

# The art of budgeting time

Budgeting time is just like budgeting money. First you list your daily expenses for a specific period, maybe a month, to determine where your money goes. Then you decide where you want it to go. Then you apportion your resources among the various items you must have. After filling your basic needs, you work on those that you should have (savings or investment, for example), and those you desire (a color TV, a four-channel system or travel). In doing this, you'll find out that you have to eliminate some needs to fulfill your other wants. The idea is to put your money where you'll get the most out of it.

The initial step toward spending your time wisely is to keep an honest accounting of how you've been spending it.

There are several ways to do this:

First, keep an appointment book or a diary. Divide your day into periods and at the end of each period, say half an hour or half a day, jot down what you've done. At the end of a week, tally your expenditures to get a good idea of where your time goes.

Second, have someone catalogue your daily work activity. Have him follow you around with a stop watch. Impractical at the outset this system will definitely show you how you *actually* spend your time and not how you *think* you spend it.

This objective way of gauging how you apportion your time will bring astonishing results. The few minutes you think you spend daily talking on the phone might actually be several hours wasted on idle chatter. Or the precious time you spend tackling the details may be more than the time you have to spend dealing with the crux of what the office is hiring you for.

## Spent time vs. time well spent

The next step is to analyze your use of time in relation to what your job requires.

You may realize that you are doing things that do not fall under your responsibility. Chances are you've been mis-handling people by unconsciously encroaching on their responsibilities. If you can't determine precisely what is expected of you, start off by getting a job specification from your superior.

It may also help you to classify your work into *routine, regular, special and creative*.

*Routine* work includes small and commonly repeated procedures that can easily take up 30 to 40 percent of your day. It involves daily tasks like reading and answering mail, telephoning, or conferring with an assistant.

More substantial is *regular work*, which in reality is the function you are being paid to perform. It involves supervising subordinates, communicating management decisions, overseeing production and solving problems. In other words, it is getting day-to-day results.

*Special work* involves matters not covered in standard operations. It may include installing a new training system or revising an outdated procedure.

Lying still further beyond your daily job requirements is *creative work*. It may encompass conceiving and executing new ideas, practices and recommendations. This calls not only for above-average creativity but also extra attention because promotions are frequently based on the accomplishments in this area.

Another way to evaluate work is to categorize your jobs into *fixed, semi-flexible, and variable*.

*Fixed duties* come up regularly and have to be attended to on time. Good

examples are attending to clients and filling customer orders.

*Semi-flexible* jobs can be adjusted within limits. They may be due on a particular day but you can attend to them whenever you have time.

*Variable jobs* are done entirely at your discretion. You can do them whenever you have time to spare.

Routine and regular functions are fixed. On the other hand, creative and special assignments fall under the variable category.

Some of the fixed details and routine tasks that usually eat up so much of your time do not necessarily bring much in terms of measurable results. To measure your own wasted hours, consider how you answer the phone or explain things to subordinates.

## How to achieve tangible results

Certainly these things are part of your job but you can trim any of them down without hampering your efficiency. Many conversations, for example, would lose little if you tried to be more precise and to the point. Aimless daydreaming, disorganized thinking, excessive chat-

Allow substantial time for regular work, which really calls for a good part of your day. But don't forget to lay aside time for special tasks. Reserve a definite time for creative projects. Most probably these were the things that you really wanted to do but never seemed to have the time for.

Whatever schedule you settle on, try to stick to it as much as possible. The closer you toe the lines of your plan, the greater your chances of having time for all the things you want to do.

## Work speed

The next logical step is to acquire work speed. This is the key to using your day to its best advantage. Try to save time by increasing your speed and efficiency.

Don't confuse *speed* with *hurry*. For purposes of clarity, we will define speed as the process of eliminating unnecessary activity. Hurry, on the other hand, is a pressured speed-up of unnecessary and necessary operations. The first one is acquired through constant practice; the second is induced by pressure, and often results in unnecessary waste of time.



tering and circuitous explanations can disrupt an otherwise well-budgeted timetable. On the other end of the scale, the time you spend on careful planning may not be long but it does bring tangible results.

After evaluating the different aspects of your work, you should concretize your plan in the form of a fixed schedule or program of work.

The most feasible step is to draw up a tentative weekly schedule of your activities after determining the exact number of hours you work within a week.

In formulating your schedule you should take into consideration your ability to cope with the activity in relation to the time apportioned to it. For example, if you think that you cannot efficiently tackle creative tasks during the latter part of the day when your mind is tired, then you should do them earlier when your mind is still theoretically fresh and can easily assimilate ideas.

You should then perform fixed, routine tasks at the start and/or end of each day. Many of them occur during such periods anyway. Tasks like answering mail, adjusting operators' assignments, starting production jobs, reporting the day's production, inspecting total output, can easily fall within the early or late period slot. Routine jobs can be grouped together for quick execution.

This is not to say that hurry is always destructive. Hurry is occasionally effective for short intervals. Over the long haul, however, you can accomplish more if you concentrate on essentials and discard nonproductive efforts.

There are a few steps which you may undertake to achieve speed in your work schedule. With enough practice and dedication you should be able to achieve your objective of being able to keep pace.

## Train and delegate

Delegate responsibilities to a capable assistant, one whom you know will do the job as you want it to be done. Should you lack one who knows supervisory as well as operational techniques and goals, it is never too late to train one. And although training calls for extra patience and effort, the results in terms of smooth flow of work should compensate all your efforts.

The next step is to cut down on details. Reduce time spent waiting to see people by making exact appointments whenever possible. Eliminate uncertainty by keeping notes on important actions, decisions, or meetings. Make decisions as soon as you intelligently can. Procrastination burns up a considerable portion of our precious time.

Set up standardized systems and pro-

cedures for handling commonly recurring situations to eliminate waste of time. Such a system should be self-operative. You should step in only when the system is disrupted by unavoidable circumstances.

Interruptions do come once in a while but they too can be minimized if not totally eliminated. If you are doing something, stick to it. Even a simple job will eat up hours if you are constantly interrupted.

You may have to close your door as a hint that you want to be left alone and take stock of your work responsibilities. Evade an insistent telephone by asking a subordinate to answer all calls except those requiring your personal attention. Train your assistants to pool their queries together and present them at an appointed time. You should, however, not give the impression that you are acquiring the posture of a recluse.

Arrange a definite time for meeting with supervisors. To dodge drop-in visitors who stay too long, prearrange a signal so that a subordinate can remind you that you have an appointment to keep.

If you want to devote your time to a very demanding task like a complicated analysis, do it at a time when there are likely to be few interruptions and find a special place where you will be tapped only for real emergencies.

Maintain adequate files for quick reference. Should an inspiration suddenly pop up while you're doing something equally important, just jot the idea down for future consideration.

## Reminder system

Have a reminder system to keep track of projects nearing deadlines. You may have a notebook, a loose-leaf binder, a card file, a folder file, or a memo calendar where you can jot down your future activities.

You can also save time by packing your activities. Handle similar operations as one. You should have form letters for frequently recurring phenomena like customer complaints, changed delivery dates and others. Give group lessons instead of individual instructions when the situation calls for such.

Try to avoid draining your energy by chopping your tasks according to your performance level. Tackle your most difficult chores during your peak-energy periods and reserve your routine jobs for your more complacent time.

Know your assets and limitations. If you think you can rough it out better by tackling hard jobs first, then by all means do it as you see fit. If getting lighter tasks out of your way first brings higher results, then reserve the harder tasks for the latter part of your day. Should deadlines be an efficient alarm clock for you, then set up a tight schedule. However, if deadlines wreak havoc on your nerves, be generous by setting up a more manageable schedule. If committing yourself publicly spurs you on to peak performance level, then announce your intentions to the people concerned.

It is wise to remember that both positive and negative qualities are communicable. Perk yourself up by dealing with enthusiastic people bubbling with physical and psychic energy.

The ability to scale the ladder of success is no mean feat. Along the way are all kinds of snares. One of them is time. We only have so much time to make it. And the best way to beat the clock is to make the most out of the limited time we have.