PRIORITIZING

TO-DO LISTS

Guide to Getting the Right Work Done

DELEGATING

MEETING DEADLINES

Harvard Business Review

Harvard Business Review

Struggling to get to—much less complete—your most important work? Leaving your job most days exhausted but with little to show for it? Overwhelmed by back-to-back meetings and endless e-mails? Plagued by procrastination?

Use this guide to learn how to accomplish more of the right work more efficiently by:

- **eliminating endless "urgent" tasks**
- **delegating effectively**
- **preventing procrastination**
- **writing to-do lists that work**
- **renewing your energy with simple rituals**

Guide to Getting the Right Work Done

How to Stay Focused on What's Important

Don't be consumed by endless "urgent" tasks. You'll have no time left for important work.

by Gina Trapani

Founding editor of the personal productivity blog, Lifehacker.com.

Find more content on personal productivity at hbr.org

Busy people have two options when they decide how their workdays will go: they can choose to be *reactive* to urgent demands on their time, or *proactive* about focusing on what they decide is important. The only way to actually get things done is to mitigate the urgent to work on the important.

Let's differentiate between what I call urgent and what I call important.

Urgent tasks include things like:

- That frantic e-mail that needs a response RIGHT NOW
- A sudden request that seems like it'll only take two minutes but often ends up taking an hour
- A report you've got to write up before a meeting

More often than not "urgent" is:

- Putting out fires
- Busywork
- Tasks that you'd rather do first because they're less intimidating than your current project list
- Usually short-term

We're drawn to urgent tasks because they keep us busy and make us feel needed. (If we're busy people, we must be important people.)

But dealing with a constant stream of urgent tasks leaves you wrung out at the end of the day, wondering where all the time went, staring at the actual work you've got to complete.

On the flip side, important work:

- Moves you and your business toward your goals
- Doesn't give us that same shot of adrenaline that the urgent requests do
- Can involve thinking out long-term goals, being honest about where you are and where you want to be
- Can be plain hard work that feels boring and tedious

On a personal level, important work may include making time to get to the gym every day. On a business level, important work may be devising your yearly plan, breaking it down into quarterly and monthly deliverables, and evaluating your current performance against last year's plan. (Doesn't the mere thought of going to the gym and deciding on this year's goals make you want to check your e-mail? Still, that's the work that will help you meet your goals.)

If your workplace encourages that frantic vibe of headless-chicken running and constant urgency, it can feel impossible to focus on what's important versus what's urgent. Still, an awareness of the difference and a few simple techniques can help.

Choose three important tasks to complete each day. Write them down on a slip of paper, and keep it visible on your desk. When you have a moment, instead of checking your e-mail, look at the slip of paper and work on an item. Keep the list to just three tasks, and see how many you can complete.

Turn off your e-mail. Shut down Outlook, turn off new e-mail notifications on your BlackBerry, and do whatever else you have to do to muffle the interruption of e-mail. When you decide to work on one of your important tasks, give yourself at least an hour at least of uninterrupted time to complete it. If the Web is too much of a temptation, disconnect your computer from the Internet for that hour.

Set up a weekly 20-minute meeting with yourself. Put it on your calendar, and don't book over it—treat it with the same respect you'd treat a meeting with your boss. If you don't have an office door or you work in an open area that's constantly busy, book a

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What people are saying on HBR.org

"I started off with the three important tasks daily, but I now write down one, which contributes to a key goal, and almost always achieve it." —posted by Cheryl

"Maybe decide, with your team, that one hour a day (9 AM to 10 AM? 1 PM to 2 PM?) is interruption and meeting-free unless someone is dying."
—posted by Gina Trapani

"I also have a "do not disturb unless it can't wait an hour" block every morning, which has taken awhile for my team to get used to but makes a huge difference in how much of the important I can achieve." —posted by Cheryl

"If I have a deadline for an article, I create a green Deadline box at the top of the day using an All-Day-Event appointment. And at the beginning of every week, I look at my task list and, for tasks requiring focus that have looming deadlines, I drag them into the calendar and create a Work Block (blue) appointment." —posted by Janet

"In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven Covey divides matters into four quadrants, labeled 'Urgent but Not Important,' 'Important but Not Urgent,' 'Urgent and Important,' and 'Not Important and Not Urgent.'" —posted by Tim

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conference room for your meeting. Go there to be alone. Bring your project list, to-do list, and calendar, and spend the time reviewing what you finished in the past week, and what you want to get done next week. This is a great time to choose your daily three important tasks. Productivity author David Allen refers to this as the "weekly review," and it's one of the most effective ways to be mindful of how you're spending your time.

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blogs.hbr.org

The Worth-Your-Time Test

by Peter Bregman

CEO of Bregman Partners, a global leadership development and

change management firm.

Read more by Bregman at blogs.hbr.org/bregman

Nate Eisman* recently started working for a large consulting firm after many years as an independent consultant. He called me a few days ago for some advice.

"I'm wasting a tremendous amount of time," he complained to me. "I'm in meetings all day. The only way I can get any real work done is by coming in super early and staying super late."

Nate had gone from an organization of one to an organization of several thousand and was drowning in the time suck of collaboration. He is not alone.

I recently surveyed the top 400 leaders of a 120,000-person company and found that close to 95% of them—that's 380 out of 400—pointed to three things that wasted their time the most: unnecessary meetings, unimportant e-mails, and protracted PowerPoints.

Working with people takes time. And different people have different priorities. So someone may need your perspective on an issue that's important to him but not to you. Still, if he's a colleague, it's important to help. And often we want to help.

On the other hand, we've all felt Nate's pain. The question is: How can we spend time where we add the most value and let go of the rest?

We need a way to quickly and confidently identify and reduce our extraneous commitments, to know for sure whether we need to deal with something or avoid it, and to manage our own desire to be available to others. I propose a little test that every commitment should pass before you agree to it. When someone comes to you with a request, ask yourself three questions:

   1. Am I the right person?

   2. Is this the right time?

   3. Do I have enough information?

If the request fails the test—if the answer to any one of these questions is "no"—then don't do

it. Pass it to someone else (the right person), schedule it for another time (the right time), or wait until you have the information you need (either you or someone else needs to get it).

I've written before about how to avoid being interrupted. But sometimes it's impossible or inappropriate to wall yourself off completely. For example, what if your boss is the person who interrupts you? Or what if you're on vacation and an important client reaches out with a time-sensitive and crucial question?

The three test questions offer a clear, easy, and consistent way of knowing when to respond. Asking them can help us resist the temptation to respond to everything.

If your boss asks you to do something and her request fails the test, it's not just okay—it's useful—to push back or redirect so the work is completed productively. It's not helpful to you, your boss, or your organization if you waste your time on the wrong work.

That's the irony. We try to be available because we want to be helpful. And yet being overwhelmed with tasks—especially those we consider to be a waste of our time—is exactly what will make us unhelpful.

When we get a meeting request that doesn't pass the test, we should decline it. When we're cc'd on an e-mail that doesn't pass the test, we need to ask the sender to remove us from the list before we get caught up in the flurry of "Reply All" responses. And a 50-page presentation needs to pass the test before we read it—and even then, it's worth an e-mail asking which are the critical pages to review.

A few weeks after sharing the three questions with Nate, I called him at his office at around 6 PM to see how it was going. I guess it was going well because I never reached him. He had already gone home.

*Some details changed to protect privacy

What people are saying on HBR.org

"The trap lies in this current demand for full collaboration. Doing the right thing, as you explained, would make us all more productive but at the same time it could make us seem uncooperative…. My advice is to explain very clearly my reasoning for not accepting the meeting/task and to make sure whoever I'm talking to understands that it's just this time. She/he should appreciate the logic and keep me in the e-mail loop." —posted by Kari

"Some meetings that don't pass your three questions test could be a great way to build up knowledge and broaden/deepen your understanding of the business by pre-meeting research in order to be a helpful participant. If my answer to the third question does not result in this caveat, and I don't stand to lose 'political capital' by not attending, I'd stay away without any qualms." —posted by Sunny

"So, if I could suggest a supplement to your 'worth-your-time test'—the 'worth-their-time test.' Before **you** ask someone else to participate in an activity or even cc them on an e-mail, ask yourself, 'Would I pay that person, out of my budget, the hourly cost of their salary to attend this meeting/do this activity?' It's much easier to make smart decisions when you know that Susie would cost $550/hr to be in that meeting and Johnny would run $400/hr." —posted by Marc

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Management Time: Who's Got the Monkey?

The Idea in Brief

You're racing down the hall. An employee stops you and says, "We've got a problem." You assume you should get involved but can't make an on-the-spot decision. You say, "Let me think about it."

You've just allowed a "monkey" to leap from your subordinate's back to yours. *You're* now working for your *subordinate*. Take on enough monkeys, and you won't have time to handle your *real* job: fulfilling your own boss's mandates and helping peers generate business results.

How to avoid accumulating monkeys? Develop your subordinates' initiative, say Oncken and Wass. For example, when an employee tries to hand you a problem, clarify whether he should: recommend and implement a solution, take action then brief you immediately, or act and report the outcome at a regular update.

When you encourage employees to handle their own monkeys, they acquire new skills—and you liberate time to do your own job.

The Idea in Practice

How to return monkeys to their proper owners? Oncken, Wass, and Steven Covey (in an afterword to this classic article) offer these suggestions:

MAKE APPOINTMENTS TO DEAL WITH MONKEYS

Avoid discussing any monkey on an ad hoc basis—for example, when you pass a subordinate in the hallway. You won't convey the proper seriousness. Instead, schedule an appointment to discuss the issue.

SPECIFY LEVEL OF INITIATIVE

Your employees can exercise five levels of initiative in handling on-the-job problems. From lowest to highest, the levels are:

1. Wait until told what to do.

2. Ask what to do.

3. Recommend an action, then with your approval, implement it.

4. Take independent action but advise you at once.

5. Take independent action and update you through routine procedure.

When an employee brings a problem to you, outlaw use of level 1 or 2. Agree on and assign level 3, 4, or 5 to the monkey. Take no more than 15 minutes to discuss the problem.

AGREE ON A STATUS UPDATE

After deciding how to proceed, agree on a time and place when the employee will give you a progress report.

EXAMINE YOUR OWN MOTIVES

Some managers secretly worry that if they encourage subordinates to take more initiative, they'll appear less strong, more vulnerable, and less useful. Instead, cultivate an inward sense of security that frees you to relinquish direct control and support employees' growth.

DEVELOP EMPLOYEES' SKILLS

Employees try to hand off monkeys when they lack the desire or ability to handle them. Help employees develop needed problem-solving skills. It's initially more time consuming than tackling problems yourself—but it saves time in the long run.

FOSTER TRUST

Developing employees' initiative requires a trusting relationship between you and your subordinates. If they're afraid of failing, they'll keep bringing their monkeys to you rather than working to solve their own problems. To promote trust, reassure them it's safe to make mistakes.

Management Time: Who's Got the Monkey?

The burdens of subordinates always seem to end up on the manager's back. Here's how to get rid of them.

by William Oncken, Jr., and Donald L. Wass

This article was originally published in the November–December 1974 issue of HBR and has been one of the publication's two best-selling reprints ever. For its reissue as a Classic, the *Harvard Business Review* asked Stephen R. Covey to provide a commentary.

Why is it that managers are typically running out of time while their subordinates are typically running out of work? Here we shall explore the meaning of management time as it relates to the interaction between managers and their bosses, their peers, and their subordinates.

Specifically, we shall deal with three kinds of management time:

Boss-imposed time—used to accomplish those activities that the boss requires and that the manager cannot disregard without direct and swift penalty.

System-imposed time—used to accommodate requests from peers for active support. Neglecting these requests will also result in penalties, though not always as direct or swift.

Self-imposed time—used to do those things that the manager originates or agrees to do. A certain portion of this kind of time, however, will be taken by subordinates and is called *subordinate-imposed time*. The remaining portion will be the manager's own and is called *discretionary time*. Self-imposed time is not subject to penalty since neither the boss nor the system can discipline the manager for not doing what they didn't know he had intended to do in the first place.

To accommodate those demands, managers need to control the timing and the content of what

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Donald L. Wass was president of the William Oncken Company of Texas when the article first appeared. He now heads the Dallas–Fort Worth region of The Executive Committee (TEC), an international organization for presidents and CEOs.

they do. Since what their bosses and the system impose on them are subject to penalty, managers cannot tamper with those requirements. Thus their self-imposed time becomes their major area of concern.

Managers should try to increase the discretionary component of their self-imposed time by minimizing or doing away with the subordinate component. They will then use the added increment to get better control over their boss-imposed and system-imposed activities. Most managers spend much more time dealing with subordinates' problems than they even faintly realize. Hence we shall use the monkey-on-the-back metaphor to examine how subordinate-imposed time comes into being and what the superior can do about it.

Where Is the Monkey?

Let us imagine that a manager is walking down the hall and that he notices one of his subordinates, Jones, coming his way. When the two meet, Jones greets the manager with, "Good morning. By the way, we've got a problem. You see…." As Jones continues, the manager recognizes in this problem the two characteristics common to all the problems his subordinates gratuitously bring to his attention. Namely, the manager knows (a) enough to get involved, but (b) not enough to make the on-the-spot decision expected of him. Eventually, the manager says, "So glad you brought this up. I'm in a rush right now. Meanwhile, let me think about it, and I'll let you know." Then he and Jones part company.

Let us analyze what just happened. Before the two of them met, on whose back was the "monkey"? The subordinate's. After they parted, on whose back was it? The manager's. Subordinate-imposed time begins the moment a monkey successfully leaps from the back of a subordinate to the back of his or her superior and does not end until the monkey is returned to its proper owner for care and feeding. In accepting the monkey, the manager has voluntarily assumed a position subordinate to his subordinate. That is, he has allowed Jones to make him her subordinate by doing two things a subordinate is generally expected to do for a boss—the manager has accepted a responsibility from his subordinate, and the manager has promised her a progress report.

The subordinate, to make sure the manager

does not miss this point, will later stick her head in the manager's office and cheerily query, "How's it coming?" (This is called supervision.)

Or let us imagine in concluding a conference with Johnson, another subordinate, the manager's parting words are, "Fine. Send me a memo on that."

Let us analyze this one. The monkey is now on the subordinate's back because the next move is his, but it is poised for a leap. Watch that monkey. Johnson dutifully writes the requested memo and drops it in his out-basket. Shortly thereafter, the manager plucks it from his in-basket and reads it. Whose move is it now? The manager's. If he does not make that move soon, he will get a follow-up memo from the subordinate. (This is another form of supervision.) The longer the manager delays, the more frustrated the subordinate will become (he'll be spinning his wheels) and the more guilty the manager will feel (his backlog of subordinate-imposed time will be mounting).

Or suppose once again that at a meeting with a third subordinate, Smith, the manager agrees to provide all the necessary backing for a public relations proposal he has just asked Smith to develop. The manager's parting words to her are, "Just let me know how I can help."

Now let us analyze this. Again the monkey is initially on the subordinate's back. But for how long? Smith realizes that she cannot let the manager "know" until her proposal has the manager's approval. And from experience, she also realizes that her proposal will likely be sitting in the manager's briefcase for weeks before he eventually gets to it. Who's really got the monkey? Who will be checking up on whom? Wheel spinning and bottlenecking are well on their way again.

A fourth subordinate, Reed, has just been transferred from another part of the company so that he can launch and eventually manage a newly created business venture. The manager has said they should get together soon to hammer out a set of objectives for the new job, adding, "I will draw up an initial draft for discussion with you."

Let us analyze this one, too. The subordinate has the new job (by formal assignment) and the full responsibility (by formal delegation), but the manager has the next move. Until he

Making Time for Gorillas

by Stephen R. Covey

When Bill Oncken wrote this article in 1974, managers were in a terrible bind. They were desperate for a way to free up their time, but command and control was the status quo. Managers felt they weren't allowed to empower their subordinates to make decisions. Too dangerous. Too risky. That's why Oncken's message—give the monkey back to its rightful owner—involved a critically important paradigm shift. Many managers working today owe him a debt of gratitude.

It is something of an understatement, however, to observe that much has changed since Oncken's radical recommendation. Command and control as a management philosophy is all but dead, and "empowerment" is the word of the day in most organizations trying to thrive in global, intensely competitive markets. But command and control stubbornly remains a common practice. Management thinkers and executives have discovered in the last decade that bosses cannot just give a monkey back to their subordinates and then merrily get on with their own business. Empowering subordinates is hard and complicated work.

The reason: when you give problems back to subordinates to solve themselves, you have to be sure that they have both the desire and the ability to do so. As every executive knows, that isn't always the case. Enter a whole new set of problems. Empowerment often means you have to develop people, which is initially much more time consuming than solving the problem on your own.

Just as important, empowerment can only thrive when the whole organization buys into it—when formal systems and the informal culture support it. Managers need to be rewarded for delegating decisions and developing people. Otherwise, the degree of real empowerment in an organization will vary according to the beliefs and practices of individual managers.

But perhaps the most important lesson about empowerment is that effective delegation—the kind Oncken advocated—depends on a trusting relationship between a manager and his subordinate. Oncken's message may have been ahead of his time, but what he suggested was still a fairly dictatorial solution. He basically told bosses, "Give the problem back!" Today, we know that this approach by itself is too authoritarian. To delegate effectively, executives need to establish a running dialogue with subordinates. They need to establish a partnership. After all, if subordinates are afraid of failing in front of their boss, they'll keep coming back for help rather than truly take initiative.

Oncken's article also doesn't address an aspect of delegation that has greatly interested me during the past two decades—that many managers are actually *eager* to take on their subordinates' monkeys. Nearly all the managers I talk with agree that their people are underutilized in their present jobs. But even some of the most successful, seemingly self-assured executives have talked about how hard it is to give up control to their subordinates.

I've come to attribute that eagerness for control to a common, deep-seated belief that rewards in life are scarce and fragile. Whether they learn it from their family, school, or athletics, many people establish an identity by comparing themselves with others. When they see others gain power, information, money, or recognition, for instance, they experience what the psychologist Abraham Maslow called "a feeling of deficiency"—a sense that something is being taken from them. That makes it hard for them to be genuinely happy about the success of others—even of their loved ones. Oncken implies that managers can easily give back or refuse monkeys, but many managers may subconsciously fear that a subordinate taking the initiative will make them appear a little less strong and a little more vulnerable.

How, then, do managers develop the inward security, the mentality of "abundance," that would enable them to relinquish control and seek the growth and development of those around them? The work I've done with numerous organizations suggests that managers who live with integrity according to a principle-based value system are most likely to sustain an empowering style of leadership.

Given the times in which he wrote, it was no wonder that Oncken's message resonated with managers. But it was reinforced by Oncken's wonderful gift for storytelling. I got to know Oncken on the speaker's circuit in the 1970s, and I was always impressed by how he dramatized his ideas in colorful detail. Like the Dilbert comic strip, Oncken had a tongue-in-cheek style that got to the core of managers' frustrations and made them want to take back control of their time. And the monkey on your back wasn't just a metaphor for Oncken—it was his personal symbol. I saw him several times walking through airports with a stuffed monkey on his shoulder.

I'm not surprised that his article is one of the two best-selling HBR articles ever. Even with all we know about empowerment, its vivid message is even more important and relevant now than it was 25 years ago. Indeed, Oncken's insight is a basis for my own work on time management, in which I have people categorize their activities according to urgency and importance. I've heard from executives again and again that half or more of their time is spent on matters that are urgent but not important. They're trapped in an endless cycle of dealing with other people's monkeys, yet they're reluctant to help those people take their own initiative. As a result, they're often too busy to spend the time they need on the real gorillas in their organization. Oncken's article remains a powerful wake-up call for managers who need to delegate effectively.

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makes it, he will have the monkey, and the subordinate will be immobilized.

Why does all of this happen? Because in each instance the manager and the subordinate assume at the outset, wittingly or unwittingly, that the matter under consideration is a joint problem. The monkey in each case begins its career astride both their backs. All it has to do is move the wrong leg, and—presto!—the subordinate deftly disappears. The manager is thus left with another acquisition for his menagerie. Of course, monkeys can be trained not to move the wrong leg. But it is easier to prevent them from straddling backs in the first place.

Who Is Working for Whom?

Let us suppose that these same four subordinates are so thoughtful and considerate of their superior's time that they take pains to allow no more than three monkeys to leap from each of their backs to his in any one day. In a five-day week, the manager will have picked up 60 screaming monkeys—far too many to do anything about them individually. So he spends his subordinate-imposed time juggling his "priorities."

Late Friday afternoon, the manager is in his office with the door closed for privacy so he can contemplate the situation, while his subordinates are waiting outside to get their last chance before the weekend to remind him that he will have to "fish or cut bait." Imagine what they are saying to one another about the manager as they wait: "What a bottleneck. He just can't make up his mind. How anyone ever got that high up in our company without being able to make a decision we'll never know."

Worst of all, the reason the manager cannot make any of these "next moves" is that his time is almost entirely eaten up by meeting his own boss-imposed and system-imposed requirements. To control those tasks, he needs discretionary time that is in turn denied him when he is preoccupied with all these monkeys. The manager is caught in a vicious circle. But time is a-wasting (an understatement). The manager calls his secretary on the intercom and instructs her to tell his subordinates that he won't be able to see them until Monday morning. At 7 PM, he drives home, intending with firm resolve to return to the office tomorrow to get caught up over the weekend. He returns bright and early the next day only to see, on the

nearest green of the golf course across from his office window, a foursome. Guess who?

That does it. He now knows who is really working for whom. Moreover, he now sees that if he actually accomplishes during this weekend what he came to accomplish, his subordinates' morale will go up so sharply that they will each raise the limit on the number of monkeys they will let jump from their backs to his. In short, he now sees, with the clarity of a revelation on a mountaintop, that the more he gets caught up, the more he will fall behind.

He leaves the office with the speed of a person running away from a plague. His plan? To get caught up on something else he hasn't had time for in years: a weekend with his family. (This is one of the many varieties of discretionary time.)

Sunday night he enjoys ten hours of sweet, untroubled slumber, because he has clear-cut plans for Monday. He is going to get rid of his subordinate-imposed time. In exchange, he will get an equal amount of discretionary time, part of which he will spend with his subordinates to make sure that they learn the difficult but rewarding managerial art called "The Care and Feeding of Monkeys."

The manager will also have plenty of discretionary time left over for getting control of the timing and the content not only of his boss-imposed time but also of his system-imposed time. It may take months, but compared with the way things have been, the rewards will be enormous. His ultimate objective is to manage his time.

Getting Rid of the Monkeys

The manager returns to the office Monday morning just late enough so that his four subordinates have collected outside his office waiting to see him about their monkeys. He calls them in one by one. The purpose of each interview is to take a monkey, place it on the desk between them, and figure out together how the next move might conceivably be the subordinate's. For certain monkeys, that will take some doing. The subordinate's next move may be so elusive that the manager may decide—just for now—merely to let the monkey sleep on the subordinate's back overnight and have him or her return with it at an appointed time the next morning to continue the joint quest for a more substantive move by

> **The manager can now see, with the clarity of a revelation on a mountaintop, that the more he gets caught up, the more he will fall behind.**

the subordinate. (Monkeys sleep just as soundly overnight on subordinates' backs as they do on superiors'.)

As each subordinate leaves the office, the manager is rewarded by the sight of a monkey leaving his office on the subordinate's back. For the next 24 hours, the subordinate will not be waiting for the manager; instead, the manager will be waiting for the subordinate.

Later, as if to remind himself that there is no law against his engaging in a constructive exercise in the interim, the manager strolls by the subordinate's office, sticks his head in the door, and cheerily asks, "How's it coming?" (The time consumed in doing this is discretionary for the manager and boss imposed for the subordinate.)

When the subordinate (with the monkey on his or her back) and the manager meet at the appointed hour the next day, the manager explains the ground rules in words to this effect:

"At no time while I am helping you with this or any other problem will your problem become my problem. The instant your problem becomes mine, you no longer have a problem. I cannot help a person who hasn't got a problem.

"When this meeting is over, the problem will leave this office exactly the way it came in—on your back. You may ask my help at any appointed time, and we will make a joint determination of what the next move will be and which of us will make it.

"In those rare instances where the next move turns out to be mine, you and I will determine it together. I will not make any move alone."

The manager follows this same line of thought with each subordinate until about 11 AM, when he realizes that he doesn't have to close his door. His monkeys are gone. They will return—but by appointment only. His calendar will assure this.

Transferring the Initiative

What we have been driving at in this monkey-on-the-back analogy is that managers can transfer initiative back to their subordinates and keep it there. We have tried to highlight a truism as obvious as it is subtle: namely, before developing initiative in subordinates, the manager must see to it that they have the initiative. Once the manager takes it back, he will no longer have it and he can kiss his discretionary time good-bye. It will all revert to subordinate-imposed time.

Nor can the manager and the subordinate effectively have the same initiative at the same time. The opener, "Boss, we've got a problem," implies this duality and represents, as noted earlier, a monkey astride two backs, which is a very bad way to start a monkey on its career. Let us, therefore, take a few moments to examine what we call "The Anatomy of Managerial Initiative."

There are five degrees of initiative that the manager can exercise in relation to the boss and to the system:

1. wait until told (lowest initiative);
2. ask what to do;
3. recommend, then take resulting action;
4. act, but advise at once;
5. and act on own, then routinely report (highest initiative).

Clearly, the manager should be professional enough not to indulge in initiatives 1 and 2 in relation either to the boss or to the system. A manager who uses initiative 1 has no control over either the timing or the content of boss-imposed or system-imposed time and thereby forfeits any right to complain about what he or she is told to do or when. The manager who uses initiative 2 has control over the timing but not over the content. Initiatives 3, 4, and 5 leave the manager in control of both, with the greatest amount of control being exercised at level 5.

In relation to subordinates, the manager's job is twofold. First, to outlaw the use of initiatives 1 and 2, thus giving subordinates no choice but to learn and master "Completed Staff Work." Second, to see that for each problem leaving his or her office there is an agreed-upon level of initiative assigned to it, in addition to an agreed-upon time and place for the next manager-subordinate conference. The latter should be duly noted on the manager's calendar.

The Care and Feeding of Monkeys

To further clarify our analogy between the monkey on the back and the processes of assigning and controlling, we shall refer briefly to the manager's appointment schedule, which

calls for five hard-and-fast rules governing the "Care and Feeding of Monkeys." (Violation of these rules will cost discretionary time.)

Rule 1. Monkeys should be fed or shot. Otherwise, they will starve to death, and the manager will waste valuable time on postmortems or attempted resurrections.

Rule 2. The monkey population should be kept below the maximum number the manager has time to feed. Subordinates will find time to work as many monkeys as he or she finds time to feed, but no more. It shouldn't take more than five to 15 minutes to feed a properly maintained monkey.

Rule 3. Monkeys should be fed by appointment only. The manager should not have to hunt down starving monkeys and feed them on a catch-as-catch-can basis.

Rule 4. Monkeys should be fed face-to-face or by telephone, but never by mail. (Remember— with mail, the next move will be the manager's.) Documentation may add to the feeding process, but it cannot take the place of feeding.

Rule 5. Every monkey should have an assigned next feeding time and degree of initiative. These may be revised at any time by mutual consent but never allowed to become vague or indefinite. Otherwise, the monkey will either starve to death or wind up on the manager's back.

> In accepting the monkey, the manager has voluntarily assumed a position subordinate to his subordinate.

...

"Get control over the timing and content of what you do" is appropriate advice for managing time. The first order of business is for the manager to enlarge his or her discretionary time by eliminating subordinate-imposed time. The second is for the manager to use a portion of this newfound discretionary time to see to it that each subordinate actually has the initiative and applies it. The third is for the manager to use another portion of the increased discretionary time to get and keep control of the timing and content of both boss-imposed and system-imposed time. All these steps will increase the manager's leverage and enable the value of each hour spent in managing management time to multiply without theoretical limit.

Further Reading

ARTICLES

What Effective General Managers Really Do
by John P. Kotter
Harvard Business Review
March–April 1999
Product no. 3707

A gap has existed between the conventional wisdom about how managers work and the actual behavior of effective managers. Kotter explains that managers who limit their interactions to orderly, focused meetings actually shut themselves off from vital information and relationships. Seemingly wasteful activities like chatting in hallways and having impromptu meetings can, in fact, prove quite efficient when managers have an agenda on which they are always working. Unplanned encounters thus provide an opportunity to advance the agenda.

The Manager: Master and Servant of Power
by Fernando Bartolomé and André Laurent
Harvard Business Review
November–December 1986
Product no. 4215

When workers' commitment to their jobs wanes, or when they allow resentments toward bosses, direct reports, and others to fester, the reason isn't that bosses are power-hungry or direct reports rebellious. Conflict and misunderstanding usually arise because of power dynamics. Many managers can't see how their behavior toward direct reports and superiors alike is distorted by hierarchical differences. The result can be a lessening of trust between manager and subordinate, which inhibits open communication and risk taking.

Pygmalion in Management
by J. Sterling Livingston
Harvard Business Review
September–October 1988
Product no. 88509

Further substantiation of the manager's crucial role in developing initiative. Experiments and studies have demonstrated that managers' expectations have a direct impact on their direct reports' productivity—the "Pygmalion effect." High expectations on the part of managers lead to the development of a "superstaff." Low expectations result in damaged egos and poor performers. The difference in the behavior of these two groups is a direct result of how each of them is treated by the manager.

BOOK

Harvard Business Review on Managing People
Harvard Business School Press
1999
Product no. 9075

The articles in this collection suggest ways to build organizations with judicious and effective systems for managing people. Although each article presents a thought-provoking perspective on some aspect of people management, two are especially applicable to the subject of time spent managing others. Writing on empowerment, Chris Argyris warns that using it as the ultimate criterion for success in an organization may cover up deeper problems that need to be addressed. Jay Conger argues that persuasion, defined as learning from others and negotiating a shared solution, is gaining importance as a management tool in post-command-and control organizations.

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An 18-Minute Plan for Managing Your Day

by Peter Bregman

CEO of Bregman Partners, a global leadership development and

change management firm.

Read more by Bregman at blogs.hbr.org/bregman

I began my day yesterday with the best intentions. I walked into my office in the morning with a vague sense of what I wanted to accomplish. Then I sat down, turned on my computer, and checked my e-mail. Two hours later, after fighting several fires, solving other people's problems, and dealing with whatever happened to be thrown at me through my computer and phone, I could hardly remember what I had set out to accomplish when I first turned on my computer. I'd been ambushed. And I know better.

Most of us start every day knowing we're not going to get it all done. So how we spend our time is a key strategic decision. That's why it's a good idea to create a to-do list and an ignore list. The hardest attention to focus is our own.

But even with those lists, the challenge, as always, is execution. How can you stick to a plan when so many things threaten to derail it? How can you focus on a few important things when so many other things require your attention?

We need a trick.

Jack LaLanne, the fitness guru, knows all about tricks. He has one trick that I believe is his real secret power.

Ritual.

At the age of 94, he still spends the first two hours of his day exercising. Ninety minutes lifting weights and 30 minutes swimming or walking. Every morning. He needs to do so to achieve his goals: on his 95th birthday he plans to swim from the coast of California to Santa Catalina Island, a distance of 20 miles. Also, as he is fond of saying, "I cannot afford to die. It will ruin my image."

So he works, consistently and deliberately, toward his goals. He does the same things day in and day out. He cares about his fitness and he's built it into his schedule.

Managing our time needs to become a ritual too. Not simply a list or a vague sense of our priorities. That's not consistent or deliberate. It needs to be an ongoing process we follow *no matter what* to keep us focused on our priorities throughout the day.

I think we can do it in three steps that take less than 18 minutes over an eight-hour workday.

STEP 1

(5 Minutes): Set Plan for Day. *Before turning on your computer,* sit down with a blank piece of paper and decide what will make this day highly successful. What can you realistically accomplish that will further your goals and allow you to leave at the end of the day feeling like you've been productive and successful? Write those things down.

Now, most important, take your calendar and schedule those things into time slots, placing the hardest and most important items at the beginning of the day. And by the beginning of the day I mean, if possible, before even checking your e-mail. If your entire list does not fit into your calendar, reprioritize your list. There is tremendous power in deciding when and where you are going to do something.

In their book *The Power of Full Engagement,* Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz describe a study in which a group of women agreed to do a breast self-exam during a period of 30 days. 100% of those who said *where and when* they were going to do it completed the exam. Only 53% of the others did.

In another study, drug addicts in withdrawal (can you find a more stressed-out population?) agreed to write an essay before 5 PM on a certain day. Eighty percent of those who said *when and where* they would write the essay completed it. None of the others did.

If you want to get something done, decide when and where you're going to do it. Otherwise, take it off your list.

STEP 2

(1 minute every hour): Refocus. Set your watch, phone, or computer to ring every hour. When it rings, take a deep breath, look at your list and ask yourself if you spent your last hour productively. Then look at your calendar and deliberately recommit to how you are going to use the next hour. Manage your day hour by hour. Don't let the hours—or the inevitable interruptions—manage you.

STEP 3

(5 minutes at end of day): Review. Shut off your computer and review your day. What

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What people are saying on HBR.org

"Regarding reviewing a list or plan in the AM: I always create the list the night before. So when I arrive in the morning, I don't have to think about what I am going to do, it is already there." —posted by Tom W

"I would add to this a little trick: the breakdown of an hour. Set a timer for 50 minutes (I use a great widget I found). For those 50 minutes, no e-mail, no tweets, no distractions. Just work. Once the gong goes off, I set a new timer for 20 minutes. During this 20 minutes, no work. Tweet, e-mail, take lunch, whatever. Then repeat. I find that I get in the zone and stay there hour after hour." —posted by JB

"Shutting off the computer for planning works. The other thing that works for me is not checking e-mail until my first block of work is done." —posted by Wally

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worked? Where did you focus? Where did you get distracted? What did you learn that will help you be more productive tomorrow?

The power of rituals is their predictability. You do the same thing in the same way over and over again. And the outcome of a ritual is predictable too. If you choose your focus deliberately and wisely and consistently remind yourself of that focus, you will stay focused. It's simple.

This particular ritual may not help you swim 20 miles through the ocean or live to be 100. But it may just help you leave your office feeling productive and successful.

And, at the end of the day, isn't that a higher priority?

Posted on July 20, 2009
blogs.hbr.org/bregman

How to Write To-Do Lists That Work

Most to-do lists don't work. Here's how to make sure yours do.

by Gina Trapani

Founding editor of the personal productivity blog, Lifehacker.com.

Find more content on personal productivity at hbr.org

We all have those dreadful tasks that stick around on our to-do lists forever. You know you have to get them done eventually, but it's just easier to glaze over the list and work on something, well, easier.

But a little forethought can help you counteract the tendency to ignore your to-do list while you busy yourself with whatever happens to pop up next. If you break down even the most loathsome task into bite-sized chunks, you can cross it off your list in no time.

Start over with a clean slate. For each item on your old list (or just an "Ooh, I've got to do that" thought in your mind), get ready to write it anew while you keep these two guidelines in mind:

1. Break it down.
Then break it down some more. Don't confuse to-do's with goals or projects. A to-do is a single, specific action that will move a project toward completion. It's just one step. For example, "Plan the committee lunch" is a project. "E-mail Karen to get catering contact" is a to-do. In this case, the action of e-mailing Karen is a simple, two-minute undertaking—something small and innocuous that you can do without thinking. The lunch plans won't be complete after you've finished this to-do, but you'll be much closer than you were while you were ignoring the "Plan the committee lunch" project. After it's done? Add the next step to your list.

Breaking down your task to the smallest possible action forces you to think through each step up front. With the thinking out of the way, it's easy to dash off that e-mail, make that call, or file that

report, and move your work along with much less resistance.

2. Use specific action verbs and include details.

Your teeth are overdue for a cleaning, but the "Make a dentist appointment" to-do just hasn't gotten done. When you write down that task, use an action verb (call? e-mail?) and include whatever details your future self needs to check it off. "Call Dr. M. at 555-4567 for a cleaning any time before 11 AM on January 17, 18, or 19" is a specific, detailed to-do. Now that's something you can get done while you're stuck in traffic with a cell phone.

Your to-do list is your way of assigning tasks to yourself, so be as helpful to yourself as you would be to a personal assistant. Make your to-do's small and specific to set yourself up for that glorious moment when you can cross them off the list as DONE.

Posted on January 13, 2009
blogs.hbr.org

What people are saying on HBR.org

"I think we tend to concentrate too much on a to-do list when, in reality, we might be better served to develop a not-to-do list. It is sometimes those things we do by habit that create the need to develop a strict to-do, so one day, just say to yourself, These are the things I will not do today." —posted by Sam

"On my list of not-to-dos: 'I will not e-mail someone and then two seconds later follow up with an IM or personal call.'" —posted by SK

"It gives you great pleasure, self-confidence, and the desire to achieve more when you realize that you have crossed off all the tasks [on your list] at the end of the day or week." —posted by Armelle

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The Art of the Self-Imposed Deadline

Here's how to create your own deadlines so that you accomplish more—more easily.

by Steven DeMaio

DeMaio is a writer, teacher, and author of the blog "Working fort Yourself," at stevendemaio.wordpress.com.

Find more content on personal productivity at hbr.org

For people who work for themselves, the self-imposed deadline is a fact of life. Whether you're starting a business, writing a dissertation, or consulting for a dozen clients, paying attention only to your drop-dead dates would mean never meeting them. You obviously have to set up interim goals along the way.

But the art of self-scheduling is not unique to entrepreneurs and PhD students. It's one that I actively—and successfully—practiced for the two decades I spent working for other people. And it's now making my transition to freelance life a lot smoother. Here are the self-scheduling techniques that worked for me really well in the office—and that remain the hallmarks of my working style out on the professional fringes:

Start your day as early as possible.
Even if you're not a morning person, there's something intoxicating about planning to do A and B, and then discovering you've done A, B, and C by noon. Seeing C in the rearview mirror at lunch also makes D and E look a lot more inviting—and Q not so far out of reach.

Tackle similar small tasks back-to-back.
That's what gets you on a roll. The mind thrives on repetition, at least to a point. Capitalize on what makes us crave the refrains of songs and makes *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* such a potent tale. Three, I must tell you, is a beautiful number. Three things done by noon is ecstasy.

Avoid the curse of the "final push."
Divide up a project so that the longest part is the first part, the next longest is the second, and so on. If each part gets smaller as you go, the end will come faster—or at least it will feel like that, which is the point. If the long parts are near the end, you'll feel worn out before you reach the finish. Besides, if you're "dead at the deadline," those other projects you're juggling will stagnate.

Posted on March 25, 2009
blogs.hbr.org

What people are saying on HBR.org

"Steven, great post! Setting self-imposed deadlines is a great way to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks. When Linda [Kaplan Thaler] and I were writing our new book, we found that a method similar to Step No. 3, which we call 'mini-tasking,' is especially effective. Instead of laboring away at long tasks, break them up into manageable bites that you can check off one at a time. The satisfaction of being able to complete more tasks (which is really just a mental trick we play on ourselves) provides greater motivation to make it through to the end." —posted by Robin Koval @ The Power of Small

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How to Start a Project on Time

by Steven DeMaio

DeMaio is a writer, teacher, and author of the blog, "Working for Yourself," at stevendemaio.wordpress.com.

Find more content on personal productivity at hbr.org

Everyone knows that getting started is often the toughest part of a project. It's amazing how this conundrum cuts across types of endeavors: writing, research, filing taxes, drafting a presentation, preparing a budget, doing household repairs, cleaning a room, even grooming a dog. The anticipation is the main obstacle. You see the task ahead of you, and it looks monstrous. Even if you enjoy the kind of work you'll be doing, dread can set in, which can lead to serious delay. The single biggest factor in missing a deadline is getting started later than you could have.

I find that the art of starting on time boils down to one basic technique: creating an environment in which the project feels as if it's already underway before you sit down (or stand up) to begin it formally. There are many ways to achieve this, but the best ones involve **making small preparations for the new project while you're doing something else.**

If the task is writing, try jotting down ideas as soon as they occur to you while you're going about your daily life—and then placing the notes somewhere prominent, where their very presence will later engage your attention and interest. The prominent place can simply be your computer desktop or e-mail inbox, although physical prominence (for example, a paper notebook that rests on your keyboard) tends to work much better.

For presentations, budgets, and taxes, setting up and naming new files—and sticking them right where you'll see them every time you fire up your computer—works pretty well. The key is to seize on opportunities, while you're doing other work, to toss real content into those files so that they're not merely empty shells. A file with data already populating it is much more likely to focus you than a blank one is. Still, I'd add something physical to the mix (maybe a relevant paper sitting under your mouse) in order to seal the deal.

For manual projects, physical placement of tools works beautifully. Step away from preparing dinner to put the dog-grooming brush on the coffee table or in the middle of the living room floor, so that you have no choice but to deal with it after the meal. The same kinds of tricks work with repair tools and other implements. The key is to make setting them out a distraction from another endeavor, so that the setup task doesn't feel like the dreaded moment of actually plunging in to start the project.

Weaving the very first steps of a new project into other things you're doing makes the transition seamless. No mountains to climb, no first hurdles to clear. You're still surmounting the barriers, but you're reducing them to the size they actually are instead of allowing your dread to make them bigger than they need to be.

Of course, just as setting your watch ahead is no guarantee against lateness, stealth initiation is no guarantee against procrastination. But unlike the watch trick, it's not merely a psychological ploy. It actually sets you on the path to completion, and knowing that you're already on your way is the invaluable ingredient. Try it. You'll see.

Posted on May 21, 2009
blogs.hbr.org

What people are saying on HBR.org

"Whenever I am reluctant to start working on a presentation, I make it a point to break it into manageable pieces and take them one at a time when I am busy with something else. Sometimes I end up jotting points for the presentation during a boring meeting." —posted by VG

"Using stealth tactics like this gets around the 'voice in the head' that says 'this is too big to start now, let's leave it till I have more time and energy.' And to the commenter that asked about software solutions, try using MS Outlook, opening on your Today page with the Task Manager prominent." —posted by Brian

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Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time

The Idea in Brief

Organizations are demanding ever-higher performance from their workforces. People are trying to comply, but the usual method—putting in longer hours—has backfired. They're getting exhausted, disengaged, and sick. And they're defecting to healthier job environments.

Longer days at the office don't work because time is a limited resource. But personal energy is renewable, say Schwartz and McCarthy. By fostering deceptively simple **rituals** that help employees regularly replenish their energy, organizations build workers' physical, emotional, and mental resilience. These rituals include taking brief breaks at specific intervals, expressing appreciation to others, reducing interruptions, and spending more time on activities people do best and enjoy most.

Help your employees systematically rejuvenate their personal energy, and the benefits go straight to your bottom line. Take Wachovia Bank: Participants in an energy renewal program produced 13 percentage points greater year-over-year in revenues from loans than a control group did. And they exceeded the control group's gains in revenues from deposits by 20 percentage points.

The Idea in Practice

Schwartz and McCarthy recommend these practices for renewing four dimensions of personal energy:

PHYSICAL ENERGY

- Enhance your sleep by setting an earlier bedtime and reducing alcohol use.

- Reduce stress by engaging in cardiovascular activity at least three times a week and strength training at least once.

- Eat small meals and light snacks every three hours.

- Learn to notice signs of imminent energy flagging, including restlessness, yawning, hunger, and difficulty concentrating.

- Take brief but regular breaks, away from your desk, at 90- to 120-minute intervals throughout the day.

EMOTIONAL ENERGY

- Defuse negative emotions—irritability, impatience, anxiety, insecurity—through deep abdominal breathing.

- Fuel positive emotions in yourself and others by regularly expressing appreciation to others in detailed, specific terms through notes, e-mails, calls, or conversations.

- Look at upsetting situations through new lenses. Adopt a "reverse lens" to ask, "What would the other person in this conflict say, and how might he be right?" Use a "long lens" to ask, "How will I likely view this situation in six months?" Employ a "wide lens" to ask, "How can I grow and learn from this situation?"

MENTAL ENERGY

- Reduce interruptions by performing highconcentration tasks away from phones and e-mail.

- Respond to voice mails and e-mails at designated times during the day.

- Every night, identify the most important challenge for the next day. Then make it your first priority when you arrive at work in the morning.

SPIRITUAL ENERGY

- Identify your "sweet spot" activities— those that give you feelings of effectiveness, effortless absorption, and fulfillment. Find ways to do more of these. One executive who hated doing sales reports delegated them to someone who loved that activity.

- Allocate time and energy to what you consider most important. For example, spend the last 20 minutes of your evening commute relaxing, so you can connect with your family once you're home.

- Live your core values. For instance, if consideration is important to you but you're perpetually late for meetings, practice intentionally showing up five minutes early for meetings.

HOW COMPANIES CAN HELP

To support energy renewal rituals in your firm:

- Build "renewal rooms" where people can go to relax and refuel.

- Subsidize gym memberships.

- Encourage managers to gather employees for midday workouts.

- Suggest that people stop checking e-mails during meetings.

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Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time

The science of stamina has advanced to the point where individuals, teams, and whole organizations can, with some straightforward interventions, significantly increase their capacity to get things done.

by Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy

Steve Wanner is a highly respected 37-year-old partner at Ernst & Young, married with four young children. When I met him a year ago, he was working 12- to 14-hour days, felt perpetually exhausted, and found it difficult to fully engage with his family in the evenings, which left him feeling guilty and dissatisfied. He slept poorly, made no time to exercise, and seldom ate healthy meals, instead grabbing a bite to eat on the run or while working at his desk.

Wanner's experience is not uncommon. Most of us respond to rising demands in the workplace by putting in longer hours, which inevitably take a toll on us physically, mentally, and emotionally. That leads to declining levels of engagement, increasing levels of distraction, high turnover rates, and soaring medical costs among employees. My colleagues and I at the Energy Project have worked with thousands of leaders and managers in the course of doing consulting and coaching at large organizations during the past five years. With remarkable consistency, these executives tell us they're pushing themselves harder than ever to keep up and increasingly feel they are at a breaking point.

The core problem with working longer hours is that time is a finite resource. Energy is a different story. Defined in physics as the capacity to work, energy comes from four main wellsprings in human beings: the body, emotions, mind, and spirit. In each, energy can be systematically

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(Free Press, 2003).
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expanded and regularly renewed by establishing specific rituals—behaviors that are intentionally practiced and precisely scheduled, with the goal of making them unconscious and automatic as quickly as possible.

To effectively reenergize their workforces, organizations need to shift their emphasis from getting more out of people to investing more in them, so they are motivated—and able—to bring more of themselves to work every day. To recharge themselves, individuals need to recognize the costs of energy-depleting behaviors and then take responsibility for changing them, regardless of the circumstances they're facing.

The rituals and behaviors Wanner established to better manage his energy transformed his life. He set an earlier bedtime and gave up drinking, which had disrupted his sleep. As a consequence, when he woke up he felt more rested and more motivated to exercise, which he now does almost every morning. In less than two months he lost 15 pounds. After working out he now sits down with his family for breakfast. Wanner still puts in long hours on the job, but he renews himself regularly along the way. He leaves his desk for lunch and usually takes a morning and an afternoon walk outside. When he arrives at home in the evening, he's more relaxed and better able to connect with his wife and children.

Establishing simple rituals like these can lead to striking results across organizations. At Wachovia Bank, we took a group of employees through a pilot energy management program and then measured their performance against that of a control group. The participants outperformed the controls on a series of financial metrics, such as the value of loans they generated. They also reported substantial improvements in their customer relationships, their engagement with work, and their personal satisfaction. In this article, I'll describe the Wachovia study in a little more detail. Then I'll explain what executives and managers can do to increase and regularly renew work capacity—the approach used by the Energy Project, which builds on, deepens, and extends several core concepts developed by my former partner Jim Loehr in his seminal work with athletes.

Linking Capacity and Performance at Wachovia

Most large organizations invest in developing employees' skills, knowledge, and competence. Very few help build and sustain their capacity—their energy—which is typically taken for granted. In fact, greater capacity makes it possible to get more done in less time at a higher level of engagement and with more sustainability. Our experience at Wachovia bore this out.

In early 2006 we took 106 employees at 12 regional banks in southern New Jersey through a curriculum of four modules, each of which focused on specific strategies for strengthening one of the four main dimensions of energy. We delivered it at one-month intervals to groups of approximately 20 to 25, ranging from senior leaders to lower-level managers. We also assigned each attendee a fellow employee as a source of support between sessions. Using Wachovia's own key performance metrics, we evaluated how the participant group performed compared with a group of employees at similar levels at a nearby set of Wachovia banks who did not go through the training. To create a credible basis for comparison, we looked at year-over-year percentage changes in performance across several metrics.

On a measure called the "Big 3"—revenues from three kinds of loans—the participants showed a year-over-year increase that was 13 percentage points greater than the control group's in the first three months of our study. On revenues from deposits, the participants exceeded the control group's year-over-year gain by 20 percentage points during that same period. The precise gains varied month by month, but with only a handful of exceptions, the participants continued to significantly outperform the control group for a full year after completing the program. Although other variables undoubtedly influenced these outcomes, the participants' superior performance was notable in its consistency. (See the exhibit "How Energy Renewal Programs Boosted Productivity at Wachovia.")

We also asked participants how the program influenced them personally. Sixty-eight percent reported that it had a positive impact on their relationships with clients and customers. Seventy-one percent said that it had a noticeable or substantial positive impact on their productivity and performance. These findings corroborated a raft of anecdotal evidence we've gathered about the effectiveness of this

approach among leaders at other large companies such as Ernst & Young, Sony, Deutsche Bank, Nokia, ING Direct, Ford, and Master-Card.

The Body: Physical Energy

Our program begins by focusing on physical energy. It is scarcely news that inadequate nutrition, exercise, sleep, and rest diminish people's basic energy levels, as well as their ability to manage their emotions and focus their attention. Nonetheless, many executives don't find ways to practice consistently healthy behaviors, given all the other demands in their lives.

Before participants in our program begin to explore ways to increase their physical energy, they take an energy audit, which includes four questions in each energy dimension—body, emotions, mind, and spirit. (See the exhibit "Are You Headed for an Energy Crisis?") On average, participants get eight to ten of those 16 questions "wrong," meaning they're doing things such as skipping breakfast, failing to express appreciation to others, struggling to focus on one thing at a time, or spending too little time on activities that give them a sense of purpose. While most participants aren't surprised to learn these behaviors are counterproductive, having them all listed in one place is often uncomfortable, sobering, and galvanizing. The audit highlights employees' greatest energy deficits. Participants also fill out charts designed to raise their awareness about how their exercise, diet, and sleep practices influence their energy levels.

The next step is to identify rituals for building and renewing physical energy. When Gary Faro, a vice president at Wachovia, began the program, he was significantly overweight, ate poorly, lacked a regular exercise routine, worked long hours, and typically slept no more than five or six hours a night. That is not an unusual profile among the leaders and managers we see. Over the course of the program, Faro began regular cardiovascular and strength training. He started going to bed at a designated time and sleeping longer. He changed his eating habits from two big meals a day ("Where I usually gorged myself," he says) to smaller meals and light snacks every three hours. The aim was to help him stabilize his glucose levels over the course of the day, avoiding peaks and valleys. He lost 50 pounds

### How Energy Renewal Programs Boosted Productivity at Wachovia

At Wachovia Bank, employees participating in an energy renewal program outperformed a control group of employees, demonstrating significantly greater improvements in year-over-year performance during the first quarter of 2006.

Percentage increase in loan revenues*
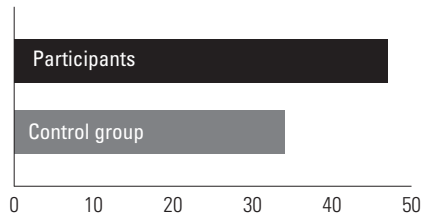
*From three critical kinds of loans

Percentage increase in deposit revenues
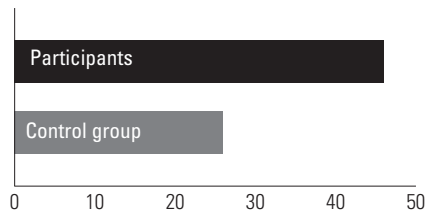
in the process, and his energy levels soared. "I used to schedule tough projects for the morning, when I knew that I would be more focused," Faro says. "I don't have to do that anymore because I find that I'm just as focused now at 5 PM as I am at 8 AM."

Another key ritual Faro adopted was to take brief but regular breaks at specific intervals throughout the workday—always leaving his desk. The value of such breaks is grounded in our physiology. "Ultradian rhythms" refer to 90- to 120-minute cycles during which our bodies slowly move from a high-energy state into a physiological trough. Toward the end of each cycle, the body begins to crave a period of recovery. The signals include physical restlessness, yawning, hunger, and difficulty concentrating, but many of us ignore them and keep working. The consequence is that our energy reservoir—our remaining capacity—burns down as the day wears on.

Intermittent breaks for renewal, we have found, result in higher and more sustainable performance. The length of renewal is less important than the quality. It is possible to get a great deal

of recovery in a short time—as little as several minutes—if it involves a ritual that allows you to disengage from work and truly change channels. That could range from getting up to talk to a colleague about something other than work, to listening to music on an iPod, to walking up and down stairs in an office building. While breaks are countercultural in most organizations and counterintuitive for many high achievers, their value is multifaceted.

Matthew Lang is a managing director for Sony in South Africa. He adopted some of the same rituals that Faro did, including a 20-minute walk in the afternoons. Lang's walk not only gives him a mental and emotional breather and some exercise but also has become the time when he gets his best creative ideas. That's because when he walks he is not actively thinking, which allows the dominant left hemisphere of his brain to give way to the right hemisphere with its greater capacity to see the big picture and make imaginative leaps.

The Emotions: Quality of Energy

When people are able to take more control of their emotions, they can improve the quality of their energy, regardless of the external pressures they're facing. To do this, they first must become more aware of how they feel at various points during the workday and of the impact these emotions have on their effectiveness. Most people realize that they tend to perform best when they're feeling positive energy. What they find surprising is that they're not able to perform well or to lead effectively when they're feeling any other way.

Unfortunately, without intermittent recovery, we're not physiologically capable of sustaining highly positive emotions for long periods. Confronted with relentless demands and unexpected challenges, people tend to slip into negative emotions—the fight-or-flight mode—often multiple times in a day. They become irritable and impatient, or anxious and insecure. Such states of mind drain people's energy and cause friction in their relationships. Fight-or-flight emotions also make it impossible to think clearly, logically, and reflectively. When executives learn to recognize what kinds of events trigger their negative emotions, they gain greater capacity to take control of their reactions.

One simple but powerful ritual for defusing negative emotions is what we call "buying time." Deep abdominal breathing is one way to do that. Exhaling slowly for five or six seconds induces relaxation and recovery, and turns off the fight-or-flight response. When we began working with Fujio Nishida, president of Sony Europe, he had a habit of lighting up a cigarette each time something especially stressful occurred—at least two or three times a day. Otherwise, he didn't smoke. We taught him the breathing exercise as an alternative, and it worked immediately: Nishida found he no longer had the desire for a cigarette. It wasn't the smoking that had given him relief from the stress, we concluded, but the relaxation prompted by the deep inhalation and exhalation.

A powerful ritual that fuels positive emotions is expressing appreciation to others, a practice that seems to be as beneficial to the giver as to the receiver. It can take the form of a handwritten note, an e-mail, a call, or a conversation—and the more detailed and specific, the higher the impact. As with all rituals, setting aside a particular time to do it vastly increases the chances of success. Ben Jenkins, vice chairman and president of the General Bank at Wachovia in Charlotte, North Carolina, built his appreciation ritual into time set aside for mentoring. He began scheduling lunches or dinners regularly with people who worked for him. Previously, the only sit-downs he'd had with his direct reports were to hear monthly reports on their numbers or to give them yearly performance reviews. Now, over meals, he makes it a priority to recognize their accomplishments and also to talk with them about their lives and their aspirations rather than their immediate work responsibilities.

Finally, people can cultivate postive emotions by learning to change the stories they tell themselves about the events in their lives. Often, people in conflict cast themselves in the role of victim, blaming others or external circumstances for their problems. Becoming aware of the difference between the facts in a given situation and the way we interpret those facts can be powerful in itself. It's been a revelation for many of the people we work with to discover they have a choice about how to view a given event and to recognize how powerfully the story they tell influences the emotions they feel. We teach them to tell the most hopeful and personally empowering story pos-

> **Most people realize that they tend to perform best when they're feeling positive energy.**

sible in any given situation, without denying or minimizing the facts.

The most effective way people can change a story is to view it through any of three new lenses, which are all alternatives to seeing the world from the victim perspective. With the *reverse lens*, for example, people ask themselves, "What would the other person in this conflict say and in what ways might that be true?" With the *long lens* they ask, "How will I most likely view this situation in six months?" With the *wide lens* they ask themselves, "Regardless of the outcome of this issue, how can I grow and learn from it?" Each of these lenses can help people intentionally cultivate more positive emotions.

Nicolas Babin, director of corporate communications for Sony Europe, was the point per-son for calls from reporters when Sony went through several recalls of its batteries in 2006. Over time he found his work increasingly exhausting and dispiriting. After practicing the lens exercises, he began finding ways to tell himself a more positive and empowering story about his role. "I realized," he explains, "that this was an opportunity for me to build stronger relationships with journalists by being accessible to them and to increase Sony's credibility by being straightforward and honest."

The Mind: Focus of Energy

Many executives view multitasking as a necessity in the face of all the demands they juggle, but it actually undermines productivity. Distractions are costly: A temporary shift in attention from one task to another—

Are You Headed for an Energy Crisis?

Please check the statements below that are true for you.

Body

__ I don't regularly get at least seven to eight hours of sleep, and I often wake up feeling tired.

__ I frequently skip breakfast, or I settle for something that isn't nutritious.

__ I don't work out enough (meaning cardiovascular training at least three times a week and strength training at least once a week).

__ I don't take regular breaks during the day to truly renew and recharge, or I often eat lunch at my desk, if I eat it at all.

Emotions

__ I frequently find myself feeling irritable, impatient, or anxious at work, especially when work is demanding.

__ I don't have enough time with my family and loved ones, and when I'm with them, I'm not always really with them.

__ I have too little time for the activities that I most deeply enjoy.

__ I don't stop frequently enough to express my appreciation to others or to savor my accomplishments and blessings.

Mind

__ I have difficulty focusing on one thing at a time, and I am easily distracted during the day, especially by e-mail.

__ I spend much of my day reacting to immediate crises and demands rather than focusing on activities with longer-term value and high leverage.

__ I don't take enough time for reflection, strategizing, and creative thinking.

__ I work in the evenings or on weekends, and I almost never take an e-mail–free vacation.

Spirit

__ I don't spend enough time at work doing what I do best and enjoy most.

__ There are significant gaps between what I say is most important to me in my life and how I actually allocate my time and energy.

__ My decisions at work are more often influenced by external demands than by a strong, clear sense of my own purpose.

__ I don't invest enough time and energy inmaking a positive difference to others or to the world.

. . .

How is your overall energy?

Total number of statements checked: __

Guide to scores

0–3: Excellent energy management skills

4–6: Reasonable energy management skills

7–10: Significant energy management deficits

11–16: A full-fledged energy management crisis

What do you need to work on?

Number of checks in each category:

Body __   Mind __

Emotions __   Spirit __

Guide to category scores

0: Excellent energy management skills

1: Strong energy management skills

2: Significant deficits

3: Poor energy management skills

4: A full-fledged energy crisis

stopping to answer an e-mail or take a phone call, for instance—increases the amount of time necessary to finish the primary task by as much as 25%, a phenomenon known as "switching time." It's far more efficient to fully focus for 90 to 120 minutes, take a true break, and then fully focus on the next activity. We refer to these work periods as "ultradian sprints."

Once people see how much they struggle to concentrate, they can create rituals to reduce the relentless interruptions that technology has introduced in their lives. We start out with an exercise that forces them to face the impact of daily distractions. They attempt to complete a complex task and are regularly interrupted—an experience that, people report, ends up feeling much like everyday life.

Dan Cluna, a vice president at Wachovia, designed two rituals to better focus his attention. The first one is to leave his desk and go into a conference room, away from phones and e-mail, whenever he has a task that requires concentration. He now finishes reports in a third of the time they used to require. Cluna built his second ritual around meetings at branches with the financial specialists who report to him. Previously, he would answer his phone whenever it rang during these meetings. As a consequence, the meetings he scheduled for an hour often stretched to two, and he rarely gave anyone his full attention. Now Cluna lets his phone go to voice mail, so that he can focus completely on the person in front of him. He now answers the accumulated voice-mail messages when he has downtime between meetings.

E&Y's hard-charging Wanner used to answer e-mail constantly throughout the day—whenever he heard a "ping." Then he created a ritual of checking his e-mail just twice a day—at 10:15 AM and 2:30 PM. Whereas previously he couldn't keep up with all his messages, he discovered he could clear his in-box each time he opened it—the reward of fully focusing his attention on e-mail for 45 minutes at a time. Wanner has also reset the expectations of all the people he regularly communicates with by e-mail. "I've told them if it's an emergency and they need an instant response, they can call me and I'll always pick up," he says. Nine months later he has yet to receive such a call.

Michael Henke, a senior manager at E&Y, sat his

team down at the start of the busy season last winter and told them that at certain points during the day he was going to turn off his Sametime (an in-house instant-message system). The result, he said, was that he would be less available to them for questions. Like Wanner, he told his team to call him if any emergency arose, but they rarely did. He also encouraged the group to take regular breaks throughout the day and to eat more regularly. They finished the busy season under budget and more profitable than other teams that hadn't followed the energy renewal program. "We got the same amount of work done in less time," says Henke. "It made for a win-win."

Another way to mobilize mental energy is to focus systematically on activities that have the most long-term leverage. Unless people intentionally schedule time for more challenging work, they tend not to get to it at all or rush through it at the last minute. Perhaps the most effective focus ritual the executives we work with have adopted is to identify each night the most important challenge for the next day and make it their very first priority when they arrive in the morning. Jean Luc Duquesne, a vice president for Sony Europe in Paris, used to answer his e-mail as soon as he got to the office, just as many people do. He now tries to concentrate the first hour of every day on the most important topic. He finds that he often emerges at 10 AM feeling as if he's already had a productive day.

The Human Spirit: Energy of Meaning and Purpose

People tap into the energy of the human spirit when their everyday work and activities are consistent with what they value most and with what gives them a sense of meaning and purpose. If the work they're doing really matters to them, they typically feel more positive energy, focus better, and demonstrate greater perseverance. Regrettably, the high demands and fast pace of corporate life don't leave much time to pay attention to these issues, and many people don't even recognize meaning and purpose as potential sources of energy. Indeed, if we tried to begin our program by focusing on the human spirit, it would likely have minimal impact. Only when participants have experienced the value of the rituals they establish in the other dimensions do they start to see that being attentive to their own deeper needs

dramatically influences their effectiveness and satisfaction at work.

For E&Y partner Jonathan Anspacher, simply having the opportunity to ask himself a series of questions about what really mattered to him was both illuminating and energizing. "I think it's important to be a little introspective and say, 'What do you want to be remembered for?'" he told us. "You don't want to be remembered as the crazy partner who worked these long hours and had his people be miserable. When my kids call me and ask, 'Can you come to my band concert?' I want to say, 'Yes, I'll be there and I'll be in the front row.' I don't want to be the father that comes in and sits in the back and is on his Blackberry and has to step out to take a phone call."

To access the energy of the human spirit, people need to clarify priorities and establish accompanying rituals in three categories: doing what they do best and enjoy most at work; consciously allocating time and energy to the areas of their lives—work, family, health, service to others—they deem most important; and living their core values in their daily behaviors.

When you're attempting to discover what you do best and what you enjoy most, it's important to realize that these two things aren't necessarily mutually inclusive. You may get lots of positive feedback about something you're very good at but not truly enjoy it. Conversely, you can love doing something but have no gift for it, so that achieving success requires much more energy than it makes sense to invest.

To help program participants discover their areas of strength, we ask them to recall at least two work experiences in the past several months during which they found themselves in their "sweet spot"—feeling effective, effortlessly absorbed, inspired, and fulfilled. Then we have them deconstruct those experiences to understand precisely what energized them so positively and what specific talents they were drawing on. If leading strategy feels like a sweet spot, for example, is it being in charge that's most invigorating or participating in a creative endeavor? Or is it using a skill that comes to you easily and so feels good to exercise? Finally, we have people establish a ritual that will encourage them to do more of exactly that kind of activity at work.

A senior leader we worked with realized that one of the activities he least liked was reading and summarizing detailed sales reports, whereas one of his favorites was brainstorming new strategies. The leader found a direct report who loved immersing himself in numbers and delegated the sales report task to him—happily settling for brief oral summaries from him each day. The leader also began scheduling a free-form 90-minute strategy session every other week with the most creative people in his group.

In the second category, devoting time and energy to what's important to you, there is often a similar divide between what people say is important and what they actually do. Rituals can help close this gap. When Jean Luc Duquesne, the Sony Europe vice president, thought hard about his personal priorities, he realized that spending time with his family was what mattered most to him, but it often got squeezed out of his day. So he instituted a ritual in which he switches off for at least three hours every evening when he gets home, so he can focus on his family. "I'm still not an expert on PlayStation," he told us, "but according to my youngest son, I'm learning and I'm a good student." Steve Wanner, who used to talk on the cell phone all the way to his front door on his commute home, has chosen a specific spot 20 minutes from his house where he ends whatever call he's on and puts away the phone. He spends the rest of his commute relaxing so that when he does arrive home, he's less preoccupied with work and more available to his wife and children.

The third category, practicing your core values in your everyday behavior, is a challenge for many as well. Most people are living at such a furious pace that they rarely stop to ask themselves what they stand for and who they want to be. As a consequence, they let external demands dictate their actions.

We don't suggest that people explicitly define their values, because the results are usually too predictable. Instead, we seek to uncover them, in part by asking questions that are inadvertently revealing, such as, "What are the qualities that you find most off-putting when you see them in others?" By describing what they can't stand, people unintentionally divulge what they stand for. If you are very offended by stinginess, for example, generosity is probably

one of your key values. If you are especially put off by rudeness in others, it's likely that consideration is a high value for you. As in the other categories, establishing rituals can help bridge the gap between the values you aspire to and how you currently behave. If you discover that consideration is a key value, but you are perpetually late for meetings, the ritual might be to end the meetings you run five minutes earlier than usual and intentionally show up five minutes early for the meeting that follows.

Addressing these three categories helps people go a long way toward achieving a greater sense of alignment, sa isfaction, and well-being in their lives on and off the job. Those feelings are a source of positive energy in their own right and reinforce people's desire to persist at rituals in other energy dimensions as well.

• • •

This new way of working takes hold only to the degree that organizations support their people in adopting new behaviors. We have learned, sometimes painfully, that not all executives and companies are prepared to embrace the notion that personal renewal for employees will lead to better and more sustainable performance. To succeed, renewal efforts need solid support and commitment from senior management, beginning with the key decision maker.

At Wachovia, Susanne Svizeny, the president of the region in which we conducted our study, was the primary cheerleader for the program. She embraced the principles in her own life and made a series of personal changes, including a visible commitment to building more regular renewal rituals into her work life. Next, she took it upon herself to foster the excitement and commitment of her leadership team. Finally, she regularly reached out by e-mail to all participants in the project to encourage them in their rituals and seek their feedback. It was clear to everyone that she took the work seriously. Her enthusiasm was infectious, and the results spoke for themselves.

At Sony Europe, several hundred leaders have embraced the principles of energy management. Over the next year, more than 2,000 of their direct reports will go through the energy renewal program. From Fujio Nishida on down, it has become increasingly cuturally acceptable at Sony to take intermitent breaks, work out

at midday, answer e-mail only at designated times, and even ask colleagues who seem irritable or impatient what stories they're telling themselves.

Organizational support also entails shifts in policies, practices, and cultural messages. A number of firms we worked with have built "renewal rooms" where people can regularly go to relax and refuel. Others offer subsidized gym memberships. In some cases, leaders themselves gather groups of employees for midday workouts. One company instituted a no-meeting zone between 8 and 9 AM to ensure that people had at least one hour absolutely free of meetings. At several companies, including Sony, senior leaders collectively agreed to stop checking e-mail during meetings as a way to make the meetings more focused and efficient.

One factor that can get in the way of success is a crisis mentality. The optimal candidates for energy renewal programs are organizations that are feeling enough pain to be eager for new solutions but not so much that they're completely overwhelmed. At one organization where we had the active support of the CEO, the company was under intense pressure to grow rapidly, and the senior team couldn't tear themselves away from their focus on immediate survival—even though taking time out for renewal might have allowed them to be more productive at a more sustainable level.

By contrast, the group at Ernst & Young successfully went through the process at the height of tax season. With the permission of their leaders, they practiced defusing negative emotions by breathing or telling themselves different stories, and alternated highly focused periods of work with renewal breaks. Most people in the group reported that this busy season was the least stressful they'd ever experienced.

The implicit contract between organizations and their employees today is that each will try to get as much from the other as they can, as quickly as possible, and then move on without looking back. We believe that is mutually self-defeating. Both individuals and the organizations they work for end up depleted rather than enriched. Employees feel increasingly beleaguered and burned out. Organizations are forced to settle for employees who are less than fully engaged and to con-

stantly hire and train new people to replace those who choose to leave. We envision a new and explicit contract that benefits all parties: Organizations invest in their people across all dimensions of their lives to help them build and sustain their value. Individuals respond by bringing all their multidimensional energy wholeheartedly to work every day. Both grow in value as a result.

Reprint R0710B
Harvard Business Review, October 2007
To order, visit www.hbr.org

Further Reading

A R T I C L E

When Executives Burn Out
by Harry Levinson
Harvard Business Review
February 2000
Product No. 4290

This article describes additional ways companies can help employees replenish their personal energy. Suggestions include periodically rotating managers out of potentially exhausting positions, distributing the thorniest problems to a broad range of people rather than just to your best performers, and systematically letting people know that their contributions are important to you and the company. Levinson also recommends using pairs or teams of people to tackle tough problems so individuals won't feel isolated, training people as quickly as possible to enable them to keep up with fast-changing technologies, and maintaining personal interaction between leaders and subordinates during stressful times.

To order, visit www.hbr.org

How—and Why—to Stop Multitasking

by Peter Bregman

CEO of Bregman Partners, a global leadership development and

change management firm.

Read more by Bregman at blogs.hbr.org/bregman

During a conference call with the executive committee of a nonprofit board on which I sit, I decided to send an e-mail to a client.

I know, I know. You'd think I'd have learned.

I've written before about the dangers of using a cell phone while driving. Multitasking is dangerous. And I proposed a way to stop.

But when I sent that e-mail, I wasn't in a car. I was safe at my desk. What could go wrong?

Well, I sent the client the message. Then I had to send him another one, this time with the attachment I had forgotten to append. Finally, my third e-mail to him explained why that attachment wasn't what he was expecting. When I eventually refocused on the call, I realized I hadn't heard a question the Chair of the Board had asked me.

I swear I wasn't sleep-deprived or smoking anything. But I might as well have been. A study showed that people distracted by incoming e-mail and phone calls saw a 10-point fall in their IQs. What's the impact of a 10-point drop? The same as losing a night of sleep. More than twice the effect of smoking marijuana.

Doing several things at once is a trick we play on ourselves, thinking we're getting more done. In reality, our productivity goes down by as much as 40%. We don't actually multitask. We switch-task, rapidly shifting from one thing to another, interrupting ourselves unproductively, and losing time in the process.

You might think you're different, that you've done it so much you've become good at it. Practice makes perfect and all that.

But you'd be wrong. Research shows that heavy multitaskers are *less competent* at doing several things at once than light multitaskers. In other words, in contrast to almost everything else in your life, the more you multitask, the worse you are at it. Practice, in this case, works against you.

I decided to do an experiment. For one week I would do no multitasking and see what happened. What techniques would help? Could I sustain a focus on one thing at a time for that long?

For the most part, I succeeded. If I was on the phone, all I did was talk or listen on the phone. In a meeting I did nothing but focus on the meeting. Any interruptions—e-mail, a knock on the door—I held off until I finished what I was working on.

During the week I discovered six things:

First, it was delightful. I noticed this most dramatically when I was with my children. I shut my cell phone off and found myself much more deeply engaged and present with them. I never realized how significantly a short moment of checking my e-mail disengaged me from the people and things right there in front of me.

Second, I made significant progress on challenging projects, the kind that—like writing or strategizing—require thought and persistence. The kind I usually try to distract myself from. I stayed with each project when it got hard, and I experienced a number of breakthroughs.

Third, my stress level dropped dramatically. Research shows that multitasking isn't just inefficient, it's stressful. And I found that to be true. It was a relief to do only one thing at a time. I felt liberated from the strain of keeping so many balls in the air at each moment. It felt reassuring to finish one thing before going to the next.

Fourth, I lost all patience for things I felt were not a good use of my time. An hour-long meeting seemed interminably long. A meandering, pointless conversation was excruciating. I became laser-focused on getting things done. Since I wasn't doing anything else, I got bored much more quickly. I had no tolerance for wasted time.

Fifth, I had tremendous patience for things I felt were useful and enjoyable. When I listened to my wife Eleanor, I was in no rush. When I was brainstorming about a difficult problem, I stuck with it. Nothing else was competing for my attention, so I was able to settle into the one thing I was doing.

Sixth, there was no downside. I lost nothing by not multitasking. No projects were left unfinished. No one became frustrated with me

What people are saying on HBR.org

"For those with direct reports, this is more important than almost anything. If your time is limited with each associate, make the most of the time that you have. Removing the business gains, the impoliteness and rudeness of multitasking can't be overstated." —posted by Joseph

"A friend of mine suggested 25-minute work periods with no multitasking. It's called The Pomodoro Technique™. Work on one thing for 25 minutes, then rest." —posted by Denis

"I set up my phone to automatically go to voice-mail and I shut down my e-mail. Within just a few business days I was able to get more work done than I've accomplished in the previous four weeks combined." —posted by CFB

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for not answering a call or failing to return an e-mail the second I received it.

That's why it's so surprising that multitasking is so hard to resist. If there's no downside to stopping, why don't we all just stop?

I think it's because our minds move considerably faster than the outside world. You can hear far more words a minute than someone else can speak. We have so much to do, why waste any time? So, while you're on the phone listening to someone, why not use that *extra* brain power to book a trip to Florence?

What we fail to realize is that we're already using that brain power to pick up nuance, think about what we're hearing, access our creativity, and stay connected to what's happening around us. It's not really extra brain power. And diverting it has negative consequences.

So how do we resist the temptation?

First, the obvious: The best way to avoid interruptions is to turn them off. Often I write at 6 AM when there's nothing to distract me. I disconnect my computer from its wireless connection and turn my phone off. In my car, I leave my phone in the trunk. Drastic? Maybe. But most of us shouldn't trust ourselves.

Second, the less obvious: Use your loss of patience to your advantage. Create un-realistically short deadlines. Cut all meetings in half. Give yourself a third of the time you think you need to accomplish something.

There's nothing like a deadline to keep things moving. And when things are moving fast, we can't help but focus on them. How many people run a race while texting? If it turns out you only have 30 minutes to finish a presentation you thought would take an hour, are you really going to answer your cell phone?

Interestingly, because multitasking is so stressful, single-tasking to meet a tight deadline will actually reduce your stress. In other words, giving yourself less time to do things could make you more productive and relaxed.

Finally, it's good to remember that we're not perfect. Every once in a while it might be OK to allow for a little multitasking. As I was writing this, Daniel, my two-year-old son, walked into my office, climbed on my lap, and said "*Monsters, Inc.* movie please."

So, here we are. I'm finishing this piece on the left side of my computer screen while Daniel is on my lap watching a movie on the right side of my computer screen.

Sometimes, it is simply impossible to resist a little multitasking.

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