves of linen closets to store your golf clubs or use a kitchen drawer to house your toolkit. Don't feel that you have to use all storage areas for the purpose they were originally intended. I use a spare bedroom as an office, and the closet organizers such as hanging compartments designed for shoes and larger ones for sweaters now house my various office supplies.

Not so junky junk drawer

I maintain that everyone needs a junk drawer for miscellaneous one-of-a-kind items. The secret is not to let it expand into two or more junk drawers. When items that you just can't part with become too plentiful to find quickly, add dividers to the drawer to separate items that have some common association – such as those used in the same room (kitchen, garden, etc.), or for common use (cooking, repairing, washing, etc.).

Act at the time of recall

When you recall that you need to mail letters in the morning or deposit clothes for dry cleaning or return a book to a friend, act now, not in the morning. Place those items near the front door or on the front car seat – where they won't be missed. Marking them on a

“To Do” list might not allow enough time if you’re rushing in the morning. And you could even misplace or forget to look at your “To Do” list.

Organizing tip for procrastinators

Not ready to part with some of the items cluttering up your home or office? In addition to your “Toss”, “Keep”, and “Donate” boxes, have a fourth one labelled “In limbo” for those items that you can’t decide whether to toss, donate or keep. Six months or a year later, tackle this box as well. If you haven’t needed, looked for, missed or even thought about any of the items in the meantime, it will be a lot easier to part with them.

Brighten up those storage areas

Rather than storing those extra paintings and framed photographs that usually get shoved under the bed, and that artificial plant that you received from Aunt Sally, use them to embellish closets, the laundry room and other out-of-sight areas that tend to attract unused stuff. You might hesitate before blocking wall-hangings and other decorative pieces. It also gives you the added advantage of brightening up those otherwise cluttered hideaway places that you have to visit frequently. It might even give your mood a boost.

If you need a further reason to invest a little time in getting organized, how about this statistic published in the April 6, 2013 issue of *The Globe & Mail* in an article by Leah Etchler? A U.S Study found that employees lose 76 hours per year as a result of disorganization. That’s time that could be put to use – either in your business or your personal life.

2.2 DISORGANIZED? DON’T BLAME IT ON YOUR BRAIN

You were going to clean out that cupboard today, but a TV program came on that you didn’t want to miss. And after all, if you miss this program it may never air again – and you can always clean the cupboard tomorrow.

In the old days we used to call this procrastination – doing what you would rather do now and putting off the more important things until later. But with all of the brain research going on today, it’s now suggested that it’s your brain that’s at fault. The brain’s default setting is “to tap the least tiring cognitive process,” according to an article in the December, 2015 issue of *Scientific American Mind*. In other words, it takes the path of least resistance – the easiest and least energy-consuming route. It’s certainly easier to leave something out than put it away or to do something later rather than now – including your intention to organize your home and office.

We now have legitimate reasons for shirking our responsibilities, rationalizing our errors, and making snap decisions without examining the facts. With the advent of functional MRIs, and locating the regions of the brain responsible for everything from lack of willpower to angry outbursts, we can pinpoint the blame even further. “It’s the insula or the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex,” we might claim.

We even have attorneys arguing in court rooms that their clients were not responsible for their crimes since it was some malfunction of a certain region of their brain.

I have over 50 books on the brain in my library – everything from *Brain rules* to *A better brain at any age*. What I have concluded personally is that the mind is separate from the brain. You are not your brain; you are your mind. Your brain is simply part of the body – your personal computer, which does your bidding. You can control your brain – unless this most complicated computer in the universe actually breaks down – so get ready to accept responsibility for at least most of your behaviours.

Most of the brain books will confirm the neuroplasticity of the brain, and that you are able to reprogram it to develop willpower, resist impulses, overcome procrastination, and strengthen your planning and organizing skills, and so on.

Although most scientists believe the mind itself is simply a part of the brain, my own unscientific mind tells me otherwise. It is the only way that consciousness and immortality make sense to me. It may be linked with or even be another name for soul and/or spirit; but if it is energy, it cannot be destroyed, only changed in form.

My intention here is not to get you to believe in life after death, but merely to warn you not to blame your brain for every lapse in focus or any urge to take the path of least resistance. You may not be your brain; but you are able to control it. As the title of one of those brain books urges, *change your brain; change your life*.

As an example, there are many ways you can strengthen your executive skills – those brain-based skills that allow you to manage time, focus, persist, plan, resist impulses and maintain self-control, among other behaviors. I suggest ways of doing that in one of my other eBooks, [Strengthen your brain’s executive skills](#), published in January, 2016 by Bookboon.com.

2.3 ARE YOU DISORGANIZED?

You might consider your state of organization – or disorganization in your office or home, and take steps to improve it. Below is a brief quiz with 15 statements. Check off those statements that are true in your case. Then add up the number of checkmarks.

- I spend more than fifteen minutes each day searching for things.
- If all the paperwork on my desk were put into one pile it would be over two inches thick.
- I frequently misplace such things as car keys, eyeglasses, or other personal effects.
- When searching for something in a drawer, the drawer always looks messier when I'm finished.
- It's impossible for me to keep flat surfaces free from clutter. I collect things on top of spare desks, credenzas, filing cabinets, tables.
- We share such things as 3-hole punches and staplers at the office.
- Most common things, such as printer paper, stationery, and other office supplies are centrally located.
- It is sometimes difficult to locate things in the filing cabinets.
- I frequently spend five minutes or more searching for files on my computer.
- I frequently store things without listing the items in each carton (or without keeping index cards of the contents).
- I don't keep a follow-up file for storing work in process.
- My in-basket is on my desk.
- At home or at work we store things in spots that we have not designated for them. Example, vacuum cleaner or golf clubs in hall closet, cartons of envelopes in coat closet, etc.
- I have more than one junk drawer in my desk/dresser/kitchen.
- In closets, stairwells, storage rooms, etc., we use floor space as much as we use racks, shelves and hangers.

If you checked off more than 5 statements as being true, you are disorganized to at least some extent and I recommend that you immediately block off some time in your planning calendar this week to get organized. As little as one hour each week will start paying dividends within a few weeks, and you will gain much more time than you invest.

In my book, *The impact of working environment on productivity*, published by *Bookboon.com*, I reviewed the impact of environmental factors such as noise level, lighting, office decor, colors and greenery on productivity and creativity.

It's also important to have an organized office to minimize distractions, boost efficiency, lower stress, conserve energy and increase personal comfort while working on your priority tasks.

If you are what some people refer to as a "packrat" – keeping material that is no longer used – refer to that section in Chapter 6, which discusses organization in the home.

3 HOW ORGANIZED IS YOUR OFFICE?

3.1 YOUR OFFICE LAYOUT IS IMPORTANT

A survey conducted by Steelcase Canada quite some time ago revealed that 74 percent of office workers feel they could do more work in the same amount of time if office conditions were changed. The three factors office workers said could help them increase their productivity are improved work flow between people and departments, reduction of noise and distraction in the office, and access to proper job equipment.

Choose a comfortable, sturdy adjustable chair that allows you to rest your feet on the floor while maintaining your eyes at about 30 inches from the computer screen with the top part of the monitor slightly below eye level. If you need a cushion to support your lower back, get one. Hopefully you will spend as much time on your feet or pacing around the office while you work since it is both healthier, and in many cases, more productive.

Discourage interruptions by avoiding eye contact with passersby. Don't position your desk so you are facing an open doorway. You might place your desk to one side, so people will have to go out of their way to see you. If they are able to catch your eye from outside the office they will be tempted to walk inside and strike up a conversation. For the same reason, avoid having gathering spots outside your office such as a coffee area, water cooler or copying station. A coffee maker, for example, seems to put people in a socializing mood. That's okay if everyone takes their break at the same time, but this seldom happens.

Although the absence of chairs would make unscheduled visitations brief, it could also make scheduled meetings more inconvenient. But don't have chairs close to your desk or facing you. They're an open invitation for people to slip into them. Instead, place them about ten feet or more from the desk or against a wall on either side of the room. When the drop-in approaches your desk, you can stand and remain standing until the brief conversation is over. If you want to carry on a lengthy conversation, simply move from your desk to the chairs and carry on the conversation in the open, facing each other, without the barrier of a desk between you.

Have your office decorated tastefully, but simply. A lot of photos, trophies, certificates and citations will encourage chit chat. Don't have family photos or memorabilia in your line of sight. These could initiate the brain's impromptu trip down memory lane. A window view is okay as long as it's a view of nature and not a brick wall or a busy carnival.

Don't have ashtrays if you don't smoke there or comfortable sofas if you don't sleep in your office. But plants are great, even if you don't garden. And a clock is a great reminder of the speed at which time passes; place it where your visitor can see it.

Arrange your working tools and furniture closely around the desk area. Don't place frequently-used filing cabinets or bookcases on the other side of the room. You should have everything that you frequently use each day within reach. Have an adequate inventory of felt pens, paperclips, staples, highlighter markers, etc. in one of your desk drawers. Don't skimp on office supplies; have your own stapler, 3-hole punch, and whatever else you use frequently. Sharing with other people is not economical when you take lost time into consideration.

Your desk does not have to be large, but you must have sufficient working area. The desk is not meant for storage, so keep it clear of paperwork except for projects you are working on. Other projects should be retained in a follow-up file; the bulkier ones can be kept in colored manila folders, clearly identified. These should be kept in hanging files in your desk drawer. If your desk doesn't have a drawer large enough to hold files, I recommend you get one that does. If this is impossible, keep the follow-up file system and project files in a vertical file holder on top of your desk or in a filing cabinet at the side of your desk. The follow-up file will be discussed later.

Keep articles, procedures, job descriptions, policies, product bulletins and anything else that you refer to frequently in 3-ring binders. Label them clearly for easy identification; buy some self-adhesive insert holders for the spines of these binders. The bookcase should be within reach. Surround yourself on three sides with your working materials.

Your office should be arranged so that everything is readily accessible. Every time you have to walk to another area for supplies, you risk an extended interruption. So anticipate the envelopes, letterhead, computer paper, etc., that you will need, and include them in your inventory. If you need an extra cabinet or shelf on the wall near your desk, get one. Have a set of stacking trays on your desk or credenza bearing the names of people who report to you, or who you communicate with on a regular basis. This could include your boss. Whenever there is something requiring their attention, jot notes on it and toss it in one of those trays. Invariably they will interrupt you at least once every day and they can empty their tray when they do. Don't deliver paperwork to anyone who will be dropping in. Save yourself some trips.

Don't let your office environment control you. You spend too many hours there to suffer unnecessary inconveniences. If a floor receptacle prevents you from placing your desk where you want it, have the outlet moved. If the door opens the wrong way, have it changed. If the lighting is poor, add more lights. If the rollers on your chair are worn, replace them. Any costs incurred are one-time costs; the time savings are forever.

3.2 GETTING RID OF THE BACKLOG

In an office environment, people can become so overwhelmed with paperwork and so pressured by time constraints, that they feel it's impossible to keep on top of it all. They become packrats by default.

If you find yourself buried in paperwork, have an overflowing in basket, a desk drawer crammed with files, reports and trivia and stacks of material on your credenza, window ledges and filing cabinets, you will have difficulty coping with current material. You must first get rid of the backlog, and organize yourself so the paperwork will never get ahead of you again.

First you must clean up your desk, office, and files. Here is a ten-point system for getting rid of your backlog:

1. Block off a three-hour period in your planning calendar. If it's impossible during working hours, schedule it at night or on a weekend.
2. Empty all the desk drawers, ledges, etc., of paperwork. Don't tackle filing cabinets at this stage – only your desk, credenza, and any visible piles of paperwork.
3. Toss all paperwork into three envelope boxes marked "Priority", "Routine", and "Unimportant". Stack any magazines separately.
4. As you carry out Step 3, quickly scan the material and recycle anything that can be discarded.
5. One of the desk drawers should be a file drawer. If not, use a file cabinet drawer that is within reach of your desk. Install hanging folders.
6. Use 13 of the hanging folders, along with 31 manila folders, for a follow-up file. An example is described later. Label the other folders with titles of your major on-going projects. Every hanging file should contain a similarly labeled manila file folder.
7. One or more of your desk drawers will contain "non-paperwork" – miscellaneous paraphernalia and office supplies. Separate those items you actually *use* on a regular basis, and organize them in an organizer tray. Retain in a shallow drawer.
8. Throw out whatever items your willpower will allow. Place the other items in a shoebox; label "Junk Drawer", followed by the date, and stash them away in some dark closet. Chances are you'll never need them again. Out of sight, out of mind, and eventually, out of the building.
9. Go through those envelope boxes, starting with the one labeled "Priority", dealing with each piece of paper as you pick it up. Scrap it, delegate it, do it, or schedule a time to do it later. In the latter case, block off time to do it in your planner, and put the paperwork in the follow-up file.
10. It is unlikely you will be able to dispense with all the paperwork in 3 hours. Set the boxes aside and dedicate at least a half-hour every morning to systematically go

through this paperwork until it is all scrapped, done, delegated, or scheduled for a later time. This is in addition to the time you already spend on your incoming e-mail and other material. You need to keep on top of your incoming material so another backlog does not accumulate. Once the backlog has disappeared, you have that half-our back.

3.3 ORGANIZE YOUR OFFICE FOR MAXIMUM PRODUCTIVITY

As mentioned, organize your desk and surrounding area so that frequently used materials and supplies and equipment are within reach. The less frequently you use materials, the farther away they should be stored. For example, writing materials might be on your desk with your computer, working files in your left hand desk drawer and archived files in another room entirely.

Here are a few additional tips for keeping your office and desk area organized:

- Use organizer trays in your most accessible desk drawers to house such items as elastic bands, sticky notes, scissors, tape, batteries, staples, thumb drives, monitor cleaner, postage stamps, scratch pads, labels, labels, forms, and so on. Keep like things close together but rarely in the same compartment of the organizer tray.
- Keep frequently-used hardcopy files in hanging folders in your desk's filing drawer or in a freestanding filing cabinet within reach. Action files such as this week's meeting material, invoices to be paid, information for an article being written or items to be reviewed can be held in a vertical step file device on your desk. But otherwise keep your desk as clear as possible to accommodate your current project and computer or laptop.
- Since people recognize color faster than they can decipher text, for your action folders it is usually a good idea to color code the various categories. Use different colored manila file folders and hanging folders to house the paperwork for different projects and categories. You might have red for action items, blue for payables, yellow for follow-ups, and so on. Of course the tabs should be clearly labelled as well; but eventually you won't even have to refer to the tab to identify the folder.
- To store inventory and supplies you could paint shelves different colors so you would know that electronic items, electrical cords etc. are on the white shelf, packaging materials on the green shelf, paper products on the yellow shelf, safety and first aid supplies on the red shelf, and so on. Color provides instant identification among similar items, and if you file by color, anything filed in the wrong place can be quickly spotted.

- I particularly like the idea of color-coding books according to topic so it is easy to file and retrieve by topic. This is explained later in this chapter.
- Whenever possible, store your supplies where they are used – printer paper, ink cartridges etc. near the printer, copier supplies near the copier and so on. These organizing principles apply to your digital files and forms as well. Have frequently used documents such as your weekly blog articles, tweets, monthly reports etc. in a folder on your computer desktop. Avoid having to click through five or six levels of document folders every day or week to reach the electronic files that you use every day.
- Less frequently used files can be several levels down in your main “Documents” folder. For instance, you might have to click through Documents, Associations, NAPO, Conferences, and Exhibits each year to reach the display information document.
- Don’t allow your computer desktop to be cluttered with folders and individual documents. File newly created documents in the proper folder as you create them. Temporary storage easily becomes more permanent and slows the retrieval process.
- Have a bookcase within reach for more current books that you refer to frequently for research while writing articles, writing proposals for clients or developing training programs. Once they are referred to less frequently and replaced by more current books, move them to your larger bookcases farther from your immediate working area.
- Remove all clutter and other potential distractions from your immediate work area – including the in-basket on your desk if your office is in a company. Hopefully you have already decided what you will be working on each day and don’t need additional distractions. Any in-basket should be outside your office or at least as close as possible to the doorway. If it’s a crisis, people won’t use your in-basket anyway.
- Don’t run out of supplies or stationery. Organize the storage so there’s a place for everything. Insist on everything being kept that way. For forms, letterhead, envelopes, promotion material, tape a copy to the outside of the box for easy identification. Number the cartons: 1, 2, 3, etc., when they come in. Stack them in reverse order and when you get down to 2 or 1, re-order.
- Have written procedures for all tasks. Have the staff members who are responsible for the tasks make up the procedures. Review them. Refine them. Simplify them if possible. And make everyone in the office aware of them.
- Get a large wall calendar. Record all meetings, conferences, workshops, vacations, important deadlines, so everyone can see them.

3.4 THE FOLLOW-UP FILE

A clear desk does not guarantee that you'll be organized. But it helps. If you have a handful of material relating to a project and nowhere to put it, don't leave it on your desk or toss it back into the in-basket. Either place it in the appropriate Action File or into a follow-up file, which schedules it on a particular date. When you put something in your follow-up file for a particular date, be sure to block off enough time in your planner to actually work on it – unless it simply requires a quick phone call or something requiring a few minutes only.

The follow-up file is exclusive of your assistant's follow-up file (if you have an administrative assistant). If your staff member keeps a follow-up file and uses it to jog your memory on reports due, or items for approval, that's great. But this is *your* personal follow-up file, which contains the back-up material you will need for those tasks that you have scheduled in your time planner to do personally. Place paperwork into this follow-up file when a time to complete it has been blocked off in your planning calendar.

The follow-up file system consists of thirteen hanging files marked January, February, etc., and the last one marked "Next year". One set of manila folders marked from 1 to 31, corresponding to the days of the month is placed in the current month's hanging folder. There is only one set of manila folders for the current month only. At the first of the month



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when you have emptied the day's project papers, you then move that manila folder to the next month's hanging folder and it becomes the first of the next month. All 31 folders keep rotating through the monthly hanging folders.

I have a portable file system that can travel with me if I have to work elsewhere, and the files can quickly be transferred to a desktop file holder if it is more convenient to do so. It is pictured below.

This follow-up file system is simply an adjunct to your time planner. Your planner contains your work plan. When you arrive in the morning, flip open your time planner and if you see a report scheduled for 9:00 a.m., you know exactly where to look for the back-up papers needed – in that day's follow-up file.



If more papers are received related to a specific task that is scheduled for a future date, it's a simple matter to find the appropriate follow-up file folder by simply flipping through your time planner to find the date on which that project is scheduled.

For on-going projects such as committee meetings, book manuscripts, and master class schedules, it's not necessary (or advisable) to jam all the back-up material into the follow-up folders. Instead, use a coloured manila folder bearing the project's name or title. Keep them in "Action" folders in a step file on your desk or in your right hand filing drawer in

hanging folders for easy retrieval. Even though they are labelled, you will soon get to know that the red folder is “A” project, the green folder the “B” project, and so on.

3.5 ORGANIZING YOUR BOOKS

Use a system that feels comfortable and lends itself to the way you work. I prefer my books organized by topic rather than by author or title. Perhaps this is due to the fact that I spend a large portion of my time writing. I rarely search for a specific book because I am more interested in a specific topic.

It’s more important for me to be able to quickly locate all the books on one topic. So for my thousand or more books I keep the topics together and use a color coding method to quickly spot the different topics.

I apply small self-adhesive labels to the bottom of the spines, a different color for each topic. For example, orange for those dealing with the brain, dark green for business, red for technology, blue for meetings, and so on. When the book covers more than one topic in depth, I would add a label for the other major topics as well, always keeping the predominant topic label at the bottom. It would be filed in that section.

Since I am interested in the predominant topic rather than the book title, I don’t apply a label until I have at least skimmed through the book. If you have a lot of topics you could easily run out of colors. But you can always vary the size, shape or shade of the label so they are easily distinguishable. For example I use dark green for business and light green for self-development. I also use larger white square labels for time management, my main topic of interest. The colored label will allow you to quickly return the book to its assigned location on the shelf and to spot any that have been misfiled. See the photo below.



When removing a book from your library shelves, you might consider pulling the next one a few out a few inches so it protrudes from the rest. Then you can then quickly return it to its exact location – although I don't find this saves much time unless you are frequently accessing the same book.

Deniece Schofield offered some good advice for storing household items in her book, *Confessions of a Happily Organized Family*. It is good for the office as well, and I found it useful for pocket books that need not be organized by topic. "Paperback books waste a lot of space on the standard 12-inch deep bookshelf. Double up and conserve precious space by storing the books two layers deep. In order to see the back row of books, put two 2 × 4's, one on top of the other, on the back of the shelf to function like a stair step. This will raise the back row four inches and enable you to see and choose the book you need."

I work in a home office. One of the bedrooms is repurposed as an office with a clothes closet repurposed as a storage room and clothes and shoe organizers, a bookcase and hangers within the closet repurposed as supply holders and shelving. See the photos below.





I mentioned organizer trays in this chapter. Below are a couple of photos showing two of my desk drawers. You can get trays in many sizes and various numbers, sizes and shapes of compartments. Did I organize them for these photos? Absolutely. Only slightly. But I didn't photograph my junk drawer, which I feel everyone needs. It is the junk drawer that allows me keep the other drawers organized. It is cleaned out only a few times a year.

Don't spend so much time organizing that you neglect the important things in business and in life. But it's worthwhile investing a day or so to completely organize your home and office. Then it requires very little time on a daily basis to keep it that way. Don't be discouraged if you slip once in awhile. It gets easier as you continue to work at it. And organization is not the goal. Efficiency and effectiveness is the goal.



3.6 ORGANIZE YOUR ELECTRONIC FILES

Just as a messy desk wastes time, so does a messy desktop computer. Although a cluttered screen may not look as physically cluttered as a messy closet, basement or garage, it can be just as great a time waster. With the proliferation of emails, downloads, documents, articles and e-books, time is easily wasted accessing the various items on file – especially if you have filed them in haste or left them on your desktop.

By now, you should have a better idea of the major categories (folders) and topics (sub-folders) that you will need, and you're in a better position to give them more descriptive titles. So drag all the existing files into a folder labeled "OLD FILES," and start a new filing system. When you do have to search through these old files for something, transfer it into your new organized filing system once you find it. Probably 90% of your old files will remain untouched.

From now on take the time to file your documents at the time that you create, receive or download them. Don't file on the desktop, even temporarily. The "do it now" habit works for filing as well as for tasks. If you have to take action on something before filing or deleting it, save it temporarily in an "ACTION" folder. This becomes your electronic "To Do" folder. When placing anything in this action folder, it should be listed on the "To Do" section in your planner as well so you will be reminded to take action at the right time.

If necessary, rename any documents that you receive so they will be properly identified and able to be found quickly. This especially applies to email since many people fail to identify the topic with an adequately descriptive header – if they use a header at all. Also, when you receive the revised copies or final versions of anything, be sure to delete the ones they are replacing.

Keep your desktop free of icons and shortcuts for programs you rarely use. Drag them into a "Programs" folder and leave visible only those that you use on a recurring basis. While you're at it, uninstall completely any programs you never use.

You might also have a Friday afternoon or Monday morning "cleanup" session where you pick a folder and delete any files that you haven't referred to in a few years and are unlikely to do so.

4 MERGING TIME & ORGANIZATION FOR MAXIMUM PRODUCTIVITY

4.1 MOBILITY IN THE OFFICE

Don't plan your office as though you were going to be sitting all day. It's unhealthy, non-productive and downright dangerous.

An article aptly titled *Killer chairs*, which appeared in the November, 2014 issue of *Scientific American*, the book, *Eat Move Sleep*, by Tom Rath, and various independent studies provide statistics that should convince everyone that any office should be conducive to physical movement, whether it involves a stand-up desk or freedom to move about the office while working. For example,

- Those sitting for over four hours a day watching TV had a 46% increase in deaths from any cause than those spending less than two hours a day.
- Sitting for more than half the day doubles the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular problems.
- Obese people sat 2.25 hours longer than their lean counterparts every day, and expended 350 fewer calories.
- Research at the *University of California* long ago showed that people digest complex facts better and make quicker decisions when standing. Some actually absorbed information 40% faster.
- Studies reported in the August 27, 2016 issue of *Toronto Star* show that giving kids standing desks in school helps them burn more calories and improves behavioural classroom engagement.
- One 2013 Australian survey of 63,048 middle-aged men found that those who sat for more than four hours a day were more likely to have a chronic disease like high blood pressure and heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.
- Sitting at a desk five days a week could compress your spine, degenerate your muscles, and according to at least a few reports, even cause depression or cancer.

Your office should allow you to walk around while you talk on the phone, work at a stand-up desk, have stand-up meetings, take the stairs instead of the elevator, and periodically go for a brief walk – anything that will get you out of your chair during the day.

You might consider alternating between a stationary desk and a standing desk. Experiment to see what type of work is best done sitting, standing or while walking around the office. And don't forget the advantage of spending time in another location altogether, such as at a picnic bench or in a coffee shop.

4.2 PRODUCTIVITY REVISITED

Ever since I broadened my field of interest to include holistic time management, I have been amazed at how many factors influence our productivity besides the usual efficiency – organizing – planning triad of strategies. I have written about them in previous books – everything from music to physical movement, from office greenery to window scenery and from colors to coffee shops.

In the process of doing all this, I've been forced to modify my narrow definition of personal productivity. In the past I have defined personal productivity solely in business terms, such as output per unit of input, whether that is the number of invoices processed per hour or the number of customers served in a day or the number of tasks completed during the week.

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Other business writers all seem to do the same thing – define personal productivity in terms of the volume of work-related output, which presumably will assist corporate productivity as long as the individual is productive in a direction that aligns with corporate goals.

The problem with this approach is that it does not allow for a truly “personal” output, which may or may not have anything to do with corporate efficiency or productivity. For example, it has been shown that nature walks, friendships, and volunteering can all help, either directly or indirectly, to increase work-related productivity. But they can also have other beneficial outputs such as happiness, hope and well-being, which may or may not influence work-related productivity one iota. And yet who can deny the possible personal benefits of such things, including mental health, mindfulness, and empathy and so on.

4.3 CORPORATE PRODUCTIVITY VS. PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY

What I choose to do, therefore, is have two distinct definitions; one for personal productivity and another for corporate or work-related productivity.

Corporate productivity is a term I will use for the volume of output per unit of input, such as the number of widgets for hour. It is solely a measure of the efficiency of production, whether by an individual or team. Corporate productivity can be increased by increasing the output without increasing the input or increasing output drastically with only a slight increase in input. This might be accomplished through the use of technology or by workers simply working smarter and more efficiently.

Personal productivity can then be defined as the value of your personal life in terms of quality, quantity and contribution. Personal productivity might be increased through varying inputs, such as social relationships, an active lifestyle, love, forgiveness, and a continuing relationship with nature. The personal productivity of an individual in most cases will have a positive influence on corporate productivity if the person is involved in a business or career; but that is not necessarily the case. The challenge is to balance the two.

The tendency in the workplace is to increase input rather than change input. For example, the impulse is to work harder, even though it has been shown that the top performers tend to work no more than 4.5 hours a day. And how many people would actually think to get more sleep in order to get more done?

But with an equal focus on personal productivity, which relies heavily on health and lifestyle issues, it's easier to buffer the traditional methods of increasing corporate productivity, which are driven solely by efficiency and achievement. This will insure that not only the company

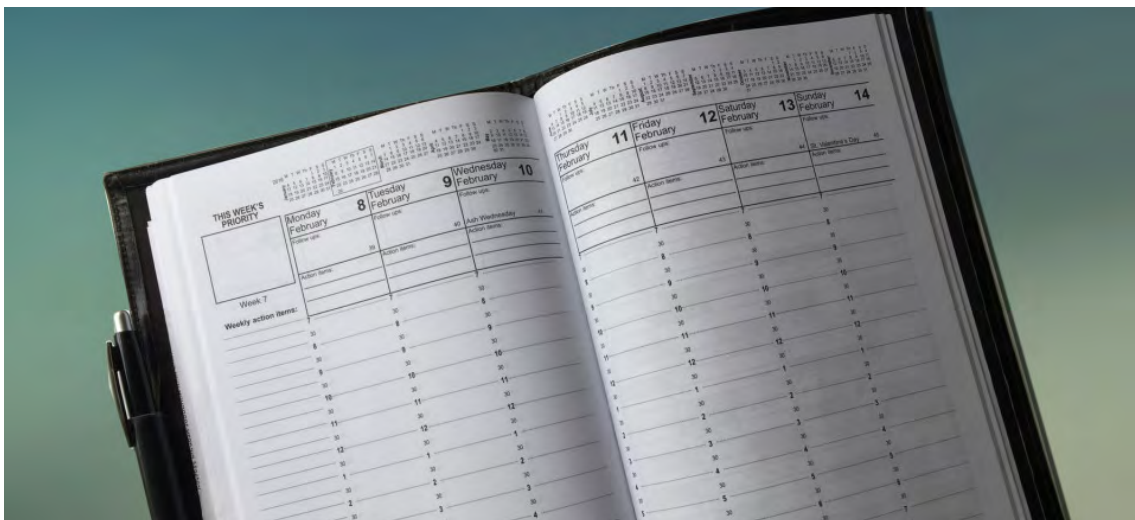
will gain in terms of increased productivity, but the individual will gain as well in terms of personal growth, fulfillment, and physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

4.4 ADVANTAGES OF A WRITTEN “TO DO” LIST

A digital list of “things to do” on your computer or laptop can become long and unmanageable, with a mixture of priority and less important and trivial items, some of which must be done immediately and others later on – or even months into the future.

This tends to increase your anxiety level, serves as a distraction, and wastes time as you constantly scan the items to decide which ones to work on that day. These decisions consume energy that otherwise could be spent on priority tasks.

You can manage your “to do” list more effectively by separating it from your computer workstation as a handwritten list. Then you can choose a few of the most important items (depending on the time they will take) and record them in your daily planner or Daily Priority Pad, crossing them off your master list as you do so.



It's important that you don't choose too many items each day. Always allow up to 50% more time than you think the task will take – or plan for only four or five hours of real work each day. The balance of the work day will be filled by unplanned tasks and activities that inevitably occur.

One advantage of the planning calendar over the priority pad is that you can actually schedule a block of time for each task and have a visual view of the times that are still available for other work. But be careful not to over schedule your day.

Writing down your “to do” list frees up working memory, imprints the items in your mind, allows time to evaluate their importance, and provides a motivational sense of accomplishment as you cross off each item.

Mikael Cho, cofounder of Crew, claimed that “the separation from the digital space (where I do most of my work) to the physical, helped me feel less overwhelmed.”

Physically writing things down also increases your focus on what you are doing at the time, avoids mental multitasking, and helps you to make a better decisions when selecting the priorities for each day. I personally use the To Do sections (referred to as “Weekly action items”) in my *Taylor Planner* since this allows me to assign items to specific weeks. The Daily Priority Pad (for those who don’t necessarily use a paper planner) allows you to assign them to specific days. I recommend you use whatever system works best for you. This includes a smartphone since everything mentioned here can be done electronically – although there are advantages to maintaining good old-fashioned cursive handwriting for some activities.

4.5 ARE PAPER PLANNERS MAKING A COMEBACK?

Don’t toss out your paper planner just yet. It appears that using both a smartphone and a paper planner is gaining in popularity.

Michael Grothhaus, a novelist, freelance journalist, wrote an article for the April 4, 2017 issue of *Fast Company* titled, “*What happened when I ditched my smartphone for a paper planner.*” Of course he didn’t really ditch his smartphone, but he used a paper planner for writing down his tasks and mapping out his intentions and reminders.

He discovered that a trend was beginning to develop (among younger people no less) to revert to paper planners – probably reinforced by research that backs up what we paper planner advocates experienced over the years – that writing things down improves memory and recall of the items. It also creates order in your mind and you can recall the sequence of things you must do, and the relative importance and urgency of the items. Flipping back and forth through the pages keeps you on track and the cursive note-taking is tonic for the brain.

The writer of the above article quotes Anjali Khosla, editor of *Fast Company Digital*, as saying, “I switched back to my paper-based notebook system after a year of going all-digital. I prefer my paper system for a number of reasons. It gives me a break from staring at screens. It also causes me to stay in the moment and plan my days with intent. I feel satisfaction when I physically check an item off my list.” Michael Grothaus did find it difficult to remember to

bring his paper planner with him when he left for the office since he had built the habit of simply slipping his iPhone into his pocket. He also said he missed the audible reminder of an appointment 30 minutes in advance; but soon noticed that by physically writing down the appointment he seldom needed a reminder.

I have written many articles indicating various advantages of a paper planner, such as the journaling aspect, the ability to review what you have accomplished in the past and the importance of being able to budget your time without overwhelming yourself with a list of “To Do”s. But every time I did so, some people interpreted it as an attack on smartphones.

Invariably I would receive comments listing all the things that smartphones can do that paper planners can't do – such as handling email and sending text messages and taking photographs. As one person said, “My smartphone will allow me to record audio messages, and set alarms. Let's see a paper planner do that!” To which I might reply, “I have a microwave that will boil water in 8 seconds; let's see a smartphone do that!”

In other words, I'm not suggesting everyone should toss away their smartphone when they start using a paper planner any more than I suggest people throw away their kitchen sink when they purchase a dishwasher. They each have their uses.

My own *Taylor Planner*, developed in the early 1980s is going the way of the Dodo bird in 1918. But I still maintain that for the activity of planning and scheduling, you can't beat a paper planner, and I plan to continue using a paper planner that is closest in design to my own. So far, this seems to be the Quo Vadis “Minister” style planner.

4.6 A SOLUTION TO SHRINKING PLANNING TIMES

A weakness of all planning calendars, whether hard copy or electronic, is that they allow you to schedule and list more work than you can possibly get done in a week. We probably all know that we should not attempt more than a day's work in any given day; because to do so causes anxiety and stress and makes us more vulnerable to distractions and inattentiveness. And when you have more to do in a week than you can possibly get done, priorities frequently take a back seat to quantity as you attempt to get as many things done as possible.

One solution to the problem would be to take one day at a time, listing only those priorities and urgent items that could reasonably be done in a day. However it is difficult to know what comprises a day's work.

When determining a day's work, take into consideration the length of your working day, the interruptions that you anticipate, and the type of activities you will be involved in – and always allow up to 50% more time that you estimate your activities will take.

The Daily Priority Pad helps you to limit to the essential priorities, important tasks and urgent activities to those that can be done in one day. This one-day-at-a-time approach allows greater focus, facilitates the changing priorities that occur during the week, helps you to quickly learn from experience what a day's work really is, and frees your mind from those items that need only be addressed at a later date.

It can be used either in conjunction with or independent of an annual planner. When used with an annual planner with a week at a glance format, each page in the *Daily Priority Pad* is the day's action plan distilled from the broader weekly plan outlined in your planner.

When used independently, normally by those individuals unable to realistically schedule activities as far as a week in advance, it replaces the annual planner. This short range planning tool is needed in today's working environment where the time between planning and action is becoming shorter each year, and in which the choices available to us are increasing exponentially.

The *Daily Priority Pad* retains the priority and "to do" sections of the *Taylor Planner*, while limiting scheduled activities to a few appointments – either with others or yourself, and a "Notes" section for additional information or journaling. The *Daily Priority Pad* can be viewed and downloaded free at our website, taylorintime.com.

Daily Priority Pad®

Date **Tues Sept 20**

Appointments

Time **8:00am** **Breakfast meeting with Jane**
End **9:00am** Notes: **bring samples of latest line**

Time **11:00am** **Staff meeting**
End **12:00pm** Notes: **discuss lates shipment**

Time **12:30pm** **Lunch with Jeff**
End **1:30pm** Notes: **AJ's Bar & Grill on 5th**

Time **4:15pm** **Doctors appointment**
End **5:00pm** Notes: **bring insurance card**

Time **7:00pm** **Bobby's baseball game**
End **8:30am** Notes: **pick up Billy on the way**

Things Happening (from email, telephone, etc.)

Bob via email, needs figures by 5pm. text Susan to set this up

Susan via text: she will email Bob

Notes

some ideas for tomorrows meeting: we need to streamline the order process. too much time lost in the current process. Can't Steve work this out with his department??

ideas for article; how to get the most out your online presence with the least amount of money and time. use the Wordpress example from the book

Top Priorities

- 1 **Finish Johnson proposal**
- 2 **Update prices on website**
- 3 _____

To Do

- 1 **email John re: next week**
- 2 **print new charts**
- 3 **pick up dry cleaning**
- 4 **post blog article**
- 5 **tweet about seminar**
- 6 **mail orders to SBW**
- 7 **estimate for Doug**
- 8 **setup webcam**
- 9 **download whiteboard software**
- 10 **Joan's birthday! call her**
- 11 _____
- 12 _____
- 13 _____
- 14 _____
- 15 _____
- 16 _____
- 17 _____
- 18 _____
- 19 _____
- 20 _____

Back Burner

- 1 **redo the intro page** _____
- 2 **setup Facebook fan page** _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

5 ORGANIZING YOUR HOME

5.1 GETTING RID OF THE CLUTTER

The logical place to start when you decide to limit the stuff in your home is at the source – shopping. If you have a broken water pipe, you don't start by mopping the floor, you turn off the water. In the same way, if you can resist those needless trips to the mall and garage sales and develop some good old-fashioned willpower, you will have less of a clutter problem. There are books that can help you with that, including my book, *Strengthen your brain's executive skills*, also published by Bookboon.com.

Your brain has a mind of its own. And since it gets a shot of the pleasure chemical, dopamine, every time it sights a shiny new thingamabob on the shelf, shopping can become addictive. And marketers who continue to get better at targeting our subconscious desires are not making it any easier. Martin Lindstrom, author of the book *Buyology: the truth and lies about why we buy*, claims that buying and consuming will continue to escalate in the future.

Experts tell us to get rid of a habit by replacing it with a better one. I feel you are able to replace the habit of marathon shopping with the activity of organizing. You can't be in two places at the same time, and when you're at home sorting and tossing things out, you can't be at the mall being exposed to the temptations created by the shiny new gadgets and endless paraphernalia. And you also get a shot of dopamine every time you accomplish a task such as cleaning out a kitchen drawer or donating something to the needy or gifting an unused item to a friend.

You probably have no problem keeping digital files instead of reams of paperwork. It's just a small leap from storing paperwork as digital images to storing your stuff as digital photos. They don't need dusting, and in most cases are just as functional. If you miss actually looking at them, use the photos as rotating screen savers. But I think you'll find that out of sight, out of mind.

Consider selling your stuff on Kijiji or eBay. An Australian survey conducted in August, 2008 by eBay indicated that the average household has about \$3000 worth of unused or unwanted clutter around the house. The price of the items was determined by the average price of comparable items listed on eBay. I figured if it's true for Australians, it's probably true for the rest of us as well. If we held a garage sale we might be over \$1000 richer and be able to move the car into the garage to boot. Just think; selling your clutter can become your bread-and-butter.

If you think parting with your accumulated possessions would be too traumatic try this. Pack them into a carton or better still, a few transparent plastic storage containers, and stack them inside a closet or in the basement or stick them in your storage locker. Then you can easily retrieve them if you feel depressed or about to slip into a coma.

But don't rent public storage. The eventual goal is to get rid of the stuff once you have realized you neither need it nor miss it. The more remote your place of storage, the more remote the chance that you ever will get rid of it. According to the August, 2017 special edition of *Mindfulness* magazine, there are 2.3 billion square feet of rentable self-storage space in the United States. That's three times the size of Manhattan, New York. That's a lot of stored possessions waiting for us to die.

Most people don't enjoy their stuff even when it's visible. According to Dan Levitin, author of *The organized mind*, the brain habituates to things that don't change, and you no longer notice it if it's always there. He also mentioned a study of one American household with 2260 visible objects in just a living room and two bedrooms. How would anyone have time to even look at everything, let alone enjoy it? So keep visible only those things you need or use regularly. And never keep what you can't use.

I think you will actually feel unencumbered, free, and happier with your new uncluttered space and a sense of pride in your new accomplishment. You may also find you are more productive, more creative, and more able to focus on your significant goals and daily activities.

Memorabilia that tie you to the past frequently keep you from fully enjoying the future. Recalling good times are never as enjoyable or as stimulating as creating new ones.

Neurologists tell us that our brains are hardwired to be creative and to achieve goals. Clutter is to your brain as mud is to your feet. Don't let it get deeper and deeper and impede your progress through life. Be like the perfectionist bride who, when it was time to sweep down the aisle, literally swept down the aisle. A new broom sweeps clean and a clean start creates a path to a better life.

5.2 THE FATE OF UNUSED STUFF

A survey on living spaces conducted by the magazine *Mindful*, and published in the June, 2016 issue, asked people where they put things they hadn't used in three years. Here are the results:

55% donated to charity.
22% let it petrify at the bottom of a closet somewhere.
6% chuck it immediately.
7% insist there's a use for everything.
Everyone else sells their stuff or puts it in storage

Of course, there are more creative ways of getting rid of it. Some people simply it at the curb outside their house and find it's claimed quickly by passers-by. Others have been known to even gift wrap it if it's something that they feel nobody would normally pick up. But avoid paying good money to put things in public storage that you are very likely to use anyway.

5.3 PACKRATS LOSE TIME, MONEY AND SPACE

In this section I'm not talking to hard core hoarders who may need professional help, I'm talking to the bulk of us who simply have a tough time getting rid of stuff that we no longer need. And I use the term packrats affectionately because most of us find it a lot easier just to park something in an out-of-the-way place rather than get rid of it.

Packrats are compulsive keepers. The things they keep are not necessarily useless but are seldom used. In fact, most of the items are squirreled away out of sight, nullifying any possible usefulness. Time, money and space are consumed needlessly by these superfluous possessions. What possesses these possessors to possess their possessions? There are many reasons, just as there are different types of packrats. One type of packrat not mentioned below is the collector. These specialists accumulate specific items, whether they are ceramic mice figurines, hockey cards or antique books. This could be classed as a hobby, and is not harmful in itself. Unfortunately it can lead to other collections such as buttons, beer cans and pennies, finally regressing to pieces of string, bottle caps and lint from the dryer. Collecting can become a compulsion in itself.

Here are a few common characteristics of packrats in the form of an acronym spelling the word PACKRATS. A few words of explanation and a suggestion or two follow them. In general, packrats:

Put an unrealistic value on their old stuff.

Atempt to retain the past by retaining past treasures.

Comfort themselves with familiar possessions.

Keep for the sake of keeping (keepsakes).

Rarely part with gifts.

Always rationalize their decision to keep things.

Take pride in their possessions.

Seldom toss things out without prompting.

Put an unrealistic value on their old stuff. Just because something was expensive to buy in the past, doesn't mean it's worth that much now. Most items depreciate rapidly and replacement costs frequently plummet. This is particularly true of electronic equipment. Items that we paid \$500 for ten years ago can be purchased for less than \$100 today.

Attempt to retain the past by retaining past treasures. What's past is past. We can never relive it. Constant reminders of days gone by can prevent us from enjoying the present and anticipating the future. Getting on with life may require cutting ties to the past.



What if you could build your future and create the future?

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Comfort themselves with familiar possessions. It's natural to resist change; but it's not healthy. Old possessions that have lost their usefulness may not only comfort us but also serve to encourage the status quo. We should not seek comfort in *things* but in *people*.

Keep for the sake of keeping (keepsakes). What enjoyment could we possibly get from things hidden in closets, stashed in crawl spaces and packed away in cartons? Out of sight, out of mind. We don't enjoy them because we don't even know we *have* them! This is where packrats get their name. If you haven't missed something in a year, get rid of it.

Rarely part with gifts. By receiving a gift you are not making a lifetime commitment. A gift simply conveys a message of goodwill, thanks, congratulations, friendship or love. Get rid of the impractical gifts and keep the message in your heart. That's what's important.

Always rationalize their decision to keep things. Ask a packrat why they keep something and they'll give you a good reason – one that's reasonable to *them*, that is. The favorite reason is, "It'll come in handy someday." It's hard to disprove *that* one. Packrats should keep in mind, however, that disorganization, clutter and space problems are a high price to pay for the off chance that the item may be useable in the future.

Take pride in their possessions. This is not true of all packrats, but includes those who believe that whoever dies with the most toys, wins the game of life. Some people measure their value by the value of their valuables. People in this category should base their self-esteem on who they are and not on what they have.

Seldom toss things out without prompting. Packrats are made, not born. They have developed these hoarding habits over the years. Firmly entrenched, these habits are hard to break. It's easier for packrats to change with the encouragement and reassurance of others. Giving them a book probably won't help; they may not get around to reading it; they'll just keep it.

There may be little positive said about packrat tendencies. But if you have an elderly parent or friend who feels comfortable among familiar possessions from the past, it could be a blessing. Don't feel that you have to talk someone out of tossing away things that add stability and comfort to their life. There is a time to keep as well as a time to throw away.

5.4 THE KEY TO GETTING RID OF CLUTTER IS TO START

If you were to only toss out, recycle, give away or trash one item each day, you would be well on your way to a clutter-free home. Clutter is anything that that you don't find pleasurable, meaningful or useful, and is characterized by too much stuff in too little space.

To be useful it has to have been used. Otherwise, you may rationalize keeping something by thinking, “It may come in handy someday.” Everything on this earth may come in handy someday. But it’s likely you won’t be around by then.

To be meaningful, it must be some cherished heirloom or be attached to some pleasurable memory that brings joy to your life by its mere presence in your home. (Items bearing painful memories do not qualify.) It also could be pleasurable simply due to its beauty and how it enhances the space it occupies.

Even so, you should ask yourself, could it be photographed, digitized, gifted to a relative or moved to another location and still retain this inherent benefit. If you plan to leave it to someone you love when you die, consider giving it to them now so you can both enjoy it.

There are many ways to start. The easiest way might be to get rid of one item a day as mentioned above. In this case, while you are looking for one thing to part with, you will probably find several other items you can get rid of as well. If you feel you can dedicate a whole day or more to organizing your home, you might get four large cartons, mark them SELL, GIVE, TOSS, and RECYCLE and go to it. The cartons could be tailored to your preferred destination, such as “THRIFT SHOP, CHURCH, GARAGE SALE or AUNT SALLY.

For more ideas and help in simplifying your life or downsizing your possessions, refer to my e-book, [How to keep your life in balance](#), published by *Bookboon.com*.

6 ORGANIZING YOUR HOME CAN BE FUN

6.1 A PERSONAL NOTE FROM MY PAST

We used to store our burn ointment in the bathroom. I never once burned myself in the bathroom – it was usually in the kitchen. And if you ever had a headache it was more convenient to have it in the bathroom because that was the only place you could find aspirin tablets.

What was wrong with duplicating some of the frequently used items and storing them in two or more rooms? We used to have three bathrooms and only one set of cleaning supplies. They were under the sink in the main bathroom upstairs. You sometimes had to search three bathrooms just to find one of the cleansers. And heaven help us if we ever had a blocked toilet in the basement because the only plunger was kept in the upstairs bathroom.

Sure, it costs twice as much to duplicate things; but most of them last twice as long. And put a value on your time. As you get older you realize how precious time really is. So the principles I adopted were to store things where they were used, and to duplicate if the items were used frequently in different locations, such as scissors, transparent tape, writing materials and band aids. Also, things used for similar purposes should be grouped together; so in the case of those cleaning supplies, we ended up with a caddy in each of the three bathrooms – all containing glass cleaner, tile cleaner, sponges, cleaning cloths, and so on. Oh yes, and three toilet bowl plungers with short handles so they fit under the sink. Those things are ugly – even with a swan's head on the end of the handle.

We all need a junk drawer. Where else are we going to keep those coupons that expired in 1991 or those useless corn cob holders or bread wrapper ties or little rubber grommets we find on the kitchen floor? But our junk migrated to other fairly organized drawers, transforming them into junk drawers as well. So we resolved to maintain one junk drawer only. That's where those organizer trays came in handy. We bought one that had about 12 separate compartments and vowed to keep only 12 things to satisfy our packrat tendencies. (I have since improved considerably, no longer claiming "It'll come in handy someday.") We did cheat at the time, keeping two or three fairly similar items in the same compartment. But vowing to get rid of anything we hadn't used in the previous year was one of the most helpful vows we ever made.

Organizing your home not only helps you to find things quickly and reduces distractions, it also helps you to discover your purpose in life as well, according to research reported in the July/August, 2015 issue of *Scientific American Mind*, because an ordered life lays the groundwork for the pursuit of larger goals, purpose, and significance.

6.2 A PERSONAL STORY OF TRIUMPH OVER CLUTTER

I have a little magnetic sign on my refrigerator that claims, “Organized people are just too lazy to look for things.” There is more than a little truth to that. I am definitely too lazy to look for things, and that’s what spurred me on to become as organized as possible. I find that looking for things is frustrating, stressful, a time waster – and definitely not good for impatient people like me who Has wrestled with high blood pressure in the past.

I also have learned that the fewer things I have, the easier it is to organize them – and of the less time I waste retrieving them. It’s fun to practice common sense. Do I really need nine pairs of shoes, four winter jackets, seven hats, four scarves, and so on filling the hall closet?

I know everyone’s situation must be different, but unless you’re a centipede, how could you possibly need more than four pairs of shoes? I cut the number in half for the hats and scarves since I only have one neck and one head. I allowed myself two winter jackets because the closet started looking bare.

I can’t tell you how many pairs of shirts and slacks were crammed into the two bedroom closets – mainly because I kept losing count somewhere in the thirties. And I didn’t even attempt to count the underwear and socks. My mother would have been proud of me. I could wear a clean set every hour for a month in case I had to be rushed to the hospital – and still not need to do laundry.

It wasn’t easy to get rid of a lot of the stuff. Over half of the 30 odd pairs of slacks would no longer fit; but I still planned to lose weight even though I hadn’t lost any weight in the last 48 years. Quite the opposite. Sometimes you have to give your brain piece of your mind because it can be stubborn. I finally convinced it that if I ever lost weight I deserved the reward of a new wardrobe. Subconsciously I knew I would never have to deliver on that promise. Once you’re on a roll, it becomes motivational. I even got rid of the tuxedo I borrowed from someone for the school prom back in 1953. I never could track him down and he probably went to an early grave wondering who had borrowed his tux.

I was further motivated when I became a regular hero in a small Mexican village that I visited several times a year. On each trip I would bring down a suitcase full of old clothes.

The local “thrift shop” here in New Brunswick also benefitted and I started feeling really good about myself.

By the time I got to the kitchen, nothing could stop me. 62 glasses, 24 pots and pans – including in an egg poacher that never saw an egg in its life, a cast iron frying pan that I couldn’t lift let alone use, and hundreds of plastic bags stuffed into plastic bags – all went to a worthy cause. The 40-odd cottage cheese containers that I had carefully washed and were now still nestled inside one another on a top shelf out of reach went to the recycle bin.

Perhaps I went too far when I got rid of the one spare set of bedsheets and pillowcases; but I found I never used them. I wash the one set and return it to its rightful place on my bed. Sure, it will wear out sooner; but at least I won’t. I can always replace them with a new set when they wear thin.

I find that getting rid of stuff becomes a lifestyle. It’s never ending; because people keep buying me things. So for every item I receive, I get rid of something less attractive – with the knowledge that it brings joy to someone else.

I won’t bore you with further details of my assault on superfluous stuff. I’m sure you get the idea. I found it to be a necessary first step in getting organized.

6.3 ORGANIZING TIPS FOR THE HOME

Here are 58 quick tips for saving time in the home. Check any that might be of interest.

1. Utilize space under beds by storing infrequently used items in low, long boxes on casters – or simply use cardboard boxes. (But if you never retrieve any of it within a year, consider getting rid of it.)
2. Keep similar types of foods in certain areas, such as all vegetables in the crisper, all cheeses on bottom section of a shelf etc. so it’s easy to locate everything.
3. Twenty percent of your possessions get 80 percent of the use, so store those frequently used items where they’re easy to reach. Stash the remaining 80 percent somewhere out of the way. This applies to files, clothes, tools, supplies and books, among other things.
4. Phone the doctor’s office before leaving for your appointment to see whether he/she is on schedule. You could probably utilize the waiting time more profitably at home or school.
5. Keep a TV or radio in the bathroom or kitchen to catch up on the news while preparing for the day ahead. Buy a radio that is safe for the bathroom.

6. Put a follow-up note in your planner each year as a reminder to change all the batteries in your clocks, TV and VCR remotes, travel alarms, flashlights etc.
7. Keep a record of family members' clothing sizes and a list of loaned items and other personal information in a section of your time planner.
8. To simplify bed making, pull up the sheets and covers before you get out of bed. This saves a lot of time running from one side of the bed to the other to get everything lined up.
9. Before leaving to go to a store, phone to make sure they're open and have what you need.
10. Use plastic discs or safety pins to keep socks together through the washing and drying process. Or use a mesh bag that you can use for this purpose.
11. Throw out those part bottles of sprays, ointments and medicines that have expired or that you can no longer identify.
12. When cleaning out closets or storage rooms, label three cartons "Scrap", "Give away", and "Keep" for sorting as you go along.
13. Maintain a family message centre and a perpetual shopping list.
14. If you clip coupons, highlight the expiration dates.
15. Rinse the dishes and put them in the dishwasher directly from the table before the food dries.
16. Always have the season's clothes dry cleaned before you store them until next year.
17. Make the bed when you get up, tidy up the room before you leave it. The *do it now* habit saves time later!
18. Have laundry baskets for both light and dark clothes so you won't have to separate them later.
19. Keep a separate set of cleaning supplies in each bathroom to save steps.
20. Set up TV trays next to the refrigerator when cleaning it so you can keep the items close by as you empty the refrigerator.
21. Make up a spare set of keys, everything from car key and house key to locker, office and cottage and leave them with a close friend – one you don't mind calling in the middle of the night.
22. For quick sorting of socks, underwear, bed sheets etc., assign each child a different colour for these items. For example, blue underwear for Johnnie, green for Billy, burgundy for Jimmie etc.
23. Bob Adams, in his book, *The Everything Time Management Book* (Adams Media Corporation, 2001) suggests you keep several garbage bags at the bottom of your garbage can so you don't have to look for fresh bags when you take out the garbage.
24. Photograph bulky items that you have been keeping for nostalgic reasons only. If you haven't used something in over a year, consider getting rid of it.
25. Photocopy or photograph birth certificates, marriage certificates, passports, etc., and keep them in your files. You may also need to use the copies in an urgent situation.

26. Don't put letters, bills etc. back in the envelopes once you have read them. Keep them unfolded, staple the pages together, and place them in an action tray.
27. Near the front door, post a checklist of items to be taken to school the next day. E.g. Books, lunch bag, bus tickets, homework assignments etc. Encourage them to collect the items well before the mad rush out the door.
28. Switch from bedspreads to duvets to speed up bed making.
29. Label children's garments with an indelible marking pen to identify them at school – or in the laundry.
30. Use cup hooks or picture hangers to hang necklaces and chains at the side of the closet.
31. Keep a form to record loaned items (date, to whom loaned) and check them off when returned. Record borrowed items as well to avoid embarrassment later.
32. When storing infrequently used items number the cartons and keep index cards listing the items in the cartons.
33. To prevent having to dig through the linen closet to retrieve matching sheets and pillowcases, store the folded flat sheet, fitted sheet and pillowcase *inside* the second pillowcase.
34. If you have a habit of misplacing frequently used items such as eyeglasses or keys, establish a home base for each of them, and get in the habit of returning each item to its home base when not in use. For example, a key rack on the wall, a holder for eyeglasses on the coffee table, etc. It would also be a good idea to have spares of these items "just in case."
35. Have one junk drawer only. Use the other drawers to house specific items. Have a place for everything.
36. Set up a home filing system. Keep one file for income tax receipts and other files on major categories, such as Family, Bank Accounts, Investments, Legal, Repairs, etc.
37. Store empty clothes hangers to one side of the closet and use them as required. Don't let them mix with ones being used.
38. If you have a home with different keys for the front door, side door, storage shed etc. have a locksmith make them all uniform, then one key is all you need. (Not sure where I got this idea; but personally, I just colour code the keys.
39. Use a pocket shoe rack that hangs from a door to store small toys and dolls.
40. When you assign a drawer, shelf or other space for specific items whether it is light bulbs, socks or vitamins, don't introduce other items. A place for everything makes it easier to find things.
41. Exchange money for more time by farming out household chores, gardening, and home maintenance.
42. Prepare for the morning before you retire for the night by setting the breakfast table, selecting clothes to wear, packing your computer bag and so on.
43. When cleaning house, tackle those important, high-traffic areas first.

44. When you wash the bed sheets, return them to the same bed, rather than wash, fold and put them away. You also give the bed a chance to air out.
45. Remove clothes from the dryer as soon as it stops and hang or fold them to prevent wrinkling. (If you forget, throw a damp towel into the dryer and turn it on for another five minutes.)
46. If you have different sized sheets, buy them in different colors or distinctive patterns for easy sorting.
47. Attach an extension cord to your vacuum cleaner so you don't have to continually change outlets.
48. Cara Gallo, in her booklet *The Super Mom Syndrome* (American Media Mags, 2002), suggests reducing double handling wherever possible. For example, putting dirty dishes directly into the dishwasher instead of stacking them in the sink, and putting groceries directly into the cupboards from the shopping bags instead of first putting them on the counter.
49. After dinner, set a timer for five minutes and have everyone in the house pick up and put away the day's accumulated clutter.
50. Make up checklists for recurring activities, such as vacation, trips to the cottage, etc., so nothing will be overlooked.
51. For your young children, buy shoes with Velcro snaps; they're faster and easier than tying laces.
52. Limit the number of toys the children can take out at any one time.
53. Teach children to put away their things, do their household chores, etc. by *showing* them.
54. Assign a filing cabinet drawer to each child so they can store school papers, personal drawings etc.
55. Reduce refrigerator surface clutter by laminating your children's favorite art projects and using them as place mats.
56. Reduce toy clutter by allowing your children to organize their own garage sale and using the money to buy newer and *fewer* things.
57. Bathe the children the night before so there's no bathroom congestion in the morning
58. Stagger bed times and getting-up times so everything isn't happening at once. Buy children their own alarm clock.

6.4 GETTING AN EARLY START

Bonnie McCullough, in her book, *Totally Organized*, says she makes her bed the moment she gets up, even before going to the bathroom. She claims she's not so tempted to go back to sleep, And no doubt that neatly made bed gives her a psychological lift and gets her on the way to a productive morning.

Getting an early start isn't always easy. The bed is so comfortable and warm, and the alarm clock is viewed as an intruder to be silenced with a swipe of the hand. But if you can overcome that initial stage of inertia by forcing yourself to swing out of bed and onto your feet, the next time is easier. Soon it becomes a habit. Early risers tend to get more done; but only if they get to bed early enough to get adequate sleep. The early hours of the morning contain fewer interruptions. Telephones are silent. Children, depending on their ages, are either asleep or trying to compensate for those silent telephones. But if you are an "early person" and can function effectively at 6 a.m., you can easily get a jump on most people.

A word of caution: getting up early and simply wasting this prime time on extra-long showers, third cups of coffee and yesterday's news does not make for good time management. Schedule at least one priority task to be accomplished each morning. Some people write books by simply writing at the kitchen table for an hour each morning. Others beat the traffic by going in to the office for a quiet hour each morning. Others, whose family consists of "early persons", use this opportunity for quality time with the family. It can be productive time. But it's a choice. Will lingering in bed justify things left undone? And remember, procrastination is giving up what you want most for what you want at the moment.

Having said this, getting up early usually requires getting to bed earlier. Never short-change your sleep in order to get more done. You will find that getting a good 7 hours or more sleep a night will increase your energy level, your productivity and your health.

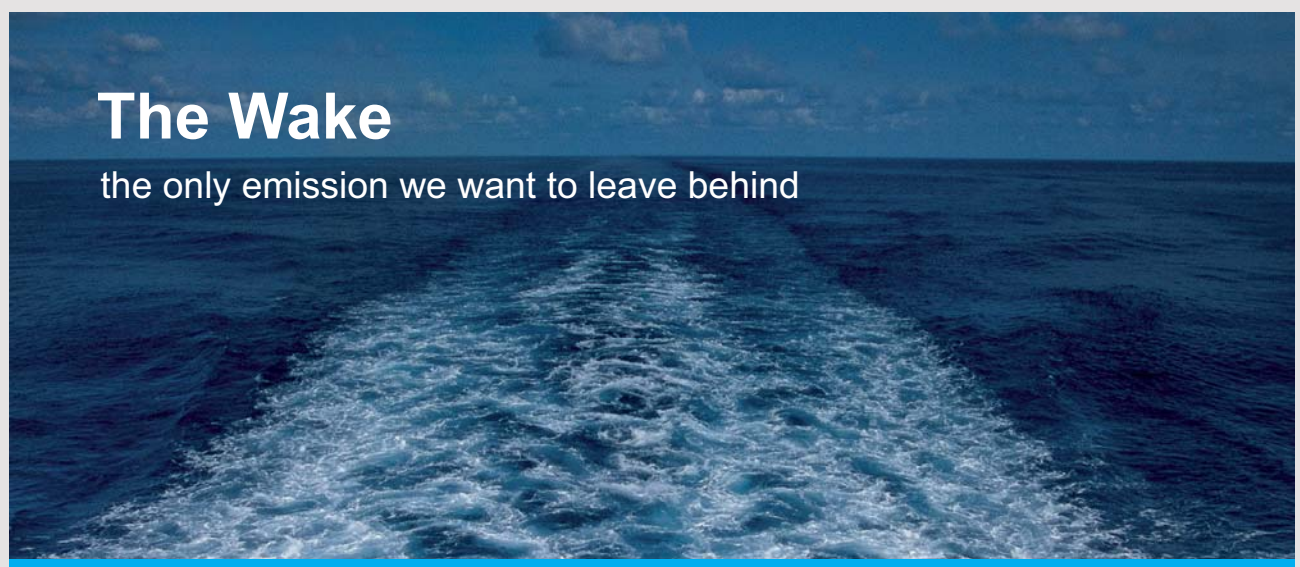
7 EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT GETTING ORGANIZED I LEARNED FROM MY MOTHER

7.1 MOTHER KNOWS BEST

Mothers seem to have an innate talent for organization. Many of us pick up habits during our childhood years that serve us the rest of our lives. I'm no exception, and for what it's worth, here are a few applications that have served me well in my adult years – particularly as they apply to business.

“Don't lose it.”

In most cases, my mother was referring to the ten cents she tucked away in my pocket to buy milk at school. But she also pinned my mittens to my sleeve, wrote my name on the inside of my rubber boots and labeled the shoeboxes that house my prized possessions.




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I apply this rule today by having a place for everything whenever possible. I store similar items together. For example, electronic devices, cables and accessories are stored in one desk drawer, writing materials, labels and business cards in another drawer, and so on. The key is to separate items that have some common association – whether it's how they're used, where they're used, or when they're used.

I use transparent plastic containers instead of cartons so I can see the contents, label colored stacking trays for work in progress, and use organizer trays in some of the shallow drawers in my desk. You may need a junk drawer for miscellaneous one-of-a-kind items. The secret is not to let it expand into two or more junk drawers.

When I receive cartons of goods from suppliers, I mark the contents on the face of the carton with a magic marker. When the contents are forms or other paperwork products, I tape a sample of the form on the side of the carton before storing it on the shelf. The few minutes spent doing these things at the time save hours when you need to retrieve them later. How else could my mother keep house, raise five boys, and hold down a part-time job.

“Write it down.”

Knowing that my memory was as fleeting as my intentions, she insisted I write down what I was supposed to pick up at the store, the phone numbers of relatives in case of an emergency, and the dates my school assignments were due.

I never rely on my memory, even making notes while I'm talking on the telephone using a telephone log booklet that I designed for this purpose. In my planning calendar I record dates that I expect deliveries and assignments due, birthdays of family members and close friends, and things I plan to get done each day. I write thoughts on sticky notes applied to my laptop rather than interrupt myself when I'm working on a project at the time.

One big advantage of using a paper planner is that you never lose sight of your past. You have a permanent record in your own unique handwriting – your dreams, goals, achievements, activities, and highlights of a lifetime. Your planners serve as journals or diaries – personal mementos of a flesh and blood unique individual, complete with likes, dislikes and personality quirks. You leave footprints long after you have passed on.

You could record the same information in an electronic handheld device; but it's unlikely to happen. The purpose of the PDA is to get things done faster, not record them. At the end of each year, I print the year on the spine of my planner and store them in chronological order in my bookcase.

My life story is in those planners – from my teen years (little pocket calendars) through college, and my forty plus years as an entrepreneur, husband and father. As I get older and the threat of dementia looms, I take solace in the fact that I will never lose my memories; they are recorded for me as well as for my offspring.

“Put it away.”

Everything my mother owned had a home. She always knew where to find the egg beater, the broom and the carving knife – and unless they were being used, that’s where they remained. The rule was “If you take it out, you put it away.”

It’s always easier to leave things out rather than immediately put them away again. A Harvard professor, George K. Zipf, over 75 years ago penned a law that stated that frequency of use draws near to us things that are frequently used. People are reluctant to file or put away what they’re going to need or use again soon. A messy desk results. Resist the temptation to leave something on your desk, and instead, develop the habit of putting things back where they belong after you have finished with them. Have a detailed filing system, adequately labelled so you are confident you can retrieve the item quickly if necessary.

As we read more about the workings of our brain, we learn more about the importance of getting organized. For example, according to neuroscientist Torkel Klingberg, author of *The overflowing brain*, the more items on your desk, the greater the demand on your attention. So keep your workplace clear.

“Every day make your bed, brush your teeth and put out the garbage.”

My mother was really into routines. Laundry, baked bread, kids’ baths – you name it – were all done at in the same way at the same time each week. Routines made it easier to do the right thing, and nothing was forgotten. The important things got done efficiently and in the right way.

What starts as a routine becomes a habit. And I seldom forget the repetitive important things because they become almost unconscious behaviors that I repeat automatically. Now I walk every morning, write every day and send tweets and post to a blog every week – in addition to making the bed, brushing my teeth and putting out the garbage.

I recommend you develop routines for priority tasks that have to be done on a regular basis, the most important routine being to look at your planner every morning when you get up. This will remind you of the non-routine priority tasks that you have scheduled for that day as well as items on the “To Do” section of your planner.

The above routine will help improve the planning function. Whenever you think of something that must be done, jot it in your planner on the day that you plan to do it. Whenever possible, that day should be in advance of the task's actual deadline.

Make the transition from one day to the next both easier and more productive by developing a routine for closing each workday and starting the next. For example, start putting things away 15 minutes before quitting time, and set the next morning's priority task on the now-organized desk.

“Get everything ready the night before.”

Most of the things we had to get ready were items we needed for school the next morning, such as money for milk, assignments, a packed lunch, and of course clean underwear. Heaven forbid if we got hit by a car and got taken to the hospital and didn't have clean underwear.

Planning ahead helps immensely in adult life. And the more organized you are, the easier it is to plan. Making a “To do” list is a form of planning; but not a very effective one. If you went a step further, and prioritized the list, and scheduled time for the high priority items in your planner, you would have a higher level of planning. Although a “To Do” list is a rudimentary form of planning, scheduling is planning expressing itself as action. . “To Do” lists are intentions; but scheduled blocks of time in your planner are commitments.

Scheduled activities are three-dimensional; they not only tell you what you have to do, they also tell you when you are going to do them, and how long they are expected to take. And if something is scheduled, you know it's a priority. Things that are left on your “To Do” list are frequently postponed or die a natural death. Items that are scheduled as appointments with yourself, usually get done.

“Do it now.”

Later was not in her vocabulary. Taking out the garbage fetching water from the well, cutting wood for the stove – anything important – had to be done immediately. This “do it now habit” sure came in handy when the temptation to procrastinate was strong. Of course we had the additional motivation to act once we spotted our Dad with a scowl on his face.

If it's a distasteful task, but it has to be done, do it now and get it over with. Or as the oft quoted expression suggests, “If you have to swallow a frog, don't look at it too long.” If it's a large, daunting task, you should work at it one chunk at a time until it is completed. Nothing is more unpleasant than starting a job that you know will take a long, long time.

And time is one thing everyone is short of. But if you break the task into smaller chunks, each individual task is much shorter and not as intimidating.

To develop any habit, we must act out the new behavior we're trying to acquire – again and again. Repetition is the key. So the more you practice the “do it now” habit, the easier it will become to tackle large or unpleasant tasks. If you need more help in this area, refer to my book, *Procrastinate less and get more done*, published by Bookboon.com.

8 ORGANIZING ADVICE FOR SENIORS

8.1 DON'T RETIRE FROM LIFE

Something strange seems to happen to many of us during the final third of our lives. During the retirement stage, many of us seem to forget everything we learned about time management and organizing. In fact a few of us don't even plan for retirement in the first place. We make a sudden transition from employed to unemployed with no idea of how we will spend the rest of our lives, other than some fantasy thoughts about playing golf every day and taking it easy. The problem is, it takes money to play golf. It also takes good weather, good health, and good friends. And there's nothing easy about taking it easy when we have no plans.

Ted Engstrom, in his book, *Welcome to the Rest of Your Life*, referred to a Harvard University study that showed that early retirement actually lowers one's longevity. 7 out of 8 men studied who retired at age 65 were dead by age 75. Retirement does not mean withdrawal from the human race, just the rat race.

I have spent a lot of time with retirees in the years since I passed retirement age, and have witnessed a wide range of situations and attitudes. Some individuals who had obviously not planned at all are having financial problems or don't know what to do with themselves. Others feel a successful retirement is one in which you are able to keep busy. They're going here or there – shopping malls, window shopping, early-bird dinners at restaurants. They're so busy doing things they don't stop long enough to ask themselves if whether they are enjoying themselves or not. Others complain about the poor hand that life has dealt them, lead a sedentary lifestyle, always hang around people their own age or older, and get a small amount of pleasure from criticizing others.

But I have also met others who have more than just activities or hobbies in their lives; they have meaning in their lives. They get up early and check their schedules. They have part-time jobs or second careers. They do volunteer work, plan activities with other people, choose to have a positive attitude, participate in the lives of their children and grandchildren, engage in regular physical activity, and yes, even take vacations.

With life expectancy continuing to increase, some people are spending a third of their lives or more in retirement. That's too much time to waste. If you leave full-time employment, take your time management skills with you and leave the stress behind. Set personal goals,

complete with deadlines and schedules. Continue to use a planning calendar. Schedule self-development activities. You're never too old to learn. Spend time with younger people; if you don't, your wisdom will die when you do. Keep exercise as a priority. Make up for the years you have been procrastinating. Read the books you never got around to reading. See the sights you always wanted to see. Mend broken relationships and make new ones.

8.2 PLAN FOR YOUR SENIOR YEARS

The best time to plan for your senior years is in your younger years. The second best time is now, regardless of your age. As far as I'm concerned, the greatest time management strategy is to live longer and healthier. This involves planning while you are still young. And looking after your brain as well as well as your body. Our bodies are outliving our minds. It is estimated that 5.3 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease. Next year it is predicted that a half-million new cases will develop every year. Yet people who exercise regularly in their middle age are only one-third as likely to get Alzheimer's disease in their 70s. That's just physical exercise. Brain exercise is important as well.

There are now gyms for the brain. People pay \$60 per month to work out on computers loaded with "mental fitness" software. There are classes in brain nutrition and cognitive training.

In the past few years, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, more than 700 retirement communities have added computerized brain fitness centers. People spent 80 million dollars in 2008 on mental fitness. The industry is based on a relatively new scientific discovery – neuroplasticity – the brain's ability to rewire itself by creating neural connections in response to mental activity. But you don't need computer programs to strengthen your memory and help stave off Alzheimer's. Exercise, memory training, reading – keeping active both mentally and physically – all help.

8.3 SENIORS IN THE WORKFORCE

As far as organizing advice for seniors is concerned, the best advice I can give is to recognize that as you age, your body and mind change, and you have to pay more attention to organizing your environment and yourself as you may have done in the past.

As an octogenarian, I find that my body doesn't always keep up with my mind and I have to make certain adjustments. Although we may hate to admit it, we become frailer and more susceptible to falls the older we get. And our bones are usually more brittle as well. So keep

both home and office relatively clutter-free. Avoid placing furniture or other obstacles in high-traffic area. Don't wear hard-soled shoes and avoid having loose throw rugs on the floor.

Most office accidents happen when people trip over electric cords or drawers left open. So make sure there are no cords in the way. And I suggest hanging folders in a frame or step files as opposed to filing cabinets. I have two step files that hold about 15 "Action" files.

The trend for retirement-age seniors is to continue working. According to an article appearing in the August, 2017 issue of *TelegraphJournal.com*, the U.S. government estimates that by 2024, older workers will account for 25% of the labour market. And the rate of fatal accidents among older workers 55 and older between 2006 and 2015 was 50% to 65% higher than for all workers, according to the same article. Occupational safety, which depends heavily on an organized environment, will have to allow for the fact that some older workers need more protection.

8.4 ADVICE FOR SENIORS IN THE HOME

The major causes of fires in the home include leaving on a curling iron or heating blanket or an electric heater too close to flammable material – or an unattended burner or stove. I think it would be a good idea to have a checklist to go over each night before retiring – such as pull the plug on electric heater, turn on nightlights, lock door, etc. I'm a great believer in checklists.

I think seniors should keep a checklist of all the prescription and over-the-counter medications they take. Include supplements and vitamins. For each medicine, mark the amount you take, the time of day you take it, and whether it should be taken with food. Store two copies of the list: one on the refrigerator door or where your medications are stored, and one in your wallet or purse.

Some people are notorious for keeping old medications. Periodically organize your medicine cabinet and toss out all the expired and unused stuff. You should store things in the room they are used. For medications, that could be the kitchen. Highlight the expiry date on all your medications. Use pill containers that have separate compartments for morning, afternoon and evening, and fill them with your week's medications every weekend.

Before heading to the runway for takeoff, pilots must complete a procedural checklist to assure the aircraft is ready for flight. Now many hospitals require surgeons to complete a similar checklist before doing even the most minor procedures – including, to the amusement of some, confirming which limb or organ is to be operated upon. While it seems silly, it's

not – it's a way to be assured that every possible step is being taken to assure patient safety. Research is demonstrating that when hospitals adopt this practice, there is a measurable improvement in outcome. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found a reduction in both deaths and complications when hospitals used a 19-item surgical safety checklist.

It makes sense that if individuals establish a structure with routine procedures for health-related matters, it would not only reduce stress, but also help lower the risk of at-home medication mistakes and other mishaps that can have serious consequences. Many people put themselves at risk because they are haphazard about letting important papers pile up or, equally problematic, throwing out things they should keep for future reference.

Keep a copy of all medical records in a clearly marked folder. Make it a habit to request copies of all test results, X-Rays, and treatments.

If I were to write a list of tips for seniors, I would include such things as:

- Avoid multitasking. Finish one job before starting another.
- Write things down. Keep a journal. Write notes to yourself.
- Organize your environment, put structure in your life, & develop routines.
- Keep a planner updated. Record every appointment, activity or commitment as they are confirmed. (I prefer a paper planner)
- Keep a photo album with names of friends and relatives clearly marked.
- Take an afternoon nap – around 3 p.m. if possible. That's good advice for anyone.
- Have a place for everything, and return it to that place after use.
- Avoid caffeine at bedtime and finish your walk at least two hours before bedtime.
- Get up the same time every morning.
- Keep practicing those skills you don't want to lose. Habits are helpful as you get older.
- Get involved in associations, causes, volunteer groups, travel.
- Associate with younger people as well as people your age.
- Keep your mind active by doing crossword puzzles, taking courses, reading, playing games.
- Make physical exercise, sleep and a balanced diet your top priorities.

8.5 FOR THOSE WORKING WITH SENIORS

The elderly need good lighting. Teepa Snow, who specializes in geriatrics and elder care, spoke at the 2009 NAPO conference in Orlando. She said as we age, our eyes process only about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the light – so lights need to be about 3 times brighter. And of course they

could have trouble reading small print or thin fonts. So labels should be large & bold. Also, elderly people in general have trouble distinguishing between green and blue. So take that into consideration when color coding anything. Because of failing eyesight and “floaters”, high gloss surfaces give them problems. The light bounces off these “floaters.” So avoid glare. Use matte finish on materials. Peripheral vision is also affected, so materials at a work station should be within a 90 degree radius as opposed to 180.

Brain speed is also reduced. We don't think or react as quickly when we age – although it depends on the individuals and how they have exercised their brains over the years. The 7-second rule in questioning (allowing at least 7 seconds for a response to a question before continuing) might become a 14-second rule. Teepa Snow said that a 25-year old learns a new skill within about 40 repetitions, while the elderly take 400 repetitions. Don't rush through instructions, and make sure you allow them enough time to learn something new or form a habit.

Elderly people become more easily flustered and frustrated so you have to be patient and not take any outbursts personally. Also have shorter sessions since they may tire more easily.

Multitasking is difficult for anyone. I don't recommend it to anyone. But for some elderly people it becomes impossible. Encourage them do one thing at a time.

According to an article in NAPO News by Barry Izsak, who is a senior relocation specialist, the number of adults age 65 and older in the U.S. will increase 80% in the next 20 years. By 2030, the elderly will account for approximately 20% of the U.S. population. The age bracket of 85 years and over is the fastest growing segment of the population,

A couple of things you should remember to keep in mind if you are working with seniors. Seniors have a harder time ignoring interruptions (*Scientific Mind*, January, 2009). It may take longer to do things. They are more easily distracted. They require more structure. Also they do better when they have a measure of control, as explained in the next chapter.

9 GAINING CONTROL CAN IMPACT HEALTH AND LONGEVITY

9.1 ORGANIZATION IS AN INDICATION OF CONTROL

According to Daniel Gilbert, in his book, *Stumbling on Happiness* (Random House, NY, 2007) at the root of most stress is the feeling of being out of control. I'm sure you know the feeling if you have ever been stuck in traffic, or waiting in a long line or suddenly told that the unrealistic deadline on your project has suddenly become more unrealistic.

People have a natural inclination to control events and make things happen. Losing control makes them unhappy and stressed.

Here's an example. In a nursing home, the elderly residents were given a houseplant. Half of them were told they were to control the care and feeding of the plant while the other half were told that someone on staff would look after the plant. Within 6 months, 30%

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of the residents in the low control group had died, compared with only 15% of those who were in control. (*Stumbling on Happiness* by Daniel Gilbert, Random House, 2007.)

Another study had student volunteers visit nursing home residents on a regular basis. Some residents were allowed to decide when the student was to come in and how long he or she stayed. The others were not given that option. The student just popped in. After 2 months, residents with control were happier, healthier, more active, and taking fewer medications than those in the low control group.

Gaining control can have a positive impact on one's health and well-being. But when the researchers had finished their study and all visits stopped, there were more deaths among the high control group than the low control group, showing that losing control once you've had it can be worse than never having had control in the first place.

This could be related to disorganized people whose houses or offices are in a shambles and yet are happier than organized people whose lives are disrupted by sudden changes in environment, workload, and interruptions that move them into a disorganized state.

Those who don't rush through the day in a panic, but pace themselves and work efficiently, actually survive longer according to Matthew Edlund, author of *The Body Clock Advantage*. (Adams Media, 2003.) These people usually have routines for going to bed and rising at the same times every day, exercise and eating. They control their work versus letting their work determine when they go home, go to bed or exercise.

Mental clutter is just as stressful as physical clutter. Writing things down and having a plan to get them done unclutters your mind, relieves anxiety, eliminates the fear of forgetting and makes you feel better.

Ken Blanchard in the book, *The One Minute Manager Balances Life & Work* (HarperCollins, 2004), made the comment that we should never put our health at risk in order to gain more money. Otherwise, he claimed, in later years we'll be spending even more money in an attempt to regain our health.

Other authors also have stated that losing control affects health and productivity. Stefan Klein, for instance, in his book *The Secret Pulse of Time*, said that stress originates in a surrender of control.

People who lose control of their time end up sacrificing exercise, regular medical checkups, leisure activities, relaxation, and healthy eating habits. *Keeping* well is easier and more time effective than *getting* well.

Healthy activities such as exercise, relaxation and leisure time should be scheduled in your planner if necessary, along with your priorities and major activities and events. If you don't, the time in your planner may become filled with work-related activities and you may spiral out of control.

9.2 AGE HAS ITS BENEFITS BESIDES SENIOR DISCOUNTS

Older people are not always portrayed favorably in movies or sitcoms or among the younger crowd. In one study reported in the April, 2010 issue of *Scientific American Mind*, 65 percent of psychology students agreed that “older people are lonely and isolated.” And 64 percent of medical students agreed that major depression is more prevalent among the elderly,

Research doesn't back up these opinions. In fact, older adults are actually happier than younger people, at least in the research reported to date. And population-based surveys reveal that rates of depression are highest in those between 25 and 45. The happiest group overall is men aged 65 and older. In one study of 28,000 Americans, a third of the 88-year-olds reported being “very happy” and the happiest individuals surveyed were the oldest.

Older people are more likely to recall positive than negative information, so that should also help. And cognitive abilities do not fade dramatically with age. We do experience some memory loss and forgetfulness; but serious illness of the brain aside, intelligence and verbal abilities are not much different than they were decades earlier.

So being over the hill, doesn't mean you're not able to climb more hills.

9.3 PURPOSE BEATS PROFIT HANDS DOWN

It's important to have goals at any age. But it's also important to have the *right* goals. According to Daniel Pink in his book, *Drive*, it's our nature to seek purpose. Monetary goals don't necessarily satisfy. And as people grow older, they seem to have less concern about profit.

He refers to a study of *University of Rochester* grads who were asked about their life goals, and then were followed up early in their careers. Some had “profit” goals such as becoming wealthy or famous, and others had “purpose” goals, such as helping others improve their lives.

Those with purpose goals who felt they were being attained, reported higher levels of satisfaction and well-being than when in college, and lower levels of anxiety and depression. However those with profit goals reported levels of satisfaction and self-esteem that were no higher than when in college. They had reached their goals; but it didn't make them any happier.

So attainment of profit or materialistic goals could have little if any impact on well-being. But it does impact the pocket book. Of course I see nothing wrong with having both profit goals and purpose goals at any age. But being is more important than having, and purpose is more important than profit.

9.4 IT IS TIME TO DO WHAT YOU REALLY LOVE DOING

Quickly jot down 10 things you love to do or would really love to be able to do. As an example, the first things that came to mind when I made my list was such things as writing, reading and speaking (which I already do to varying degrees) and learn to play the piano, and the guitar, and learn to speak Spanish (which I am unable to do and am spending little or no time even trying to do).

Next, quickly make a list of the things you are currently spending most of your time doing. If the two lists match, rejoice and take a bow. My second list contained such things as shopping (including garage sales), social media and Internet use, puttering around my apartment, and watching the ongoing political saga on CNN – all of which I could well do without.

I realize that we are all different people of different ages with different needs, wants and obligations. But we all have one thing in common; we are all getting older. Eventually we will all run out of time.

Delay is not the answer; change is. I am fortunate inasmuch as watching less TV, spending less time on social media and less time puttering is relatively easy. If time spent on some of the things you are doing are not as easily reduced, such as housework, child or eldercare, over time work and so on, it's a little more challenging; but not impossible.

Downsizing your possessions and the size of the home that you maintain is a lot easier than downsizing your family. But as Katrina Onstad suggests in her 2017 book, "*The weekend effect*," you could enlist their help. She quotes a 2014 survey in which 82% of adults report doing regular chores as a kid; but only 28% required the same of their own children. She wonders why parents deprive them of their self-sufficiency.

There are many ways of freeing up time from essential chores and obligations, such as outsourcing, involving other family members, taking advantage of government sponsored services or making changes to the way you are currently working. There are plenty of self-help books including Mark Forster's latest time management book, "*Secrets of productive people.*" A good book that might motivate you to do this, (especially the first few chapters of it), is Greg McEwen's book, "*Essentialism: the disciplined pursuit of less.*"

You can't do it all. But don't let your current activities crowd out those things that you are truly passionate about. Personally, I am resolving right now to displace an hour or so of current activity each day with things I have always wanted to do and have been rationalizing that I don't have time for. Anyone want to join me? We can compare notes in the next newsletter.

I have already bought the guitar and keyboard and signed up for Internet courses. Now I'm committed.

9.5 TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

You might think that neuroticism, frequently linked to depression and anxiety, would be considered a trait that would shorten your life span. But it could actually *lengthen* your lifespan, according to one study that was published in *Psychological Science* and reported in the November/December, 2017 issue of *Psychology Today*. Of the 321,000 people studied, those who rated themselves low on health tended to have a lower mortality rate. It's thought that people who scored high in neuroticism and rated their own health as poor or fair might make greater use of primary care and go to hospitals more often.

This isn't suggesting that you become neurotic; but it could suggest that it pays to get regular checkups and not write off the medical profession simply because you have had some success with natural remedies – or nature itself, as I discussed in a previous book, "*How work environment impacts productivity.*" We also need the medical profession in order to live a long and fruitful life.

I have been writing a lot about the importance of sunshine, attitude, lifestyle and environmental factors for healthy living. I do believe in the power of such things as nature, sleep, relationships, music and the environment to improve both your health and longevity. But I still go to the dentist when I have a toothache, and owe my life to doctors who nipped my cancer in the bud, performed surgeries when necessary, and diagnosed the diseases and complaints I have experienced along the way.

David B Agus, MD, in his book, *A short guide to a long life*, indicates that a staggering seven out of 10 deaths among Americans each year are from chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, dementia, kidney disease and diabetes. He also suggests that there is a plethora of information available in this high-tech age on how to stay healthy. And yet prevention is a hard sell – perhaps because we tend to live in the moment rather than prepare for the future.

To quote Dr. Angus, “preventable non-communicable diseases now account for more deaths worldwide than all the causes combined.” If we took an active interest in our own health – enough at least to carve out a lifestyle that would pay off in the future – we would have a much better chance of extending our lifespan.

We are so conditioned to “buy now and pay later” that we frequently do the same with our health – we overindulge or eat junk food and pay for it later in life.

As far as preventative health measures are concerned, there is no “one fits all” regimen that we can adopt. For example, such things as acupuncture, aromatherapy and massage can be effective only for certain conditions and certain people. But there are some things we can all do that seem to help everyone, such as exercise, adequate sleep and exposure to nature.

In my book, “*How work environment impacts productivity*”, published by *Bookboon.com*, I discuss not only how the nature impacts not only our personal productivity, but in many cases our health as well.

9.6 THE GREATEST TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IS TO LIVE LONGER

I suppose whenever I pass another birthday, my thoughts return to my love of life. The good news, according to statistics, is that we’re living longer. The bad news is that our bodies frequently outlast our minds. Dementia is on the increase. To gain time by living longer and healthier, we must look after our brain as well as our body.

Physical exercise keeps the blood circulating throughout the brain where we need it most. It also helps to build new brain cells and improves learning and memory. So keep up a physically active lifestyle.

Lifelong learning, and the constant mental stimulation that it provides, will offset some of the cognitive decline we experience with aging. Avoiding stress where possible, and being

able to cope effectively with it when it does occur, will prevent brain cells from being killed. Minimize the hassles in your life.

Social activities of any kind, where you are interacting with others, force you to practice cognitive activities as you carry on conversations.

Diet can also help. For example, older people, who get omega-3 fatty acids by eating fish such as salmon and sardines, or take DHA and EPA supplements, are believed to be able to slow cognitive decline as well. An active lifestyle, both physically and mentally, is good for your overall health, including the health of your brain.

And the most effective time management strategy I know is to live longer and healthier.

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11 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Harold Taylor, CEO of *TaylorInTime*, has been speaking, writing and conducting training programs on the topic of effective time management for over 40 years. He has written over 20 books, including a Canadian bestseller, *Making Time Work for You*. He has developed over 50 time management products that have sold in 38 countries around the world. His monthly Time Report has been published for twenty-five years and he has had over 250 articles accepted for publication.

A past director of the National Association of Professional Organizers, Harold received their Founder's Award in 1999 for outstanding contributions to the organizing profession. He received the CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) designation in 1987 from the National Speakers Association. In 1998 the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers inducted him into the Canadian Speaking Hall of Fame. And in 2001, he received the Founder's Award from the Professional Organizers in Canada. The award has been named in his honor.

Prior to his speaking and writing career, Harold held management positions in industry for twelve years and was a teaching master in the business division of Humber College in Toronto for eight years. He has been an entrepreneur for forty years, incorporating four companies during that time. Since 1981, when he incorporated the time management company, *Harold Taylor Time Consultants Inc.*, he has presented over 2000 workshops, speeches and keynotes on the topic of time and life management.

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