

# SUCCESS

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## Making Time

*How Tracking the Hours Yields Hidden Benefits*

MANY EXECUTIVES KNOW THE VALUE OF keeping a time log. They've dramatically increased their personal effectiveness by recording their daily activities and analyzing where their time goes. But what many managers don't know is that there's a secret benefit to time logs — one you don't hear about from the experts.

Peter Drucker prescribed the time log in his classic *The Effective Executive*. A detailed, written account of how you spend your days, he writes, is essential to mastering your time. After all, he points out, the amount of work we could all tackle is infinite — it's the hours in a day that are limited.

And managers everywhere are desperate for a way to stretch those hours as far as their ambitions will allow. Take the crowd that showed up for a recent time-management seminar in suburban White Plains, N.Y. — over 100 attendees crowded into a hotel conference room.

The only basis for time management, they were told, is knowing exactly how they use their time. Some executives prefer to leave the log-keeping to their secretaries. Others, like Patti Hathaway, who conducted the seminar for Pryor Resources Inc., prefer jotting the length of each event on a scrap of paper, like "staff meeting, 1 hour, 45 minutes," filing it, and adding it all up at the end of the week.

The method doesn't matter, as long as it actually records each event as it takes place. Our memory is especially imperfect when it comes to time, Drucker says. A task that flew by may well have taken over an hour.

By now, you've already discovered the secret — the simple discipline of keeping a log sparks immediate improvements in your ability to manage time. A sharpened time consciousness is a valuable, if unexpected, fringe benefit. The simple act of keeping a log, says Hathaway, produces vital

realizations. An executive quickly sees, for example, that "80 percent of his interruptions come from 20 percent of his staff," she says. Another manager may discover that a major monthly report *always* takes twice the time expected. Those momentary flashes enable executives to address the time-zapping problems immediately.

### REVOLUTIONIZE YOUR PRODUCTIVITY

Once you've kept the log for several weeks, you're ready to begin the exercise that can revolutionize your productivity.

All along, you've been eliminating nonessential tasks. Now you can concentrate on the lasting challenge of consolidating your discretionary time. We're kidding ourselves when we say we can tackle major chores with 15 minutes here and 20 minutes there. We need, Drucker says, "large, continuous, and uninterrupted units."

From your time log, figure out how many hours a week are actually available to you. Most of us are frustrated because we assume we're working off a larger base than we actually have. And the number of hours available dwindles as executives move higher in the organization. "Senior executives rarely have as much as one-quarter of their time truly at their disposal for the important matters," Drucker writes.

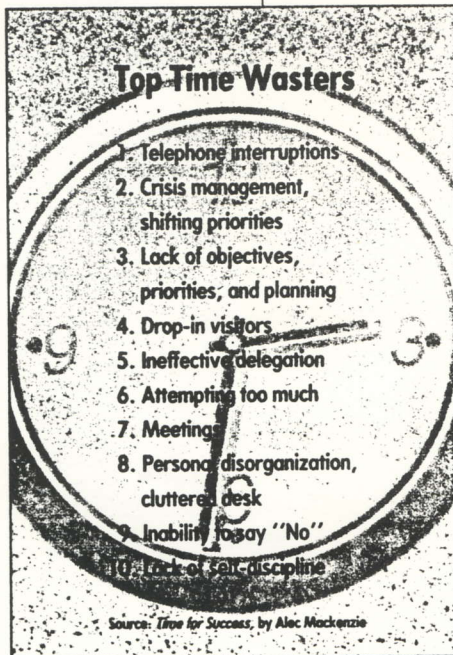
Time, like many resources, operates on the Pareto principle: We accomplish about 80 percent of our work in about 20 percent of our time.

Only deliberate planning can make that 20 percent count. To protect the largest stretches of time, Hathaway suggests scheduling a regular "quiet" time, an hour or two each day when you will not accept interruptions.

If your schedule is flexible, work at home one day a week, advises Drucker. Or schedule all your operating work for Mondays and Fridays, reserving the mornings of the other days for your large, important projects.

Make sure plans reflect your most productive hours. If you're a morning person, keep mornings free for the work that matters most or the important projects you're likely to put off.

Finally, periodically review your time use. Drucker recommends running a time log for a stretch of three to four weeks at least two times a year — every year. "Time use does improve with practice," he writes. "But only constant efforts at managing time can prevent drifting." ■



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