

# INDECISIONS — INTERRUPTIONS & MENTAL BLOCKS

## INTRODUCTION

For all the people who waste time and wish they didn't  
The no-nonsense guide to managing your time at home or in the office.

Learn how to cut paper work to a minimum  
Concentrate on important matters  
Delegate responsibility  
Schedule your day  
Make quick, effective decisions  
Establish short term priorities and life — long goals.

## I. COPIES

Excessive record keeping is a symptom of insecurity.

Figure out how often you use the various kinds of material you file. Take each category, and ask yourself, „What is the worst thing could happen if this file didn't exist?“ You'll find that most of the time the answer is „Nothing.“ If you really needed the information, it probably could be located elsewhere in someone else's file. Or a phone call would do the trick, or you would get along fine without it!

This is not to say that comprehensive files aren't useful, but the question is whether they are useful enough to \_\_\_\_\_ the amount of time and effort *that goes into keeping them current*.

Estimate the amount of time spent filing such things as routine memoranda, information copies of other people's memos, and so on, and ask yourself if your CBLT Center wouldn't be ahead if the same number of hours were put into something directed towards achieving your primary goal,

## II. FUN

Time management and fun go hand in hand. Work is fun only when you have it under *control*, when you know what your objective is, and when you are moving toward that objective. And leisure is fun only when you can relax without feeling guilty, knowing that you've earned a good rest.

So if you have negative thoughts about managing your time, \_\_\_\_\_ them. Put into practice these principles, and you'll not only get more done, but you'll get a lot more out of life.

## III. GOALS

If you want to manage your time better, the first step is to ask yourself this question: „Exactly what are my goals?“

Take a blank sheet of paper. List your personal lifetime: goals, the things you would like to be able to look back upon by the time you are eighty. Not general things, such as to be happy, but specific goals such as a trip to Europe, a master's degree, writing a book, a working knowledge of English, planting five new churches, leading 100 people to the Lord and discipling them into a productive Christian life, and so on.

Now list your professional goals. Not such generalities as a higher salary or a promotion or greater prestige, but specific things like a promotion to a particular job, or election to a specific office.

Then make a list of short-term goals, the things you would like to accomplish in the *next six months*.

Besides being specific, goals should be attainable and authentic—in other words, *things you really want* and, *are willing to work for*. Keep in mind that they

are subject to change at any time; indeed, one of your priority tasks should be to look over your list of goals and update it. But the list should represent your best judgment of what you'd like to accomplish as of this moment.

Now, \_\_\_\_\_ your lists. They probably include more things than you reasonably can expect to do, so assign priorities. Select the three or four goals in each category that you consider most important and write them down some place where you will see them every day. Memorize them. And a hundred times a day, ask yourself, „*Is what I am doing now moving me closer to one of my goals?*” If the answer is no, figure out some way the activity can be eliminated, delegated to someone else, or downgraded in priority so that it can be accomplished in your least productive time.

## IV. IF ONLY

There is no greater waste of time than \_\_\_\_\_.

A famous New York psychiatrist, nearing the end of a long and illustrious career several years ago, said that the most useful concept he had discovered for helping people turn their lives around was what he called his „four little words.” The first two were *if only*. „Many of my patients have spent their lives living in the past,” he said, „anguishing about what they should have done in various situations. ‘If only I had prepared better for that interview. If only I had expressed my true feelings to the boss...’ ‘If only I had taken that accounting course ...’

Wallowing in this sea of regret is a serious emotional drain. The antidote is simple: eliminate those two words from your vocabulary. Substitute the words next *time* and tell yourself, „Next time I'm going to be prepared ... Next time I'm going to speak out... Next time I have a chance I'm going to take that course...”

Practice this simple technique until it becomes a habit. *Never rehash errors you've made*. When you find yourself doing so, simply tell yourself, „Next time I'll do it differently.” You'll find this closes the door on the matter, freeing you to devote your time and your thoughts to the present and the future instead of the past.

## V. INDECISION

If you are the kind of person who vacillates agonizingly between two courses of action, even on minor matters, fearful that whichever course you choose might turn out to be a mistake, keep this in mind: *indecision is nearly always the worst mistake you can make*. If you choose the alternative that seems better and announce it confidently and \_\_\_\_\_ full speed ahead, you will usually make out better than if you agonize for a long time over a difficult choice.

Some decisions, such as whether to change major jobs, obviously require a great deal of thought and should not be made hastily. But once the available facts are in hand, the effective individual will reach a decision and then stop mentally churning the pros and cons, so that he can devote his full efforts to making the decision work.

As for minor decisions the day-to-day garden variety decisions that we all have to make—generally the more quickly the decision is made, the better. If you postpone action until *all* objections are overcome, you will never get anything done.

## VI. INFORMATION OVERLOAD

The office copy machine, the computer internet, the printer, the video tape recorder — all these and many more products of modern technology have one common goal: the production and distribution of more and more information to be absorbed by the human brain. But no one has come up with any ideas for increasing the human brain's capacity to absorb more information!

And yet, as sociologist-economist Kenneth E. Boulding has pointed out, 'The crucial element in social systems is not in \_\_\_\_\_ but knowledge. All a computer does is process information. Knowledge, on the other hand, is obtained much more by the loss of information than by the gain of it. In fact, that's what an organization is all about. Somebody has called an organization a hierarchy of wastebaskets. In other words, a structure to prevent information from reaching the executive desk. Otherwise, the executive gets an information overload.'

You can cope with the deluge of printed material and junk mail that comes in simply by having your secretary screen out everything that is obviously worthless, or by liberal use of the wastebasket as you open your mail. Cancel subscriptions that don't give you enough value for the time you spend reading them. The internal communications that come across your desk, however, are sometimes more difficult to deal with.



The two most common reasons for excessive internal communication are the following:

1. *Failure to delegate completely!* If subordinates feel that they don't have the authority to handle problems, they invariably pass the buck to their superiors, providing detailed input and then waiting for the decision to be made for them (see „Upward Delegation”).
2. *Management by procedures rather than by \_\_\_\_\_.* When people are judged by how well they comply with directives, rather than by how well they meet the organization's objectives, paper work will multiply: a proliferation of memos and reports designed to prove that procedures are being followed.

Make it clear to your subordinates that you expect to be kept informed about progress toward objectives and about problems requiring your attention. But make it equally clear that you do not want to be bothered by submission of quantities of routine information that will make it difficult for you to concentrate on the big picture.

## VII. INTERRUPTIONS

You can't eliminate interruptions. Most of those interruptions, in fact, are simply requests that you do whatever it is that you are responsible for doing. Talking to a student, answering a coach's question, responding to a call from your director—these are what your job is all about.

Still, you can \_\_\_\_\_ the number of interruptions. and you must if you're going to operate effectively because one hour of concentrated effort is worth more than two hours of ten or fifteen-minute segments. It takes time to warm up your mental motor after an interruption, especially if you return to the project hours or days later.

So, some suggestions:

### A. Analyze your incoming phone calls, preferably after logging them for several days.

Are you frequently getting calls that have to be referred to other people, or that are simply unnecessary? Determine what could be done to cut down on them.

For example, your secretary might not know what questions to ask of a caller to make sure the call is referred to the right person.

A more basic cause of unnecessary interruptions, however, is lack of an effective system of communication. If people aren't informed when the new courses start, or what the holiday schedule will be, or why certain salary deductions were made, they must interrupt someone, either by phone or in person, to find out.

### B. Use a \_\_\_\_\_ system for phone calls.

„Some people are important enough to be put through any time, but for other calls that don't appear to be emergencies, have your secretary get the name and number so that you can call back at your own convenience. If you answer your own phone, a quick „I'll call you back at 11:30" will minimize the interruption. By bunching your calls together during a period before lunch or toward the end of the day, when people are less inclined to chat, you can handle calls much more efficiently.

Many people prefer to answer their own phone and to take calls as they come, to demonstrate their accessibility. If this policy fits in with your operating style, fine. But most people will find that the call-back system saves time in the long run.

**C. Set the tone of the conversation at the beginning.**

It's possible to answer the phone in a cordial manner, followed by an inquiry such as „What can I do for you?" Indicating that while you want to be friendly, you also want to be \_\_\_\_\_. On the other hand, if you simply indulge in pleasantries such as, „it's sure good to hear from you again, how are things going?" and so on, you signal that you have time to kill, and the conversation is likely to take many minutes longer. The same principle applies, of course, to personal visits.

**D. Set aside a time for phone calls and consultations.**

It can be very helpful in an office if people let it be known what times they are available and what times they prefer not to be disturbed. Co-workers understand the need for this kind of

arrangement and will not take offense if you explain in advance that you prefer to see people and handle phone calls, for example, before 9:30 and after 11:30, and before 3:00 and after 4:30, thus leaving a substantial block of time in both morning and afternoon to concentrate on major projects. You explain, of course, that this is merely a guideline and that urgent matters should be brought to your attention immediately.

**E. If you have the kind of job that permits it,**

consider the possibility of spending an occasional morning or even a full day working away at another place, where interruptions are less likely.

**F. If most of your interruptions come from your boss,**

don't assume that you must put up with them. Pick a time when he is in a pleasant mood to explain that you are trying to get better control of your time, and ask if you could arrange mutually \_\_\_\_\_ times each day to check with each other on routine matters. Chances are your boss will appreciate your interest in operating more effectively and may even get the message that everyone, even the boss, needs to give some thought to time-management practices.

## VIII. LISTS

I recommend keeping two lists for each day-preferably on the same sheet of paper.

On one *side* of the sheet (or in your appointment book) list those items scheduled for a specific time, such as meetings and appointments. On *the other side*, put your 'To Do' list, a random listing of everything you would like to accomplish during the day. Then look over your 'To Do' list and number everything in order of priority. Probably most of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the list is in accomplishing the items marked number one and number two (see „Pareto Principle"), so schedule a specific block of time to work on those items. Plan to do the others, in order of *priority*, as time permits. Don't schedule secondary tasks for specific times; you need to maintain enough flexibility to handle unexpected interruptions. Otherwise, your plan will be impractical and you will become discouraged.

One serious limitation of a 'To Do' list is that it is usually compiled on the basis of urgency. It includes things that demand immediate attention, some of which are important and some of which are not; but it usually does not include the things that are important but not urgent, such as long-range planning and major projects that you want to accomplish but that nobody is pushing you to do.

So always, when making up your daily list of things that need to be done, take a moment to review your list of objectives (see „Goals”) and see if the things you are working on are really the things that will get you closer to where you want to be.

Chances are you won't get to the bottom of your „To Do” list by the end of the day, but don't let that worry you. If you've worked according to priorities you've accomplished the important things, and that's what time management is all about.

One word of caution, however: when you find yourself transferring an item from

today's list to tomorrow's list more than once or twice, it may be that it is a low-priority item, but it also may be that you are procrastinating. In that case, instead of holding it over again, admit to yourself that you're goofing off, and figure out what to do about it.

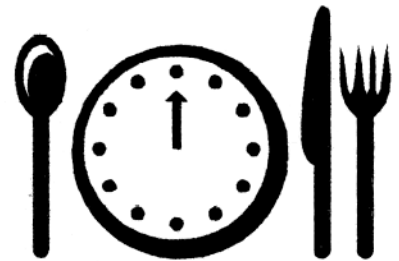
I strongly recommend spending the last few minutes of each working day preparing your list for the \_\_\_\_\_ morning. In talking with successful executives about time-management practices, I have found this mentioned more frequently than anything else as an aid to effective planning. If delayed until morning, list preparation is often done haphazardly because of the press of other activities, and the list tends to be made up of only the *urgent* matters, rather than the *important* ones.

## IX. LUNCH HOUR

The „business” lunch is a time trap. It is based on the theory that if you break bread with someone, you have the inside track to that person's pocketbook, ideas, or affection, whichever it is you're after.

The theory has some validity, and meeting someone for lunch can be a way of using time effectively. Too often, however, it is counterproductive. It tends to run to two hours, including travel time. It usually involves eating more heavily than usual contributing to mid-afternoon torpor. And it usually involves doing in two hours what could be accomplished in twenty minutes.

A far better use of time usually is a light lunch and a \_\_\_\_\_. Even a brief nap, if you can be so fortunate.



## X. MEMORANDA

Memo writing can be a vicious time-waster. Aside from the time it takes to dictate, type, edit, retype, transmit, read, answer, and file a memo, there is another peril: it often encourages procrastination. By writing a memo saying that you are in the process of performing a certain task, you con yourself into believing that things are moving, that you have done something. There is then less pressure to get on with the job now that you've gained some breathing time. But pressure is what you need, right?

Another thing to remember is that written communication tends to be one-way. Unless the other person responds in writing you don't get the feedback you need—the reactions, questions, suggestions, and arguments that ensure that your ideas are understood and are sound.

Remember, too, that people are less candid in writing than in discussion. There is permanence about the written word that encourages caution and restraint. If you want a frank appraisal of someone's work, for example, you would be foolish to ask for a memo, or even to rely too heavily on a written personal report. A more \_\_\_\_\_ evaluation will always be obtained through a phone call.

And think of the time you save!

So avoid using the memo to carry on dialogue, to negotiate, to determine consensus. It generally should be used only to announce, to confirm, to clarify, to remind.

## XI. MENTAL BLOCKS

When you keep trying to get a job done, and nothing happens, stop. Instead of investing more time in a futile effort, analyze the problem and see if you can come up with a new approach. Usually your frustration will be caused by one of the following:

1. *Lack of fact* If you aren't sure you have all the facts, you naturally hesitate to write that report, prepare that speech, or plan that program. Do some more research and see if it doesn't get you off dead center.
2. *Lack of \_\_\_\_\_*. Maybe you are finding it impossible to get started because deep down you don't believe in the value of the task or the way in which you've been told to do it.

Instead of letting this uneasiness gnaw away at you, face the facts squarely, analyze the pros and cons, and confront your boss with a recommendation for a different course of action. If you lose, and it's a minor matter, get it done as quickly as possible so you can forget it. If it's a major matter, and part of a recurring pattern, better try to find another boss!

3. *Lack of a starting point*. Maybe the task is so overwhelming that you can't figure out how to get started. Use the „salami technique.“(giant size bologna sausage) In its original state, before it has been cut it is unwieldy and looks unappetizing. But cut it into thin slices and it takes on quite a different aspect. Now you have something manageable. When you are procrastinating on a major task, slice it up in into as many small, manageable “instant tasks” as possible. Many of these tiny tasks are not irritating or negative so you will find them easy to do. Soon the big unwieldy job is done. The proverb “Divide and conquer” is very applicable here.
4. *Tunnel vision*. Perhaps you are so close to the problem that you can't get a good perspective on it. Get some input from other people. Whether they have any good ideas or not, merely explaining the situation to them often will clarify your own thinking and may stimulate you to find the way out yourself.
5. *Fatigue*. Creative thinking cannot be \_\_\_\_\_! If you are working on a problem and are getting nowhere, your best bet often is to put it on the back burner overnight and let your subconscious mind take over. Sometimes the answer will come when you least expect it-even in the middle of the night. (The late Henry Kaiser made it a practice to „assign” his subconscious mind a problem to work on just before going to sleep. He found that the answer often came to him at around 3 A.M. So he always kept a pencil and a piece of paper on the night-stand to scribble a word or two, so that he could go back to sleep without worrying about forgetting.)

## XII. NAPS

There is nothing \_\_\_\_\_ about the pattern of sleeping eight hours and remaining awake for all of the remaining sixteen. God gave us 24 hours in a day, but He did not say how much we were to sleep. Most animals have sense enough to take a nap whenever they feel like it, day or night.

Einstein made a nap part of his daily routine. So did Edison and Churchill. Presidents of the United States who have found naps useful in helping them to cope with the pressures of office include Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson.

Not everyone has the freedom to work out such a schedule. But if you do, or even if you can stretch your lunch hour to an hour and a half or two hours by coming to the office earlier, experiment and see if your \_\_\_\_\_ working cycle might involve a midday nap.

The physical arrangements are admittedly a problem for most people. You need quiet and seclusion, if you can't go home for a nap, a couch at the office may be the answer. Even driving to a nearby park and taking a short nap in the car provides a worthwhile break for some people.

A siesta isn't for everyone, but if you're one of those who perk up after one, do your best to arrange your schedule accordingly.



## XIII. NO

Of all the time-saving techniques ever developed, perhaps the most effective is the frequent use of the word no. You cannot \_\_\_\_\_ your priorities unless you learn to decline, tactfully but firmly, every request that does not contribute to the achievement of your goals.

The tendency of many time-pressured people is to accept grudgingly new assignments in church work, new social obligations, new chores at the office, without realistically weighing the cost in time. Such people worry about offending others—and wind up living their lives according to other people's priorities.

At work, of course, you cannot always turn down the request that you take on a job that you think a waste of time. But you can win a good percentage of the time if you try. Point out to your boss how the new task will conflict with higher-priority ones and suggest alternatives. If your boss realizes that your motivation is not to get out of work but to protect your time to do a better job on the really important things, you'll have a good chance of avoiding unproductive tasks. But you have to speak up.

## CONCLUSION

This part was the "introduction" on the original "Getting Things Done" – no changes were made only block moved.

### Here are a few Time — Saving Tips from GETTING THINGS DONE

Indecision is nearly always the worst mistake you can make.

The pursuit of excellence is gratifying and healthy. The pursuit of perfection is frustrating, neurotic and a terrible waste of time.

If your office is typical, roughly three quarters of the items in your files should have been placed in the waste-basket.

There's a common belief that tension is bad, that quiet and tranquility are goals for which we should strive. Nonsense. Without tension nothing gets done.

Of all the time-saving techniques ever developed, perhaps the most effective of all is frequent use of the word "\_\_\_\_\_."

In the beginning God created. Then He rested and sanctified the 7<sup>th</sup> day to make it holy. Jesus came in the fullness of time. And at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century the whole world had heard that Christ is Lord. The book of Daniel states that in time His kingdom will grow until it encompasses everything. Yes God has a plan and He is a time manager. He has a detailed plan of love for and wishes to make you successful. Let us pray about these things and be doers practicing these principles. May the Lord's rich favor rest upon you. Amen.

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

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