

CHAPTER 27

ACCOMPLISHING MORE IN LESS TIME AND GETTING ORGANIZED FOR SUCCESS

Efficiency studies show that people without organizational skills waste more time [1–3]. The more unorganized you are the less efficient you will be in accomplishing objectives.

Over a longer period of time, organized people will accomplish significantly more, making them extremely valuable employees and candidates for career advancement to the more significant roles in the organization.

Most days you are paid for 8 hours of work. This amounts to approximately 480 minutes. This may sound like a lot, but if you consider the real productive time you have available, it is much less. Let's assume during a typical day that you take a 30 minute lunch, four 5 minute bathroom breaks, 10 minutes for your computer to boot up and shut down, 15 minutes for time cards and other daily work-related activities, 10 minutes deleting out old email and emptying your junk mail, 15 minutes socializing with your co-workers, another 10 minutes going to and from the printer and 15 minutes a day walking to and from labs or conference rooms. This leaves you with $480 - 130 = 355$ minutes of actual time to do work or approximately 6 hours a day of actual time for productive work. No wonder so many people are working late at the office every day. To put in a full 8 hours of work requires spending 10–11 hours a day at the office. Add in a 45 minute commute either way to work and this means that average workers are gone from the home about 12 hours. To put in a full 8 hours of productive work means you are literally spending 12 hours to do it. Why not improve your organizational and time management skills to accomplish tasks in less time?

Getting organized and becoming more efficient is simpler and easier than you think. It requires establishing a routine and development of some easy

organization skills. These basic skills are time management, priority ranking of tasks, and organizing your work and day into manageable portions. In this chapter, we address how to accomplish more in less time. An excellent place to visit is the Franklin Covey Stores for a complete line of Planners, Calendars, Daily Planners, and Personal Organizers. In addition, they also have excellent software to support your efforts to become better organized [4].

IDENTIFY AND ELIMINATE YOUR TIME-WASTING ACTIVITIES

The first step to getting better organized is eliminating those activities that waste your time. Let's look at some big time wasters.

1. Not planning out your time
2. Attending unnecessary or nonproductive meetings
3. Not creating a "To Do List" and not prioritizing work
4. Drop-by visitors
5. Telephone interruptions
6. Procrastination
7. Email
8. Constantly changing priorities
9. Not delegating work
10. Lack of daily routine and self-discipline
11. Taking on others' work and not being able to say no

These are not all the time wasters but some of the key ones. The best indication on whether or not an activity is a time waster is to ask yourself: "Is this the best use of my time or could I be doing something else that is far more productive or important?"

If you answer "yes, there is something more important," then stop what you are doing and go do it. Move on to the most productive use of your time and stay focused on this task. Now let's look at how you can avoid these time wasters.

Not Planning Out Your Time. The first step is to get a date book, if you do not have one, so you can plan your daily activities. Using your computer calendar is another good method. If you do not take control and plan your time others will do it for you. Record all your daily key events and meetings you are invited to. Then prioritize the meetings that are the most important to attend.

Another good technique is to block or schedule your own personal office time to work. This way you plan in time for just your work. By controlling your calendar, you will have more time to complete your work and not end up spending all your time in meetings that eat up your day—leaving you with no real time to complete your own work except for after-hours.

Attending Unnecessary Meetings or Nonproductive Meetings. Just because you are invited to a meeting does not mean you have to attend, nor does it mean you have to sit through the entire meeting. If you feel you have nothing to contribute to the meeting, either don't attend or leave early. If you have something to contribute ask the meeting leader if you can speak first so you can leave. If you are finding yourself stuck in a meeting that is going nowhere, excuse yourself and leave. You can always come back later at the end to see if there was anything of significance that you should be aware of or need to take action on.

Bring work to the meeting. It has become socially acceptable if you are not a main participant to bring your laptop and get work done during the meeting. However, if upper management is there, this is frowned upon.

When you have overlapping meetings, ask if you can give your input at the start of one so you can attend another meeting. In advance of the meetings, let the second meeting know you are going to be late and ask if the leader can schedule your items later in the meeting when you will be able to attend.

Not Creating a "To Do List" and Not Prioritizing Work. Most people do not create a "To Do List" nor prioritize their tasks. This results in wasted time and energy that often culminates in missing key deadlines. "To Do Lists" allow you to identify and track all the important tasks and help you focus on the most important ones first. See the "Creating To Do Lists" later in the chapter on how to effectively do this and save yourself time and hopefully significantly reduce the stress in your life.

Drop-by Visitors and Hallway Conversations. Do you know how procrastinators waste their time and yours? They stop by to see what is up with you and chitchat about what are the latest and greatest things going on in the company. Some employees believe this is part of their job, to walk around talking to others to find out the latest gossip around the office. You have to be very proactive with these types of people and control them or they will control you and wreak havoc on your time and work.

When these types of people show up at your desk unexpectedly and want your valuable time, the first way to control them is ask why they are there. If it is an emergency you can drop what you are doing and start on it immediately.

If they express that they are there simply wanting to talk, then you need to set a time limit and end the conversation. One method of doing this is to identify that you are extremely busy and have some critical deadlines in about an hour and you really don't have the time if you are going to make the deadline. Ask the person if it is possible to get back to them later in the day. Most people have been in this situation themselves and will leave you alone. Or, if you feel it is politically correct to talk for a few minutes then identify that you only have about 3 minutes of spare time and need to keep it short. After 3 minutes announce that you have to get back to work and would they mind if you end this conversation?

Another option is, after several minutes, you announce you have to get ready for your next meeting or you need to go to the bathroom. Get up out of your chair; this is a nonverbal message indicating the conversation is quickly coming to an end. However, some people may not take the hint, so you will actually have to walk away.

Hallway conversations are another great time waster. As you walk down the hallway, people who you have not seen in a while like to tell you all that has happened to them recently. They like to share with you the great vacation they recently took, the problems in their family, the amount of work they are getting done or not getting done, or simply catch up on old times. If you slow down your pace and stop to talk, you are doomed to a 10 minute conversation. Again you need to take control. Be polite and keep on walking. Share with them that you are in a hurry, and will stop by later when you have more free time.

Telephone, Cell Phone, and Blackberry Interruptions. Most people believe that if the phone is ringing you need to answer it. Considering most phone conversations last at least 5–10 minutes, and you may receive 8–10 calls a day at the very least, this means you could be spending up 2 hours on the phone per day. Ask yourself, is this the best use of my time right now to answer this call or return this blackberry message? Is the person calling critical to accomplishing my tasks today? If the answer is no, let it roll over and let the person leave a message. That is why they invented answering systems. Return the call when it is convenient to you. But, of course, if it is the boss calling make sure you answer it unless you have a good reason why you could not.

► **Career Tip.** Schedule a time during the day when you return calls and make calls.

Procrastination. Are you a procrastinator? Do you put off work until tomorrow simply because you do not feel like doing it today? Or do you often need more time to think everything through prior to making a decision? Or do you not know what is the correct action or path forward, so no action seems like the best course of action? If you are answering yes to these questions more than likely you are a procrastinator. We all do it from time to time, but if this is a habit or standard method of operating then you need to make changes. Burka and Yuen in their book, *Procrastination: Why You Do It, What to Do About It*, provide excellent tips in dealing with the problem of procrastination [5].

Some of the underlying causes of procrastination include

- First and primary, the cause is often depression. If you feel this is the cause, get help with the depression immediately. Seek out professionals and get mental and medical help if necessary to help you deal with your depression.

- Planning and staying focused is difficult. (People with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) may be part of this category [6].)
- Tasks seem overwhelming, so it appears to be futile to even try.
- Resentment or anger toward the person requesting your support and subsequent actions. You want to “get even” by ignoring or putting action off.
- Being organized and in a routine causes you to rebel against authority.
- Fear of doing something wrong and failing, disapproval from others, or embarrassment.
- Guilt-driven about not accomplishing what is expected of you and rather than correcting the lack of action, continue to put things off.

Once you recognize the root cause of your procrastination, you can take steps to stop it. One of the most important things you can do to combat procrastination is get organized. Make lists, take a class in organization, and break tasks into very simple smaller actions that are easier to accomplish. Start small and grow into larger tasks and actions. Don’t overwhelm yourself and take on too much. If a task is not obtainable in a single day, then break it down into small tasks that are easily accomplished in a single day. Once you break the procrastination pattern into smaller tasks it becomes easier to take on more.

Email. In electrical engineering, designers are worried about the bandwidth of a communication system or how fast the messages and data are transmitted. The faster the messages are transmitted and understood the better. The list below identifies the communication techniques used between people for communicating and their estimated words per minute or bandwidth. A relative factor is estimated for each method as compared to email communication.

Method of Communicating	Words/Minute	Relative Factor
Text messaging	5 words/minute	0.30X
Typing an email (computer)	20– 30 words/ minute	1X
Average person speaking ability	100 words/ minute	3X
Average person listening ability	300 words/ minute	10X
Pictures	2000 words/ minute	100X
Video	>5000 words/ minute	300X

When you compare these methods of communicating information, you quickly realize that email and text messaging are the slowest means of transmitting information back and forth, and consequently, the most time wasters. For good time management, you want to control how much time you spend using these slow techniques of communication in your work. By comparing the relative factor for each of these communication techniques, you quickly realize that in most cases picking up the phone and talking directly to the person is going to save you significant time over text messaging and emailing. Of course, this is not possible all the time hence the value in email and text messaging. People can leave you a message when they cannot reach you.

Do you have a plan for controlling the amount of time you spend text messaging and emailing? You will need a plan to limit the use of these communication techniques if you are going to control your time and free up more time to do more important tasks. Here are some simple actions you can take to limit the time you spend on emailing.

1. Check your email at specific times during the day.
2. Do not respond immediately to every email that comes in. This is like answering the phone every time it rings.
3. Set a limit on the time you are going to spend responding to email. When you hit the time limit move on to other work.
4. Set up your junk mail filters and delete junk mail only once a day.
5. Ask the question, "Do I need to really respond to this email?" Or is simply reading it enough?
6. Ask people to remove you from their email list if you have nothing to contribute.

Email is a time-eating monster. Have you ever been in an email war? This is where someone sends out a simple email to several people stating their opinion. Something in the email is controversial and the recipients all start hitting "Reply All" so they get their opinions in. The number of emails sent grows geometrically and soon you start to receive emails so quickly that it is hard to keep up with reading them all. What starts out as simple little email explodes into a full-blown war where everyone wants to get their opinion heard. Pretty soon you are spending hours reading all the replies, most of which have no real value.

On a large distribution email message you can have 20 or 30 people all hitting "Reply All." Suddenly your computer can be flooded with up to several hundred emails and if you spend the time reading each one you will be there for hours. This is totally a waste of your time.

► **Career Tip.** Limit your time and number of text messages and emails to only those that are absolutely necessary.

► **Career Tip.** Stop emailing people after the third reply message. Pick up the phone and talk.

Email does have a purpose and good use, but it should NOT be your main method of communicating with people on your team or in the company. Email is good for instant long-distance communication outside the plant, across the nation, or across the world. It is also good when people cannot be reached but can pick up your message later in the day. Emails are also good when files are attached for further information exchange. Another good use of email is when a written record of the conversation is needed.

► **Career Tip.** Emailing should NOT always be your primary method of communicating with people.

Constantly Changing Priorities. This can be a real time waster if you let it get out of hand. You no sooner start on a task and the priorities are changed. Then you start on the new task and before you can complete this task, the priorities are changed again. You end up never completing a task and everything is half done. You have to break this cycle by letting people know you will shift priorities after you complete the present task. This may be hard if your boss is the one asking, but he or she should understand if you take the time to identify the danger or amount of work that will be wasted by switching tasks prior to completing the present one. Oftentimes, it will take more effort to restart the present task once you drop it, than the time it would take to complete the existing task in the first place.

Not Delegating Work. Not delegating work and trying to do everything yourself is another time waster. Most people with this affliction believe “if you want the job done right, you have to do it yourself.” As you move up and become a team leader or manager, you must realize your job is to accomplish work by getting others to do the work. A simple question you can ask yourself is, “Do I really need to do this or could someone else on my team do the work?” If the answer is someone else can, then delegate the task and switch your attention to those tasks that only you can do.

► **Career Tip.** Put your time and efforts on those tasks that only you can accomplish; delegate to others the rest if you can.

Lack of Daily Routine and Self-Discipline. Many people start out developing an excellent time management plan only to have it fall apart at the first crisis. You develop the self-discipline to execute your plan and when things start to fall apart self-discipline and structured work habits quickly go by the wayside. Daily routines and staying focused are two very good habits to acquire for

time management. Look at your work routine and the flow of activity you undertake during the day. Can you identify the time wasters and eliminate them? Can you substitute a good routine or habit for a bad one? Try to visualize what would constitute a perfect day for you and how you complete all the tasks.

► **Career Tip.** Start each day visualizing your perfect day and strive to make it happen.

In the beginning, to help you get in a routine, write the routine down that you want to follow and post it where it is visible. For instance, you might post on the wall above your computer:

1. Check calendar for day and determine meetings and critical activities
2. Review "To Do List" and update
3. Set priorities for day
4. Return critical calls or emails from yesterday that you were not able to get to
5. Start on highest priority on the "To Do List"

Taking on Other's Work. One great time waster is taking on other people's work just to help them out. Being a nice person and helping someone else is not entirely a bad thing and we all do this from time to time. But when this becomes a habit and others use you to get their work done then it no longer becomes beneficial to anyone. Are you taking work from others that you never planned and is it slowing your progress? If so, you need to stop taking on others' work and return the work back. This habit of helping with others' work should be a rare exception and not the norm.

In the event that you do take on others' work, make sure the boss approves. If you help someone else out and you missed your deadline, the boss may be upset.

GREAT ORGANIZING SKILLS AND TOOLS TO SAVE YOU TIME

Creating "To Do Lists," Setting Priorities, and Budgeting Time. Creating "To Do Lists" and setting priorities can significantly help you accomplish more work in less time and with less effort. The first step to creating a "To Do List" is simply brainstorming the tasks that need to be done and write them down. DO NOT worry about the order in which you write them down, we will prioritize the list later.

To help you determine what needs to be done, refer to your plans, deadlines, and objectives for the week. Do you have a project plan that shows the activities you are working on and the critical ones for the day or week? Have you coordinated with your boss or engineering lead and determined what is most critical? Have you determined the near-term and long-term

To Do List for _____	To Do List for __Monday__
Return Calls to Jane & Bob	2 Return Calls to Jane & Bob - 20 minutes
Generate Agenda for Friday's Customer Meeting and email out notices	1 Generate Agenda for Friday's Customer Meeting and email out notices - 10 minutes
Work in Lab on Product	3 Work in Lab on Product- 3 hours, this morning
Check Emails	4 Check Emails- 20 minutes after lunch
Meet with Boss and discuss actions for customer visit & lab work	5 Meet with Boss and discuss actions for customer visit & lab work- 30 minutes - 2:00 today his office
Conduct Vibration Test	8 Conduct Vibration Test - Two days from now; plan on Wednesday
Write section of test plan	6 Write section of test plan- After 3PM today - 1 hour
Analysis of Circuit Design	7 Analysis of Circuit Design - 3 days, start Tuesday

FIGURE 27-1 Example of generating a "To Do List" and prioritizing.

actions you need to take. What must you get done today to keep you on track for tomorrow? An unprioritized list of actions for the day is shown in Figure 27-1 on the left-hand side.

In Stephen Covey’s book, *First Things First*, points out that prioritizing your “Things To Do List” is key to getting organized [7]. So once you have the list of tasks and everything is covered, the next step is to budget a time for each task and when it needs to be completed. Next comes the priority ranking of the tasks. What is the order to best accomplish the tasks? Simply number the tasks in the order that makes the best sense to accomplish work.

There are many methods and reasons for setting priorities. You might prioritize some tasks since they are fun to do or others may be time critical. Other tasks might be extremely important to the boss. Some tasks may take days to complete and progress needs to be scheduled in parts. This is where the skill in developing a great “To Do List” comes in. With practice you will acquire this skill.

► **Career Tip.** Make sure the tasks the boss gives you are always at the top of the list.

The completed list with priority ranking and order of tasks to be accomplished is shown on the right-hand side of Figure 27-1. For the example shown, it was decided that the most critical item for the day, and first task to

be completed, was generating an agenda for Friday's meeting and emailing out the notices. This task only takes 10 minutes, is critical to get out on Monday, and can easily be accomplished. This is a simple but critical task that can be quickly accomplished. Get it done and out of the way. The next task involves coordinating with teammates via returning phone calls. Limiting this task to 20 minutes gets all the important coordination done quickly in the morning and frees the rest of the morning for concentrating on lab work.

► **Career Tip.** First Brainstorm Actions
Then Prioritize the List

After getting top priority tasks completed quickly, it frees up the rest of the morning to work in the lab. This planning takes care of the morning. After lunch, limiting time to check emails to 20 minutes allows a person to see if anything important came up and if they need to respond quickly. The remaining tasks for the afternoon are either multi-day tasks or activities that are planned to start later in the week.

"To Do Lists" can be done on your computer or written out on simple sheets of paper. Many office supply stores carry formatted pads of paper specifically for "To Do Lists."

Three Week Look-Ahead Calendar. Using a "To Do List" is only part of the equation to becoming organized. Another component is having a good calendar and specifically a 3 week look-ahead calendar. The purpose of this tool is to make sure you plan and take action for the tasks that are coming up beyond the present week. An example of a 3 week look-ahead schedule is shown in Figure 27-2.

The purpose of the 3-week look-ahead schedule is to map out the key tasks for the present work week and provide foresight into key tasks coming in the following weeks. This tool allows one to plan his or her time for key tasks of the present week and allows also to initiate early activities in advance that will support upcoming future tasks. In the example shown here, each week is started out with a staff meeting to start the priorities for the week. In the first week, the key tasks are to prepare for and present at the executive staff meeting. The week ends with preparing a presentation for the staff meeting on the following Monday of the second week. In the second week, preparations are started for the customer visit. The customer visit actually occurs in the third week. In addition, in the second week, a job review is planned with the boss. A very significant item one should not go to unprepared.

In the third week the major event is the customer visit on Wednesday the 23rd, and all preparations are complete and checked the day before. Also, the final task of the third week is to ship products on Friday the 30th. It appears to be quite a heavy workload in the third week and anything one can do to prepare ahead of time in week 1 or week 2 will greatly help reduce the workload in week 3. Therefore, the default tasks when time becomes available

Three Week Look-Ahead Schedule				
Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
7 10:00 AM Weekly Staff Meeting	8	9 Prepare for Executive Brief	10 Executive Brief on Progress	11 Prepare Presentation for Weekly Staff
14 10:00 AM Weekly Staff Meeting	15	16 Start Preparation for Customer Visit	17 10:00 AM Job Review with Boss	18 2:00 PM Team Meeting
21 10:00 AM Weekly Staff Meeting	22 Final Check on Preparations for Customer Visit	23 Customer Visit	24	25 Ship Products

FIGURE 27-2 Example of a 3-week look-ahead schedule.

in weeks 1 and 2 are to prepare for the customer visit and check how the products are coming for shipment.

The real value of the look-ahead calendar is to make sure you are aware of the present week’s tasks. When there is slack time in the present week, you can use this time to prepare for the following week’s tasks.

► **Career Tip.** Maintaining a 3-week look-ahead calendar greatly reduces stress and significantly reduces the number of unplanned surprises and panics.

Naturally, at the end of each week, the task is to update the look-ahead schedule since the present week drops off and a new third week will be added.

Notebooks. One of the best organizing tools for your career is a well-kept notebook. Even though computers are a great tool, they cannot match the ease and convenience of a good old-fashioned hand-written notebook.

A diagram for creating a great notebook is shown in Figure 27-3. Starting with the cover, make sure it is labeled with your name and how to contact you in the event you inadvertently leave it some place or lose it. Pasting on a pocket on the inside cover is a great place to store your business cards. You will always have them with you in case you should need them.

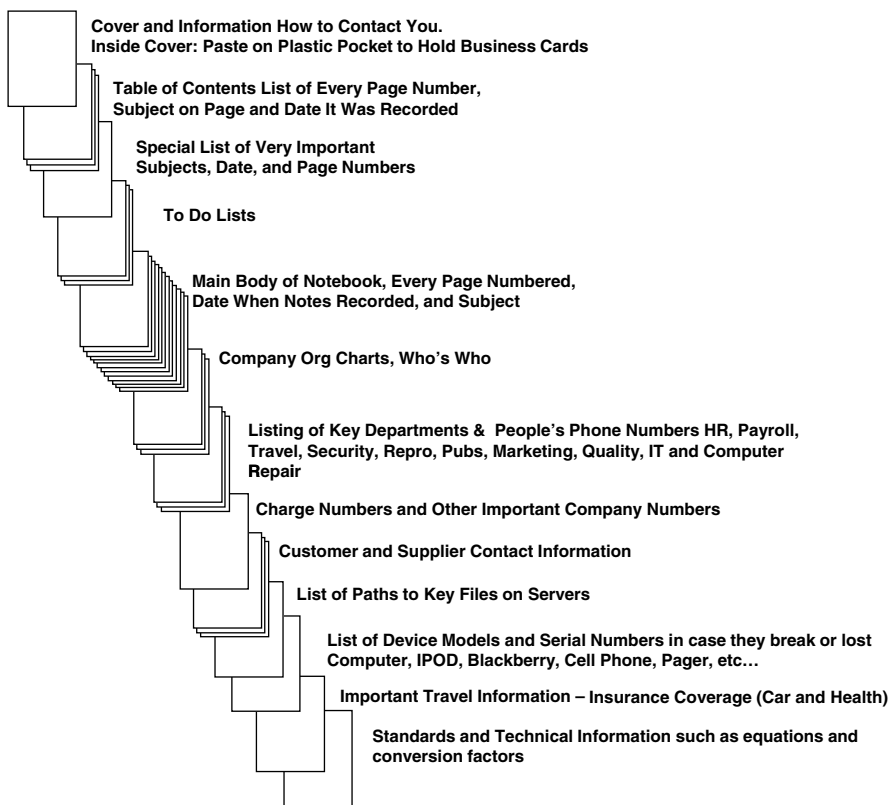


FIGURE 27-3 Tips to organizing your notebook.

Next numerically paginate every page in the notebook. Then create a table of contents that identifies a one-line listing for every page with the date, and title of the subject matter entered. Update the table of contents periodically to reflect the notes you have taken.

Following this table of contents, create a page for listing just the special items. This is a great time saver. After your notebook starts to get full, searching through a 100 or 200 line table of contents to find that special data you recorded, can take quite a bit of time. On this page enter critical or key items you know that you will be referring back to in the future.

Make the next section of your notebook, the “To Do List” area. People often create “To Do Lists” on separate sheets and then end up losing them. Keep them in your notebook and you will know where they are and stand less chance of losing them. Also having previous lists to refer back to, allows you to quickly recall when and what you did for weekly status reports.

Following the “To Do List” area is the main body of your notebook. This is where you record your meeting notes, calculations, phone notes, and all other important items.

Keep the title of the page very specific to the subject matter on the page. If you have very nebulous and vague names, when you enter all the subject titles in the table of contents, you will have no clue as to what is really recorded on the page. For instance, instead of naming a page "Phone Call," you might want to entitle it "10:00 AM Phone Call to Supplier X about Cost Impact." The more descriptive and precise you can make the title the easier it will be to determine the contents of the page.

► **Career Tip.** Sign and date each page that will support any patent applications. You will have an official record of your inventions and chronological evidence when it comes time to file for a patent.

After the main body of the notebook, toward the back, you can paste in copies of your reference data. For instance, one good section to make is a compilation of organization charts. This makes a great section to refer to when attendees at the meeting refer to different departments and people in the department.

► **Career Tip.** Be an avid collector of organization charts. These charts reveal how your company is organized and who is in charge of what. Great time savers.

Another good section to create is a listing of key departments and people's phone numbers, Human Resources, payroll, travel, security, repro, pubs, marketing, quality, IT, telecom numbers, IP addresses, and computer repair.

In most companies, the project costs and your time spent on a task are tracked by charge numbers, so a good section to create is one listing all the charge numbers you use. Your customers and supplier contact information is another good section to have in your notebook for quick reference.

With the information overload going on these days and the drive to become paperless, every document is stored on servers. The only problem is remembering the path to these key documents that you only reference once in a great while is very time consuming. It is extremely difficult to find documents when the documents are stored on servers that you do not normally access. One way to overcome this problem is having sections in the notebook where you record the path to folders containing the files. This is a list of paths to key files or folders on the servers. Storing a short-cut on your computer desktop is another method, but this can quickly lead to a much cluttered desktop, although usually it is a good back-up.

The final two sections deal with recording those very important numbers for device model numbers and serial numbers in case they break or you lose your computer, IPOD, Blackberry, cell phone, pager, or credit card. Other important information to record here is your travel information and your insurance coverage for such things as car and health

care coverage when you are traveling. This comes in handy, and I always take it with me when I travel.

Last, but not means least, is a section containing technical information on such things as industry standard, equations, and conversion factors/tables that you constantly reference. One of my favorite things I have included is the binary to hexadecimal conversion table.

DEVELOPING A DAILY ROUTINE

One of the best habits in getting organized, is developing a daily and weekly routine, and sticking to it. A daily routine to help improve your productivity is shown in Figure 27-4. You should start out each day with some quiet office time to get yourself organized. From 7:45 AM to 8:30 AM spend some quality time planning and establishing your priorities. During this time you should be scheduling the important meetings you want to happen and contacting key people you will need to interface with during the day. If you feel really ambitious, you can even make calls during morning commute to help get prepared for the day.

► **Career Tip.** Establish a daily and weekly routine and stick to it.

From 8:30 AM to 11:00 AM is your highest productivity time. This is where you want to tackle those complex, critical, or potentially dangerous activities. You are the most alert and usually have the most energy. Dig in and go for it. Eliminate all distractions during this time period and remain focused. Do not let email, phone calls, or others distract you, and waste your high productivity time. Shut your office or lab door and totally focus on what you need to get done. Some people actually block out their calendars during this time to stop other people from scheduling meetings and robbing them of this valuable time.

From 11:00 AM to 11:45 AM is wind-down for lunch time. During this time you should be bringing the morning tasks to conclusion, and returning to your office to check messages and emails. In general, you are slowing down for lunch.

Supply a lunch when scheduling a meeting between 11:00 AM and 12:00 PM. People are hungry at this time and, as a result, they usually have less patience, are more irritable, and less willing to compromise.

DEVELOPING A WEEKLY ROUTINE

Starting the week out prepared and organized is a great productivity booster. A sample of how to organize your week to make sure you start the week highly productive and finish it on a positive and strong note is shown in Figure 27-5. The days of the week are across the top of Figure 27-5 and below each day is an AM and PM box for that day.

Daily Time Line—Develop A Routine

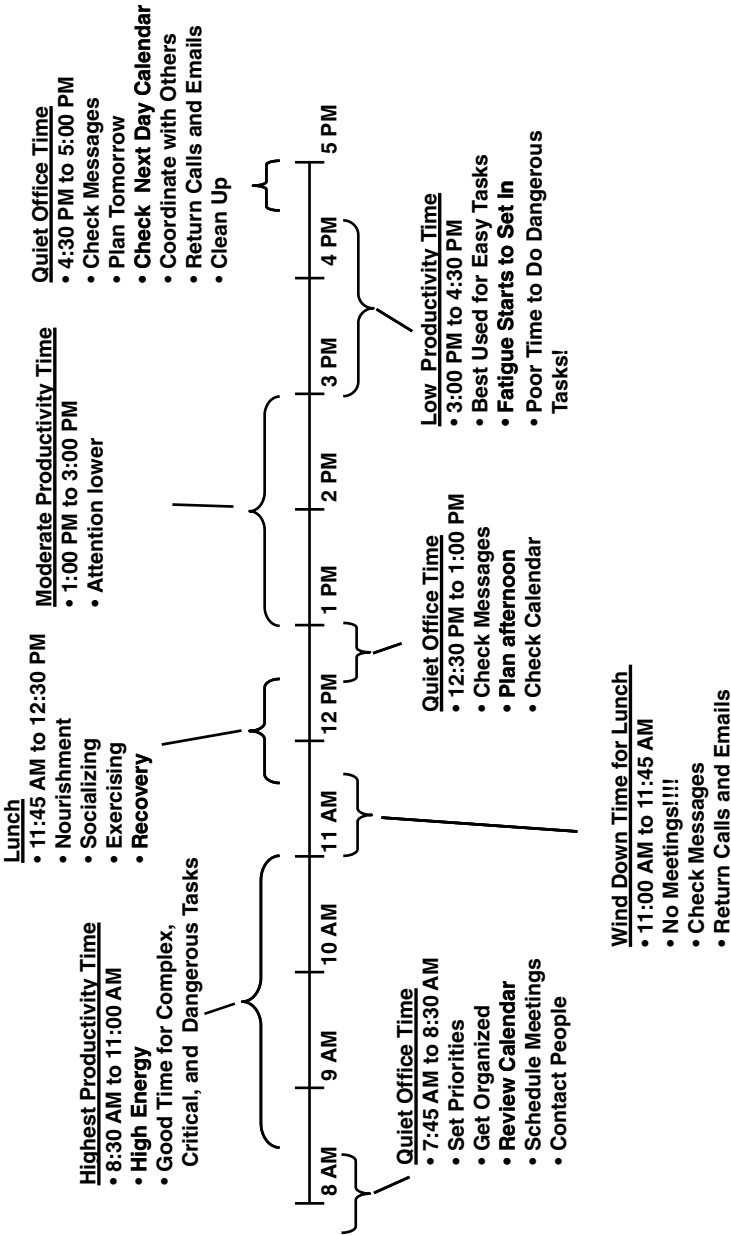


FIGURE 27-4 Sample daily routine to improve productivity.

Weekly Routines Are A Good Thing!				
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu
AM	8:00–8:30 AM Plan Your Week Set Priorities for Week		Check in with Management to Report Progress and Discuss Issues	
	9–10 AM Get Team Organized For Week			
PM	Coordinate with Management			Perform Low-Priority and Low-Value Administrative Tasks
	Write Previous Week's Accomplishments Report		Perform Low-Priority and Low-Value Administrative Tasks	Plan Next Week's Activities Clean Office and Lab Coordinate with Management

FIGURE 27-5 Sample weekly routine to follow to improve productivity.

The best way to start out the week is by getting prepared on Sunday night. By spending 45 minutes on Sunday night to review your accomplishments from the previous week, and identifying the key tasks for the coming week, you start out ahead of the game. Walking in the door on Monday morning fully prepared with a plan for the week, lets you start out significantly ahead of others.

If you cannot prepare on Sunday night, then as shown in Figure 27-5, block out 8:00 AM to 8:30 AM to get prepared and come up with a plan for the week. Shut the door to your office or spend some quiet time at your desk to organize your thoughts and plans for the coming week. Identify your goals and objectives for the week and a simple plan for each day of the week. Once you are organized and have a plan, then you can start to organize others.

If you are a team leader, Monday morning 9:00 AM to 10:00 AM is a good time to hold a team meeting and set the plan and objectives for the week. If everyone comes to the meeting as well prepared as you are, then the meeting should be short and everyone can quickly jump to their important tasks for the week. Following this routine, you and your team should be organized and have agreement on what is important and what tasks should be accomplished for the week.

Monday PM is an excellent time to coordinate with management or the boss on your plans for the week. Since you are organized, have a plan for the week and even meet with your team and obtain their status. You can then provide the boss with the latest and up-to-date status of your progress and plans for the week.

Another good activity for Monday afternoon is to write the weekly progress report summarizing the accomplishments for the previous week and your plans for the present week. There is nothing better for your career than a condensed well-written and concise progress report highlighting your significant accomplishments.

► **Career Tip.** A well-written weekly progress report highlighting significant accomplishments is a career accelerator.

Monday is usually a day of coordination and getting things set up for the week. Tuesday, on the average, is one of the most productive days of the week. By mid-week, Wednesday, a significant amount of work has occurred to warrant a quick update to the boss to let them know that things are still on track and you are making good progress. If you're not on track it is good to let them know about the problems and delays you encountered and the lack of progress. A mid-week update to the boss is a good career habit.

► **Career Tip.** Updating the boss mid-week is a good career habit.

As you approach the end of the week, you start to lose energy and these days are best for the lower priority tasks. Thursday afternoon is great for getting all those little things done that you have been putting off all week. Friday is wind down day. Friday afternoon is great for wrapping up the week's tasks and getting prepared for the next week. Closing out the week by reviewing the next week's calendar and generating a new "To Do List" is an excellent activity. Also, making a few notes on your accomplishments for the week will help in writing the progress report on Monday. Other good activities for late Friday afternoon are organizing your desk and the lab.

USING LUNCH AND AFTER-HOURS FOR RECOVERY TIME

Working through lunch time everyday is not a good thing. However using a planned lunch hour once in a while to recover and be prepared is good to incorporate in time management. Make sure you close the door to your office or go to some place quiet to work. Otherwise, people passing will stop to talk and eat up your valuable time. One quiet place most people do not realize is available is a conference room. Also staying late or arriving early in the morning is another recovery technique.

► **Career Tip.** If you constantly arrive early, work through lunch, and stay late, you are doing something wrong. Get organized and manage your time better.

If you remember back to your school years we all had times where it was necessary to put in extra hours. Work is no different, but if you are doing this constantly, something is wrong. You need to take control, get organized, and manage your time better.

SAVE TIME BY ORGANIZING YOUR COMPUTER AND SERVER FILES

Most people just start creating folders to hold files randomly and place them on the server or their computer without any thought on how to best organize them for quick and easy retrieval. The modern method of file by piling up the folders is now done electronically. Do not keep storing folders and files on your computer desktop until the entire desktop screen is covered with folder and file icons. Have a system and organize your files for easy retrieval.

► **Career Tip.** File by pile does not work.

The real challenge to storing files is setting up a structure that will allow you to quickly retrieve them. I have seen several different types of file structures. The first one is where you only have one or two folders and store all your documents in just these two folders. This will work until you have accumulated over 20 or 30 files in each folder, and soon you end up spending more time looking through all the files.

On the other side of the spectrum, one can create a folder that contains only two or three files. This method causes one to create folder after folder within folders. Using this method when you have to file 40 or more files results in paths to files being 6 to 8 folders deep. One wrong click along the way and you are possibly hopelessly lost and again wasting more time.

The best method I have observed is holding the number of files in a folder to about 10. This is a good number since, on most computers, 10–15 different files in a list will easily all fit on the screen at once. The next thing is limit the folders in any given folder to about 10 folders. This means that you can store approximately 100 files only 2 folders deep. Or you can get to any file with just two clicks of the mouse.

Working a major program with several hundred engineers, all setting up folders and storing files in different manners based on their personal preferences, is a recipe for disaster. Without someone assisting you to find where the files have been stored you can waste hours a day just looking for files.

Computers were made to shorten or reduce our workload and improve productivity. Think about your productivity and how you store files. Can you reduce the amount of time wasted looking for files by simply organizing your files on the computer better?

HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN TECHNICAL LIBRARY

With the massive amounts of information we now have at our fingertips, it becomes practical to assemble a very comprehensive technical library. There are two very easy ways to do this. One is to set up your search engines for key

technical topics and then store the results. The search engines will quickly give you access to all that is written on special subjects. With the results stored, you are just a few clicks away from massive amounts of technical data to help you with your work.

Another method of assembling a technical library is to review trade journals. Oftentimes, trade journals or trade magazines will run articles describing the state of the art on various technical subject areas. These articles are written to bring the reader up to speed quickly and often have references to the key websites in the article, if perhaps, the reader wants more information.

If you simply tear out the articles and place them in a 3-ring binder each month, after a couple of years you will have an unbelievable collection of technical articles. Now the real interesting aspect is that most trade journals are offered free if you qualify. Your own technical library is available to you free. By simply doing a search for trade magazines and the subject matter of interest you can quickly locate their website. Fill out the information they request and you will be on their mailing list within minutes.

I personally receive 30–40 free journals a month in various subject areas related to my work. My collections of technical articles contain over 200+ articles. When I or a coworker needs information, I can retrieve the latest information in minutes. With this technical library so quickly at hand, I have become quite popular with my coworkers at times, who are desperate to quickly find information.

SUMMARY

The ability to organize your work and manage your time is critical to career advancement. You will receive many dividends by changing bad habits into good habits when it comes to organization and time management. Simply audit and record where you spend your time for a week. Identify the time wasters and eliminate them. Utilize a “To Do List” to help you focus on the most critical tasks at hand. Prioritize your task list and then schedule the tasks and actions for the week.

Watch out for the slow and time wasting methods of communication: text messaging and email. Pick up the phone and call a person. Utilize the highest bandwidth means of communication whenever possible.

Next, develop a daily and weekly routine where you start each day and organized for success. Start out each week with a game plan week. Organize your weekly activities and protect your valuable high-productivity time.

Create a 3 week look-ahead calendar, so you are not surprised and caught off guard quickly approaching critical tasks. Get notes by organized and properly recorded in a notebook. Arrange your notes so it's easy to retrieve important information in less time. Organize your files on your computer and servers so information can easily be recalled.

► **Career Tip.** Being organized allows you to accomplish more work in less time and for less effort. This is career advancement.

Here are some great words to use an Internet search for if you are interested in learning more in this area:

Get Organized
Organized for Life
Time Management
Productivity Improvement
Time Savers

Have you identified any career actions you want to take as a result of reading this chapter? If so, please make sure to capture these ideas before you forget by recording them in the notes section at the back of the book.

ASSIGNMENTS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 1 Review the time wasters and determine how many you are guilty of doing.
- 2 How and what are you going to change to be better organized?
- 3 Map out how you presently spend each day. Can you improve it?
- 4 Audit your computer logs and see if you are guilty of over-text messaging and emailing. (Compute what your total time per day doing these is if you assume 3 minutes per email and 5 minutes per text message?)
- 5 What “To Do List” can you create right now?
- 6 How big is your technical library?

REFERENCES

1. Gleeson, Kerry, *The Personal Efficiency Program, How To Get Organized To Do More Work In Less Time*, John Wiley & Sons, 2003.
2. Aslett, Don, *The Office Clutter Cure: Get Organized, Get Results*, Adams Media, 2005.
3. The National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO), <http://www.napo.net/>.
4. Franklin Covey Store — Planners, Calendars, Daily Planners and Personal Organizers, <http://shopping.franklinplanner.com/>.
5. Burka, Jane B., and Yuen, Lenora M., *Procrastination: Why You Do It, What to Do About It*, Da Capo Press, 1988.
6. Institute of Attention Deficit Disorder, www.add.org.
7. Covey, Stephen R., *First Things First*, Simon & Schuster, 1994.
8. Covey, Stephen R., *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Free Press, 1990.