Special Report

Making Every Minute Count:

How PIs Can Fit 28 Hours Into a 24-Hour Day

Dr. Donald Wetmore,
The Productivity Institute, Stratford, Conn.

and

Principal Investigators Association
A Note from the Publisher

Dear Professional:

This resource is designed to help you with a challenge that nearly everyone faces: time management. Principal investigators rank it as one of their top concerns inside and outside the laboratory.

The strategies compiled in this report come from one of our popular audio conferences, "Making Every Minute Count: How to Fit 24 Hours into a 24-Hour Day," presented by Dr. Donald E. Wetmore.

In 1982, Dr. Wetmore created the Productivity Institute in Stratford, Conn., to conduct his original three-day Time Management and Personal Productivity Seminar.

With more than 30 years’ experience in the field, he developed his program to address the challenges of anyone wanting to accomplish more in their day. His presentation teaches participants how to effectively double their personal productivity both at work and at home, and to do it in less time, creating more balance in their personal lives.

During the past 20 years, Dr. Wetmore has made over 2,000 presentations to people from around the world and is considered one of the leading experts in time management.

Besides a law degree, he holds a master’s degree in business administration and a bachelor’s degree in accounting.

This report begins with 12 strategies aimed at helping you become more productive by prioritizing daily tasks and accomplishing the more important ones without falling victim to distractions.

The in-depth advice reaches beyond the workday, offering principles on wise use of time that apply throughout all aspects of life.

“The idea of time management/personal productivity is a bit more than making up a good “to do” list and having a clean desk. ...Time management is really the art and/or science of taking control of the entire 24 hours each day and playing them out in a way that is going to create balance and harmony in our lives,” Dr. Wetmore says.

In addition to the special reports that make up the library, Principal Investigators Association also offers e-Alerts and a year-long series of audio conferences — all devoted to helping you improve performance and spend more time doing what you love: the research. Our goal is to be the world’s leading source of real-world, results-oriented information in all fields of science. Our unique approach — delivering targeted guidance, case studies, success strategies and best practices — has earned us a reputation for depth, usefulness and high-value information as well as a loyal group of researchers who rely on that information to help them with their administrative and funding duties. We’re glad you’ve joined them and invite you to review all of our products and services at www.principalinvestigators.org.

We are always on the lookout for interesting topics, researcher needs, and ways we can be of service to you. If you have a success story you would like to share with your colleagues, please do not hesitate to contact us. We would be delighted to hear from you, and we look forward to serving you and your organization with the best advice and information available in the future.

Best Regards,

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How often have you said to yourself: “I surely could use another hour in this day?”

The trick is making small changes here and there that can add up to that much time savings and even more.

Suppose you want to gain just one more productive hour each laboratory workday. That adds up to about six extra weeks of productive working time a year — time that can make a big difference in your research career. To add that extra hour, try one of these 12 basic strategies:

1. Create a to-do list that prioritizes tasks. Try listing your tasks this way:
   • A, for the most crucial. You’re the only one who can determine what goes in this category. And you’ll decide in light of your commitments and your responsibilities to others. You also want to take into account the balance you’re trying to create, your goals and your "want-to's" in life.
   • B, for that which is important. If you had a chance to choose between doing an A or a B, you’d obviously want to work on the A.
   • C is for minimal value. Most likely, you’re not going to get to your C’s on any particular day, but that’s OK because everything else by definition is going to have a higher value.
   • D is the category for whatever has no value. What do you do if you find you have a D on your list? Try to get rid of it. By definition, it has no value. You may not be able to eliminate every D, but those you do jettison will give you a mental boost just to get those things off your back.

2. Set aside some time each night to plan for the next day. If you know what you need to do tomorrow, you’ll sleep better tonight. By routinely planning the night before, you’ll be more rested and focused to start the new day.

3. Work with a clean desk and a clean work environment. The person who works in a messy environment will spend anywhere from an hour to 90 minutes each day either looking for things or being distracted by other things. Having to deal with a messy environment can rob vital time and energy from important work. It can lead to 10 percent to 15 percent of your workweek going down the drain.

4. Take work in bites. Challenge: You have a big written proposal that’s going to take about three hours to prepare. The solution lies in the answer to the question, ‘How do you eat an elephant?’ One bite at a time. So use the first 20 minutes to create an outline and a list of resources. Then write down the next portion the next day. It might take you four or five days, but you can consume that elephant one bite at a time.

   Eat the crust. If you have something unpleasant to do and you schedule it for later in the day — just as you might save the crust of the pie for last — you give yourself all day to think of reasons not to do it and allow yourself to procrastinate.
5. **Assign deadlines.** If you give a task a deadline, you’ll get it done, but if you don’t assign a deadline, it may not get done for a long time, if ever.

6. **Be early.** The alternative is to be late. If you’re late, you increase any tendency you have to procrastinate.

7. **Make a deal with yourself to read the first page only.** If you have something long and tedious to read, perhaps lab data results or a long scientific article, make an agreement with yourself to read the first page only in five minutes. Before you know it you’ll have finished all of it. There’s something about getting over the first-page “hump” that can launch you on your way.

8. **Avoid the curse of perfectionism.** It’s a play on that 20/80 rule. Put in 20 percent of your time and achieve 80 percent of your result, and then move on. But if you suffer the curse of perfectionism, you say 80 percent isn’t enough; your result has to be perfect. Then it might cost another 80 percent of the time you have left to get that extra 20 percent of result, making it 16 times more “expensive” in scarce minutes.

9. **Delegate, delegate, delegate.** Delegating work will make you much more productive. The hardest part about doing so is simply letting go of control of something. If you want it to get done, you don’t always have to do it yourself, especially if you’re pressed for time. Hand some things off to your staff members.

   Or you can try what we might call “reverse delegation.” If a tech or grad student comes to you asking for help solving a problem that will take time away from your work, ask the person what they believe they should do. Whatever the problem, ask, “What do you think? Come on, you’ve solved problems like that before. What is your best idea of a solution?”

   The word “you” is very powerful — a word of empowerment that helps people grow. (But “I,” on the other hand is a weak word that creates dependency.) Surprise! Often when challenged the questioner himself will come up with a solution you can endorse.

   You can always delegate some work to your spouse, your significant other, family, and friends — those who will help if you simply ask. Or maybe hiring someone like an undergrad student to help with necessary outside errands like putting gas in your car, dropping off or picking up your dry cleaning. Hiring someone to do those things can add as much as 10-15 hours to your workweek.

10. **Decide if all those meetings are necessary.** Meetings are among the biggest institutional time wasters. So when you’re planning a laboratory staff meeting or you have to attend one, first ask yourself: Is it necessary? What would happen if, instead of every week, I had the meeting every other week? Or once a month?

    Perhaps nothing will come out of asking those questions, but if you at least ask them you might find some valuable extra time. Ask yourself, too, whether your presence at a particular meeting is necessary. What will you likely get out of it? What can you contribute to it?

    If a meeting is absolutely critical, then create an agenda with times and stick to it. Develop action items from the meeting and determine who’s going to monitor their progress so you’re not rehashing the same things month after month.
11. Log your interruptions. It would be nice if you could plan your day the night before and make things happen 1-2-3-4. But you’re going to experience interruptions. They are both good and bad; in fact, you’re paid to handle many of the A and B variety. Those aren’t the problem. It’s the C and D interruptions that cut into your valuable time. To get a better handle on all interruptions, try logging them, noting who or what interrupted you, what it was about, how long it took to handle, and whether it was an A, B, C or D. Keep the log three to five days, note how many are C and D. Try to avoid as many of these as possible in the future.

12. Continue to search for better ways to do things. If you are really intent on making better use of your time and are aware of how you’re using it now, you’ll soon begin to recognize faster and more efficient ways of handling all your daily tasks. No list of suggestions can cover all the possibilities. Therefore look at time management as a journey — not a destination.

These 12 tips are discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.
Chapter 1: Creating Balance

Having too much to do and seemingly not enough time to do it leads to stress, frustration, and sometimes puts you into crisis-management mode.

Balancing this begins by examining who we are and what we value most.

There are at least seven compartments of our lives that need to be in balance if we are to make the most of our available time. We’ll call them the **Seven Vital Areas of Life**. They are:

- Health
- Family
- Finances
- Intellectual
- Social
- Research Career
- Spiritual

No one will spend equal amounts of time in each of the seven vital areas every day, but here’s the point: Like a seven-legged table, if any one leg is longer than the rest, it will upset the balance of the entire table. The same is true of our life balance.

For example, if you do not take time for Health and Fitness and feel tired and fatigued, that is going to hurt your Family life and your Research Career. If things are not going really well in your Family life, that will adversely effect your Research Career and in extreme cases perhaps your mental health.

So, while the "to do" list included in the 12 basic tips above is an effective tool, the overall goal of improving our personal productivity involves more. Time management is really the art and/or science of taking control of the entire 24 hours each day and playing them out in a way that creates life balance and harmony.

If we are out of balance, we may be able to achieve great short-term success, but eventually the imbalance will catch up with us.

Getting caught up

Many people get caught up in one or two of the seven areas — say the Financial and Research Career areas. They are getting great results there but ignoring Health, ignoring Family, ignoring their Social life, all the while convincing themselves that this is a temporary situation. “Just until I get over the hump,” they tell themselves, fooling themselves into thinking this is going to be the last hump.

Then, while they are getting great short-term results, they suffer a heart attack.

Thirty-six percent of all fatalities are from heart attacks. One out of three men will die from a heart attack before age 65. (Women are just a few years after that and catching up). Now what happens to all that short-term success? It all goes down the drain in medical bills, lost earnings and indeed, in some cases, death.
Then that same person gets back to the desk or lab bench and makes the same mistake again. Focusing in on just one or two of the vital areas, (maybe this time Financial and Research Career and ignoring the Health, Family, Social, Intellectual and Spiritual areas), all the while convincing themselves that it is a short-term condition, and then they get served with divorce papers. If you have ever been through that process or know someone who has, you know what an adverse effect a divorce has on all of the Seven Vital Areas.

Think of this: After years of hard work focused on building your career, suddenly at age 45, half of everything you ever worked for goes down the drain in a property settlement in one day in divorce court. Is that good time management?

Many of these “mega” kinds of tragedies are self-inflicted because we are not doing enough of the right things. We may spend many hours in a research lab. But that alone is not the answer. The answer is “working smart” i.e., getting more done in less time but taking the time to do some of the right things to maintain our life balance.

**Examine each of the seven areas**

The Seven Vital Areas needn’t be arranged in any particular order. You may prioritize them as you see fit, but here are some observations about each:

1. **Health.** This often is the area we value least until we do not have it anymore. This year there will be about 2.2 million deaths in the United States and 75 percent will be from self-inflicted causes other than suicide. Consider the five leading causes: heart disease, stroke, cancer, cirrhosis and motor vehicle accidents. While they are not 100 percent preventable, they probably are 95 percent preventable.

   We are literally driving ourselves to an early grave in a fast-paced lifestyle of our making.

   Some 90 percent of those who sign up for health and fitness clubs will no longer be visiting them 90 days from now. They keep paying but don’t go. We all have to take time for health and fitness today or be forced to take time for sickness and illness tomorrow.

2. **Family.** Few of us have to be sold on the concept of more quality time with family, yet this eludes many of us as we get caught up in academic life, scientific pursuits, or other activities. There will be about two million marriages this year in the United States, and half that many divorces. About 95 percent of divorces are caused by a lack of communication. Communication equals Time. REAL COMMUNICATION TAKES TIME.

   Scientists/researchers, like most professionals, average less than two minutes per day in meaningful communication with their spouses or significant others, and less than 30 seconds per day in meaningful communication with their children. Just enough time to say, “How was school? Did you get any homework? Go do it. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

   You are not who you were five years ago, nor who you will be five years from now. Your spouse or significant other is changing, too. Therefore, without steady communication, one day you may ask yourself: “Who is that person?” Were you communicating at the time of your marriage? Probably, but later many things come along to disrupt it. For example, one works nights getting a degree, the other travels frequently for work.

   So why are half the marriages headed for disaster? Often it’s really a time-management issue.
3. **Financial.** This area tends to take up one of the biggest chunks of our time.

   Time can only be spent, never saved. And there are only two ways to spend time: wisely or not so wisely. If you start with 168 hours in the week and subtract 56 hours for sleep (8 hours per night x 7 nights), you have 112 hours left.

   Then subtract time to satisfy your Financial interests. Say you put in 50 hours per week in the lab, on average. Add 10 hours for preparation, travel, etc. That totals 60 hours. When you subtract that from 112, you are down to 52 hours per week to do everything else you need to accomplish, including eating.

   While there are not wide differences in the amount of time each of us devotes to the Financial area, there are wide gaps in earnings. Those who achieve what they deem financial security, or who earn considerably more, do not have the advantage of more time. Often, they simply use their time more wisely, spending a bit of it to improve their fortunes in the long term.

   For example, let's say you spend one hour per day (perhaps in your car, going to and from the lab) reading or listening to a tape on financial investment techniques, technical training, etc., or on any topic that could enhance your career and/or earnings.

   One hour per day, seven days per week x 50 weeks per year = 350 hours per year in self-improvement. The average college course is about 35 classroom hours. So you've done the equivalent of 10 college courses per year in self-improvement.

   Would your financial future be enhanced if you sought out and applied that much of the right information over the next four years? Absolutely. We have to re-invest some time into improving our financial success because to improve the outcome we must change the input.

4. **Intellectual.** All well-run institutions try to look ahead and plan for what the world will be like in five or 10 years. Training and personnel development are high priority with them.

   The same should be true of you as a principal investigator within such an organization. The institution sets its own goals and reinvests in itself to keep growing. It does not want to stand still. How much of your time are you consistently re-investing in yourself so that you can stay ahead of the curve in your field? Do you keep up with reading the top journals and other publications? Do you stay abreast of available grants and try to improve your grant-writing skills? There is no standing still. We are all moving ahead of the curve or falling behind it.

5. **Social.** We all appreciate good social relationships, but like the other six areas this seems to be lacking for many. If you have not had satisfaction in your social connections because of lack of time, we offer some suggestions further in this report.

6. **Research Career.** This dimension is different from our Financial area, although what we do for financial reasons we do for career reasons as well.

   Assume you joined a new institution where you found yourself alone in a lab every day with little or nothing to do. You could not talk to anyone, conduct an experiment, work with a computer, or read a book. Yet you were fully funded and amply compensated. Would you enjoy that environment?

   Probably not. The financial part is there, but what's missing? The feeling that you were conducting valuable research that could help mankind, leaving some footprints in your field, making a difference. Not just being funded, but feeling a real sense of contribution. That is what that your Research Career area is all about.
According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 80 percent of people going to work on Monday morning would rather be somewhere else. Perhaps some jobs are worthy of that level of contempt, but probably not 80 percent of them. Rather, the level of Research Career satisfaction you enjoy depends mostly on you — how you spend your TIME in the lab or classroom in relation to your big picture and what we want out of life. If the research or teaching you do is a means to get you to a desired end, Mondays lose their drudgery.

7. Spiritual. This final area does not necessarily involve organized religion, although to many it does. Once again, many feel they don’t have much time for this area of life, but there are ways to carve out some time to meet one’s spiritual needs.

You’ve met the type of person who can never take off three days for a seminar or scientific organization meeting. But when they get a surprise call one day about a death of a close family member, three hours later they are on a plane, dropping everything. They may have deep regrets for not spending enough time with that departed person. When they return a few days later, the laboratory staff hasn’t fallen apart. Things quickly get back to normal. So couldn’t some time away have been taken earlier?

Why does it take a death, a heart attack, or some other personal emergency to convince us to do what we know we should be doing? Life is a constant series of choices. We choose to work. We choose our relationships. We choose how much time we spend with everyone who is important in our lives.

A ‘super day’ every day

At the end of a day, as your head hits the pillow, suppose you go through a mental inventory of each of the Seven Vital Areas and rate them on a scale of 1 to 10. Today, every area was a 10. You were busy in the lab, but you managed to squeeze out an hour for exercise, a walk, or a jog. You also managed to spend time with your daughter doing homework and/or to telephone your brother across the country. And it was a great Financial day because you spent a few minutes with a financial planner to map out a brighter economic future. Also you managed to squeeze in an hour to read a scientific journal you had been meaning to do, to address the Intellectual area. Though you were busy, you still went out with friends for a drink at day’s end or whatever would satisfy the Social area. And it was a great Research Career day, because you and your post-docs made some real progress on a key experiment and obtained positive results. It also just happened to be a 10 in your Spiritual area as well.

So, how was your day? A busy one for sure. But you also had a super day.

Were there any problems? Did someone cut you off in traffic on your drive to or from the university? Did a colleague say an unkind word? Did someone hang up on you? Did your child bring home a disappointing report card? Sure, you had problems, but they had little to do with whether you had a great day. A super day has more to do with whether you had balance and harmony among your Seven Vital Areas.
New definition of time management

What we have discussed likely creates a new definition of Time Management for you.

You can see it means far more than working with a “to do” list and a clean desk. Rather, it means gaining control over the entire 24 hours in each day and using them to create balance and harmony, producing the good feelings of physical health and, more importantly, those of mental health and positive attitudes.

Your health will dominate your time if you let it. Your family will take all your time if you let them. Your research, colleagues, or your church will all take your time if you let them. That doesn’t mean any of those entities is bad; it is just the way the world works. If there is a void of time control and leadership in your life, someone or something else will take charge and not utilize your time in the best ways for you.

In the next chapter, we examine that process of controlling the time you have at your disposal.
Chapter 2: Managing Multiple Priorities

Because there are so many entities and events competing for your time, without some system to control and prioritize the demands, it is easy to fall victim to the loudest voice. ("The squeaky wheel gets the grease.") You need a Day-Timer or calendar tool. There are many good ones available in stationery stores, but make sure the one you choose has a "Month-at-a-Glance" calendar for appointments and scheduled events and a "Daily To-Do List," is simple to use, and compact enough to fit into your pocket, briefcase, or purse. Nowadays some "smart phones" or PDAs can supply this feature.

Take this tool with you everywhere, to the lab and to social and family engagements. The starting point of control is writing things down rather than trying to rely on memory.

Planning for tomorrow

Pretend that you are at home at 7:30 on a Sunday evening and are in a mode we’ll call Daily Planning. In that mode, you will set aside a little time each night to plan the next day’s 24 hours.

As you look ahead to Monday, pretend also that it is going to be an ideal day. No appointments, interviews, or interruptions. You have all day to handle your To Do list. Now list on a piece of paper (if you do not yet have a more formal tool) about 12-15 items you would tackle under these ideal conditions. Phone calls, experiments, catch up on reading, etc.

Your thought might be that there is no way you could accomplish that many items in a day. But that’s just an artificial number to give you enough material as we go to the next step in the exercise.

On a regular basis, you may only have a few items for your daily To Do list. Here is a sample list:

• Call Allan
• Budget
• Gnt. progs.
• Bonnie
• Tissue experiment
• Bills
• Smith report
• Call Dad
• Kathy
• Bank recs
• Call Jan
• Read (ext)
• Imp job (ext)
• Comp backup (ext)
A brief explanation of each might be useful:

- Call Allan — A PI in another building who requires information.
- Budget — Prepare your laboratory budget for the next quarter
- Gnt. progs. — Your abbreviation for “Grant Programs” — Your current project is nearing completion; it’s time to search out funding sources for a new project you have in mind.
- Bonnie — Bonnie is your lab secretary, and this is a reminder to check with her about some correspondence you asked her to handle. Not a big item, but if you don’t write it down, it slips through the cracks and a week or a month goes by without that information.
- Tissue experiment — Long, tedious, experiment with human-tissue samples that you don’t want to delegate to a post-doc. It’s too important; you want to do it yourself.
- Bills — Pay one or two personal bills, and approve some invoices from lab subcontractors for payment. They’re getting close to being late.
- Smith report — Quick report to a university administrator on results of a staff training program you conducted recently.
- Call Dad — This a personal item. Dad does not help with research, but without regular contact with him you will feel a void in your life and things will be out of balance.
- Kathy — Kathy is an assistant prof in your department who fills some spots in your teaching load. This is not a big item. You just need to touch base with her to set an upcoming assignment deadline. But, again, if you don’t put it in writing, it could escape you and create an issue later for your students.
- Bank recs — Your abbreviation for bank reconciliations. You have two accounts that need attention very soon.
- Call Jan — Another colleague’s call to be returned.
- Read (ext)— (ext) is your symbol for any repetitive function. You do not want to do this once and then forget to do it again. The “ext” reminds you, after completing this item, to post it forward to a later date so that there is continuity in that area.
- Imp job (ext) — Your abbreviation for “improve the job” and, once again, (ext) reminds you to extend to the next appropriate day for continuity. “Improve the job” is a simple exercise to take just a few minutes to come up with a little improvement in some technique or daily lab procedure that will have a lasting, cumulative effect. For example, positioning some lab instruments more conveniently, making sure you have adequate supplies, etc. This creates a good habit.
- Comp backup (ext) — Your abbreviation for computer backup and (ext) means to extend; i.e., list again on future days.

**Crucial vs. not crucial**

As you review your list, you see that some items are more important than others. The really important ones you label “crucial” and the rest “not crucial.”

Let us say that the most crucial item you can address on your list is the tissue experiment. But it is long and tedious. Over on your desk is some junk mail. It is quick and fun, and you need some emotional relief so you take some time to go through it. Then you notice your desk is a little cluttered. Though you should be working on the tissue experiment, you have all week to do that so you decide to straighten up your desk. In doing so you are substituting quantity for quality.
The temptation is great because most people want to “get it all done.” The truth is, we never do. Most have an expectation (I want to get it all done) and a reality (I do not get it all done) and they build stress into their lives over these conflicting goals.

So, it’s time for a new rule. Get rid of “I want to get it all done.” Substitute “I want to get the most important things done.”

The old rule forces us toward the Not Crucial side where we emphasize Quantity. The new rule focuses us on the Crucial side where we emphasize Quality.

What is more valuable: getting 10 not crucial items done or three crucial items? It is the three crucial items. To help you get a better focus, try this prioritizing system:

- A = Crucial
- B = Important
- C = Minimal value
- D = No value
- "." = Quickie

In the 12 tips offered at the start, we explained the meaning of A, B, C, and D priority issues and how you might address them. But here’s one more category not mentioned before:

"." stands for Quickie. This is for an item that takes less than a minute to do. For example, for you to check in with Bonnie and get the information you need might take all of 30 seconds. Analyze that item. “Is it an A? No, it’s really a B. By the time you figure out what it is, you can have it done. Label those quick items with "."

Now let’s take the prioritizing tool and apply it to your hypothetical list:

Step one is to identify the "." items, those that can be done in less than a minute. The items “Bonnie” and “Kathy” can both be accomplished within a minute, so they become your first priority, and are listed in Column I of the chart below. As you prioritize, other items on your list go into Columns II, III, IV and V, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call Allan</td>
<td>Call Allan</td>
<td>Call Allan</td>
<td>B-2 Call Allan</td>
<td>B-2 Call Allan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson research</td>
<td>A-1 Anderson research</td>
<td>A-1 Anderson research</td>
<td>A-1 Anderson research</td>
<td>A-1 Anderson research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills</td>
<td>Bills</td>
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<td>Smith report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Call Dad</td>
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<td>Call Dad</td>
<td>Call Dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank recs</td>
<td>A Bank recs</td>
<td>A-3 Bank recs</td>
<td>A-3 Bank recs</td>
<td>A-3 Bank recs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call Jan</td>
<td>Call Jan</td>
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<td>Call Jan</td>
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<td>. Read (ext)</td>
<td>A Read (ext)</td>
<td>A-4 Read (ext)</td>
<td>A-4 Read (ext)</td>
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<td>Imp job (ext)</td>
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<td>Comp backup (ext)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The next step is to identify the A items, those you feel are crucial: [See p. 19, Figure 1, Col II]

You have four A's. There is no magic to the number, but if you have none, something is amiss. You are working on some low-priority matters.

**Get it all done at the same time?**

Many try to do this, when the truth is you can only do one thing at a time. Not literally. Yes, you can be on the phone and looking at paperwork at the same time. But the point is, the more you try to do, the more diffused your focus and the less effective you will be.

**A clean desk?**

Always try to work in a clean, organized environment. Some always work with a messy desk — things piled around it on the floor and on shelves and tables. When you encourage them to clean up the messy desk, they may get defensive and say it’s their “filing system” that they alone understand.

But studies show that those who work in a messy environment spend, on average, about one hour per day looking for things or being distracted by things. One hour per day; that is seven hours per week or about 15 percent-plus of the average work week going down the drain. Remember that old saying, “Out of sight; out of mind?” The reverse is also true. When it is in sight, it is in mind. We cannot help but be distracted by the “mess,” diffusing our efforts.

**Get a focus**

To help focus on one item at a time, we now go to the next step in our process, which is to sub-prioritize, using the numeric system. You have four A's. You cannot do all four at the same time, but you can do one at a time. If you could work on only one “A” item, it probably would be the tissue experiment. That becomes you A-1. Then, if you finish that or complete a solid portion, the second item you might focus on is the Budget; that becomes an A-2. Then you would work on the Bank recs, so label that as A-3 and finally, by process of elimination, Read (ext) becomes an A-4.

Go ahead and sub-prioritize your A's (See P. 19, Figure 1, Col. III). Then move this bulleted list starting with A-2 into Col. III of chart.

The next step is to identify the B items, the things that are important, but do not have that high crucial value. Once identified, sub-prioritize the B's. Your To-Do list might now look like what's in Col. IV of Figure 1 on P. 19:

You have four B's (but again there is no magic number).

Next, identify the C items — all the remaining have to be C's because if they are not, then they are D's and should be removed because they have no value. Once identified, sub-prioritize the C's (see P. 19, Figure 1, Col. V).

You have now created your To Do list, your road map for Monday. Thus, when you arrive at the lab, you already decided the night before what you will do and when.
The first items to complete will be the “,” ones because they are quick, giving you a jump-start for the day. (This assumes Bonnie and Kathy are available; otherwise you would defer them until later.) Then take the items in order of their priority, A-1, A-2, etc.

As each item is completed give yourself a check mark.

**Stuff**

Without some pre-determined direction in your day, it is easy to fall victim to our enemy: “stuff.” Stuff is found in that bottomless bucket of demands and responsibilities you can never complete. When you get to your lab, the phone rings. So what do you do? Answer it. You have to. Then a colleague, post-doc, student, or tech comes to you with a request or a concern. The mail arrives. There is a memo someone just dropped off. Oh, here is someone from administration. Drop everything; emergency meeting. Now it is lunchtime.

Throughout your day, you didn’t get the important items done because you got caught up in “stuff.” You will attack them tonight. But tonight, you’re caught up in more “stuff.” At home there is mail to handle. The phone rings; it’s a telemarketer. There is the daily newspaper on the counter. You read it because you paid for the subscription. Then you are hungry, so you eat. That creates dishes to clean up. You talk to your daughter about school and the phone rings again. It’s an old colleague from long ago and you reminisce for 45 minutes until it’s bedtime. You get caught up in stuff.

There is never enough time. The only way to get more time is to take it. The planning process, while not perfect, brings you into focus, leading you to get more of the important things done in your day.

At the end of the workday, let’s say you accomplished the following:
- B-2 Call Allan
- A-2 Budget
- C-1 Gnt. progs.
- . Bonnie
- A-1 Anderson research
- C-3 Bills
- C-2 Smith report
- B-4 Call Dad
- . Kathy
- A-3 Bank recs
- B-1 Call Jan
- A-4 Read (ext)
- C-4 Imp job (ext)
- B-3 Comp backup (ext)

Have you had a good, productive day? For sure. What about the items you didn’t accomplish?

It’s OK. Your productivity is never measured on what you left on the table. It is based on what you did accomplish. As long as the items done were more important than the ones left undone, you’ve had a productive day.
Handling the undone items

Certainly, you don’t want to let the unfinished items slip through the cracks, so, tonight (Monday night as you continue “let’s pretend”) in daily planning, take all of the unfinished items and move them forward to the next appropriate day for completion.

It makes no sense to take all the unfinished items and roll them over to tomorrow if tomorrow will be no better day to work on them. Because then, tomorrow (Tuesday), in daily planning you will roll the same items forward to Wednesday, and you are then caught up in the painful exercise of copying ever-longer lists.

The first unfinished item is “C-1 Gnt. progs.” You see that you can get to that on Friday, so you move that item forward to Friday’s list. Move it forward as an un-prioritized blank item, not as a C-1. Because Thursday night in daily planning you will want the opportunity to re-prioritize that item in light of all the other items on Friday’s list.

What is a C-1 today could become an A-1 by then. To show the item was moved forward, put an arrow to the left of that item. The next unfinished item is C-3 Bills. You think you can get that done on Thursday, so you move it forward to Thursday’s list and use an arrow to the left of it to show that it was moved forward. At the end of the process, every item has a check mark showing completion or an arrow moving it forward.

‘But I keep getting interrupted’

Now all of this would be great in an ideal world, but in the real world we get interruptions that throw us off the track. Interruptions are unanticipated events that come to us via the telephone (or any electronic device) or in person. Interruptions are both good and bad. There are the A + B interruptions, which by definition are crucial and important. Those are not the problem. They are your main priority. It is the C + D interruptions, which by definition have little or no value, that are cause for concern because to the extent you spend your time on them you are kept from doing A + B work.

We will address this issue more thoroughly in Chapter 7, “Controlling Interruptions.” There, we will find that most people will spend about half their time in interruptions, most of which are of the C + D variety. You’ll learn how to track your own interruptions and eliminate a big chunk of them.

Appointments and scheduled events

Go to the other part of your day that deals with “Appointments and Scheduled Events” and see how you can gain more control in that area.

An appointment or scheduled event is when you have committed to do something at a particular time. It could be business-related or personal — a staff meeting, job interview, dentist appointment, dinner with that special person, etc.

The starting point is to take advantage of the power of the pen; put them into writing. Get a series of monthly calendars to give you a “Month at a Glance” view of all appointments and scheduled events. Secure your monthly calendar sheets for at least the next two months so you can proceed.
Record in the appropriate blocks your upcoming appointments and scheduled events. Put early-in-the-day appointments toward the top of that day’s block, middle-of-the-day commitments in the middle and late-in-the-day commitments toward the bottom so that, visually, you get a sense of when they occur.

List them in chronological order. Let us say you have 9 a.m., 10 a.m., and 11 a.m. commitments on a particular day. Some people will list the 9 a.m., then the 11 a.m. and put the 10 a.m. at the bottom with an arrow or asterisk pointing upward. The next thing they know, they are running late or missing appointments altogether.

**Lots of places to go and people to see**

Just to illustrate how confusing and competitive scheduling events can be, here is a hypothetical look-ahead:

- Sept. 1 at 6:30 a.m. and continuing weekly is a standing appointment to play racquetball with a colleague. Sept. 4 at 4 p.m. you’ll meet the furnace man to discuss repairs to your heating system. Sept. 3 and 4 are social and family times. Sept. 5-7 and Oct.10-15 you will be attending two seminars and presenting at one of them. Sept. 9 and following, you’ll attend your son’s high school football games. Sept. 11 at 5 p.m. you will interview a new post-doc followed by a 7 p.m. class that you teach on Monday evenings. The next day, Sept. 12, two post-docs who have a minor dispute will meet with you in your office at 3 p.m. and 4 p.m.
  - Sept. 12 at 6 p.m. you have dinner with your son Chris. You do this twice a year with each of your three children, time alone just to communicate. You will do the same with Jon and Jen on later dates. Sept. 13 at 2 p.m. you have a telephone appointment with Dr. Larson. You schedule a lot of these to avoid too much “telephone tag.”
  - Sept. 16 is a monthly meeting of the scientific researchers organization you belong to.
  - Sept. 17 at 3 p.m. is your flight to Toronto, returning at 6:50 p.m. on Sept. 20. Sept. 22 at 7 p.m. is a special dinner with your wife. Sept. 27 (and subsequent days) are set aside to work on research article you will soon publish. Appointments do not always have to be with other people. You can make some just with yourself to handle special projects.
  - Use the “Month at a Glance” calendar system to take advantage of three principles: **context, anticipation, integration.**

**Context**

This is the idea of scheduling ourselves for an event in relationship to what is going on around it.

For example, you might get a call on Tuesday, Sept. 26, from Dr. Joyce, a fellow researcher in your field who wants to discuss collaboration with you. You feel that would be mutually beneficial. He invites you to his office in New York City for a meeting on Friday, Sept. 29, at 10 a.m. A review of your calendar shows that the time is available, and you would be inclined to say “yes” on the basis of “space availability.”

But maybe there is a better way. You look ahead in your calendar and see that you are already scheduled to be in New York City the following Tuesday at 3 p.m. at a publisher’s office to discuss an article you were to peer-review. Would it not make more sense to combine both appointments on the same day?
The old switcharoo

You suggest to Dr. Joyce: “Friday the 29th works, but I’ll be in New York the following Tuesday at 3 p.m. How about if we get together that morning at 10?” When someone is requesting your time, 95 percent of the time there is an alternate date and time that are just as good. So, when you suggest the alternate, you have about a 95 percent probability the person will say “yes.” Why? Because most other people schedule themselves on the basis of space availability, too. When Dr. Joyce requests Sept. 26 and you switch it to Oct. 3, you are in control. Not in any manipulative or evil way. Dr. Joyce got what he wanted, but you set it at a date and time that made more sense to you and saved yourself at least three hours.

Let us assume that Dr. Joyce is a “5 percent person” and refuses your request for an alternate date. Then you schedule the meeting per his request and make two trips to New York City, but you were going to do that anyway so you’re no worse off. But one other alternative, having set Joyce for Sept. 26, is to make a quick call to the publisher, who is scheduled for Oct. 3, to see if you can move his appointment back one week. You may still be able to combine the appointments and save time.

Context also deals with personality styles. Some of us function better early in the day. Others are “night people.” Knowing that you are more of a morning person, you would attempt to schedule important meetings earlier in the day vs. later, just to take advantage of how you work best. A “night person” would do the opposite. That is how “executive breakfasts” became familiar in the corporate world.

Racehorses and tortoises

We also function as “racehorses” and “tortoises.” A racehorse is someone who thrives on the overload. Having lots to do is what really gets a racehorse’s adrenaline pumping. A tortoise is someone who functions best at a more measured pace. Racehorses and tortoises accomplish just as much in this world. They just do it differently.

Let us say that you are more of a racehorse. You enjoy having lots to do at any one time.

So you would want to bunch as many staff meetings together as possible. If you are looking at five commitments for next week, perhaps you would schedule three for Monday and two for Tuesday. On the other hand, if you are more of a tortoise-type person, you would probably want to spread them out, scheduling one per day over the next week.

Anticipation

Next, is the principle of Anticipation. This is the idea that, each night in daily planning, you can take a look at all of your upcoming appointments and scheduled events and all of your upcoming To Do list items set out under the day that you have planned to get to them. Then ask yourself, “What can I do in anticipation of this item coming up next week or next month?”

Crisis management

When using the principle of anticipation, you’ll get to do everything necessary sooner, at your pace, with less stress. When you wait until the deadline is near, you must do the same things, only later with stress, rushing through, cutting corners and often having to go back and redo them. Then you are in “Crisis Management.”
Crisis management, for the most part, is when the deadline has crept up behind you and robbed you of all choice. If you find yourself in that mode a lot, it probably has less to do with your day-to-day responsibilities and more to do with a lack of anticipation. [Editor's note: Unless you are genetically hard-wired to enjoy and thrive in the adrenalin rush of “crisis mode.”]

Use the crisis management log

Here is a good exercise to help reduce crisis management:

For the next two weeks, run a Crisis Management Log. Start with a pad of paper, entitle it “Crisis Management Log,” and for the next two weeks when you encounter a crisis, log it in. Put down the date and time it occurs and a little detail, so that two weeks later when you go back to review you will remember the particulars. After two weeks go back and review every crisis you encountered and ask yourself, “Which of these could have been avoided?”

Most people discover that about 80 percent of the crises could have been avoided with better anticipation and planning. Then start the corrective steps to reduce the frequency of your crisis management events by starting items that have a deadline sooner or requesting information you need sooner rather than waiting until the last minute to receive it.

Integration

The final principle is Integration. This is the idea of having every appointment and scheduled event in one central location. Here’s a scenario to show why that’s important:

A scientist does consulting work on the side and is also his kids’ soccer coach. He has a separate calendar for each responsibility.

He gets a call from an old client that provided him with over $10,000 per year in consulting fees. He is asked if Thursday the 15th is available to meet. He goes into his den where he keeps his consulting calendar. The space is available so he confirms.

What he forgot to do was waltz into the kitchen where the soccer schedule was stuck on the refrigerator. Thursday the 15th was the same day as the championship game, and he had to be there; he could not let the kids down. He also neglected to check his lab calendar because that was kept at the lab, and that was the same day he had an important meeting with his department chair. It would be a stress-filled day.

He goes to the lab that day and the schedule is terrible. He leaves in mid-afternoon, changes his clothes to go to the soccer game. Gets home at 7:30 p.m., showers, changes clothes again to get to the consulting meeting at 8:15 p.m. By the time he arrives he is a dish rag, and the client knows it.

The scientist then receives a letter from the consulting client terminating his services. When they are paying him $50 an hour (not a princely sum), they want at least $50-an-hour’s worth of advice. That represented the loss of over $10,000 in annual consulting income.

If he had the principle of integration working for him with all his commitments in one place, he would have set a better day and time to meet with the client.
Use your Month at a Glance system to help you get the “Big Picture.”

Now you have a written plan for appointments and scheduled events and a To Do list for discretionary items. But all this writing does no good unless you start working on them. The enemy here is “Procrastination.”
Chapter 3: Overcoming Procrastination

Procrastination is a useful tool if it causes us to put off the C's and D's. But more often we use procrastination to avoid doing the A's and B's — and we get two negative payoffs for it. First, we reduce our productivity. Second and more importantly, we build stress into our day because we had an expectation of how our day should go, but reality was different. And that stress carries over to subsequent events, affecting their success, too.

Pain or pleasure

What causes us to procrastinate? For the most part, we make decisions throughout our day on a spectrum that exists between pain and pleasure. Unless we perceive enough pain for not doing it or enough pleasure to do it, we avoid the task.

Let's say you tell your students on the first day of class that, in order to successfully complete the class, they must submit on the last day of the term a 40-page, single-spaced, typewritten term paper, footnotes, bibliography, the whole works.

Will most students rush home that evening to start? Probably not. Why? There is no pain in avoiding the assignment now because they have the entire term left and, for most, there is probably little pleasure associated with working on it. So they procrastinate.

Now, it is Dec. 14, two days before the end of the term. Student X has not begun the paper. Will she start now? Perhaps. Is there any more pleasure in working on the paper now than there would have been on Sept. 1? No. But if she fails to submit the paper in two days, she will experience a really big pain called failing the class and having to repeat it. So to avoid that higher pain, she is now motivated to do what she was avoiding.

To get a handle on procrastination, we need to create in our minds enough pain for not doing something or, preferably, enough pleasure to do it. You're a creative person. Make it a game, giving yourself a reward at the end for doing it. This will go a long way toward overcoming procrastination.

Here are nine different ways to get a handle on procrastination, most of which are among the 12 main time-management tips given at the beginning of this presentation. Here we will cover a few of them in more depth:

1. Daily Planning
2. Work with a clean desk
3. Accomplish a long project in bites
4. Chain yourself to the task at hand
5. Plan around interruptions
6. Eat the crust first
7. Assign it a deadline
8. Be early
9. Read the first page only, at least
Daily planning

Having a planned day set up the night before will do more to overcome procrastination than any other idea contained herein. Let us say it is Friday night and you think you might want to travel somewhere 200 miles away for a mini-vacation on Saturday and Sunday. You just picture it but do nothing further. Saturday morning, you get up at 8:15, sleeping in a bit late because it has been a tough week. You think, “I’m going to travel to Interesting City.” You make a pot of coffee, read the paper.

The phone rings. It’s your sister in California. You haven’t spoken with her for some time, so you talk for the next 45 minutes during which you tell her, “I’m going to Interesting City today.” You get off the phone, have more coffee and the next thing you know, it is 11 a.m. Whoops. There’s no way you can go to Interesting City now and have a few hours of usable daylight to enjoy it. You’re not even dressed. “I’ll just go to Interesting City next weekend,” you say.

And so you procrastinate. No big deal, but the point is you didn’t accomplish what you meant to do. Let us go back to Friday night and make a small change that will produce a big difference. You ask yourself, “What time should I arrive in Interesting City? Well, I’d like to be there around 3 p.m.” The city is about six hours from home; therefore, you will need to be on the road at 9 a.m. You don’t want to just jump out of bed and go. You prefer to walk in the morning, have breakfast, and take time to pack. So, you will get up at 7, walk at 7:30, have breakfast at 8, and pack at 8:30. You don’t want to drive all the way to the city only to discover that there is a Shriner’s convention in town and no hotel rooms available, so you pick up the phone and make a hotel reservation. You might even make a dinner reservation and use your credit card to secure some theater tickets. Next, you get out the map and trace your route, which will include a little sightseeing detour.

All of this takes only a few minutes, and it is fun to do. What do you think the chances are that you will go to Interesting City on Saturday morning? Pretty good. Remember, our plan never owns us, we own it. But you have a much higher probability of going to that city on Saturday morning because you took the time Friday night to do some planning.

And so it is with our days. If we take the time the night before to do the Daily Planning, we will have a much higher probability of getting into the important things right away and not getting all caught up in stuff.

Chain yourself to the task

Perhaps it is 2 p.m. and you have to work on that long, tedious, tissue experiment. You want to leave at 5 but start to chew up the time searching for some supplies, getting coffee, etc., until about 3:20 p.m., when you have license to say: “Well, it’s too late to start on this.”

When this occurs, chain yourself to the experiment area (with an imaginary chain) and tell yourself you cannot move until the work is done. Give yourself a positive treat or reward at the end. It is a silly mind game, but it’s also a silly mind game to chew up the time. At least this has a positive benefit.

Plan around interruptions

It is so much easier swimming downstream with the flow than trying to buck the current and swim upstream. You may get most of your interruptions early in the day and early in the week. Therefore, if you plan a big A-1 first thing Monday morning,
you are buying frustration because you no sooner get started and the phone rings or a lab tech comes in. Plan your major projects for later in the day and later in the week, when you are likely to have fewer interruptions.

**Assign deadlines**

Things that have deadlines move to action. Those scheduled for “as soon as possible” wind up in that vague category pile, and then you procrastinate. Set deadlines realistically and add on a buffer of time. Things always seem to take longer than we planned. Then you will give yourself a margin of error to reduce stress and, even better, you will deliver before the promised deadline and look even better.

**Be early**

When you are late, you procrastinate. You miss things, meetings have to be rescheduled, you are rushed and not focused. There are very few people who are truly “late” people. A late person is someone who does not have a good relationship with the clock. They are 10 minutes late today, 20 minutes late tomorrow. The next day, they are 11 minutes early. Most people who are late have a consistency about their lateness. They might be 20 minutes late all the time. They don’t consider themselves “late.” In there mind they are always on time — 20 minutes later.

The solution? Set your watch ahead 20 minutes. Be conscious of the time. Leave early. There is a “lateness acceptability factor” in our culture that says if you are late some of the time because of traffic, the weather, or personal circumstances, then it is OK But if you are late some of the time, then you appear average. What if you are one of those people who are on time — all the time? Will that make you look different? Sure. Not a big difference, but remember, you only have to be a nose ahead of the competition to get more results.
Chapter 4: Effective Delegation

After sleep, work, etc., we are all down to 52 hours per week to do all the other things we need to do, including eating. But you can have a 224-hour week. You can have a 2,240-hour week or more. Through your time stream? No. Your time stream is fixed. But how about if you plug into someone else’s time stream? How about if you get someone else to produce results for you? You accomplish the same results. This can be done through delegation, which means plugging into someone else’s time stream.

Many PIs say they are not good delegators or do not feel they have the opportunity to delegate much. But in fact, more than 90 percent of their results already come to them through delegation.

We delegate more than we realize

Do you have mail delivered to your home? Could you go to the post office, rent a box, and drive your car there every day to pick up your mail? Sure. But you probably made the decision that this was not the best use of your time. You go to lunch and pay $4 for a sandwich. How many people were involved in the production of that sandwich? Perhaps hundreds. Someone had to grow the lettuce, grind the flour, bake the bread, deliver it to the restaurant, etc., etc. And this is not some far-fetched theory. This was exactly the way the world worked until about 300 years ago when the Industrial Revolution began and people began making things for each other.

If you had to produce everything you already have in your life today from scratch, you would not have 90 percent of what you have now. So the answer to whether we all delegate is “yes,” perhaps in ways you had not thought of before. The real question is, “How far do you want to go with it?” If you are thinking about great results in your life and career, you must use delegation because there is only a limited amount of time in your weekly time budget to accomplish results.

Letting go

The hardest part about delegation is simply letting go of some task you like to control. Delegation is not “dumping.” It is not just unloading a problem onto someone else. Delegation is giving it to the right person, giving them the tools to do it, giving them the support they need, allowing them to make decisions and errors, and having a feedback process to maximize the results.

Is this the best use of your time?

The starting point of delegation is to examine all of your appointments and scheduled events and all of your discretionary items listed on your To Do lists on the day you have scheduled to do them. Then you should ask this question: “Is this the best use of my time to personally attend this appointment or do this discretionary item?” If it is, go ahead. If not, try to think of a way to hand it off and free up your time to do something more meaningful. There is a lot of difference between “You do it” and “It gets done.” Which is more important? “It gets done.” Sure, it is great to do things yourself, but remember, you only have a small amount of time to spread around.
People tend to rise or sink to your level of expectation for them. If you are always telling your laboratory staff members, “Better let me handle this,” “This is too important,” “I’m the only one to do this,” you are sending out a message of incompetence that they will eventually buy into. Instead, delegate all you can to the lowest levels of your staff and the staff will rise to the occasion.

**Burnout**

Oftentimes, PIs misplace their loyalty to an institution by saying, “I’ll do whatever it takes to accomplish this project.” That is a commendable work ethic. But if you are on a path that eventually is going to burn you out and then you leave, is that a good thing for your institution, which now has to go out and recruit your replacement and loses the value of your experience?

Much of the turnover in the total work force is attributable to burnout. “Fed up.” “Cannot take it anymore.” And every time we change positions, does that interfere with our personal productivity? Yes. We lose seniority, contacts, have a new learning curve to overcome and get set backwards.

That doesn’t mean don’t ever change institutions or roles. Perhaps you had to move from a previous lab to get to the one you manage today. Sure, changing to enhance opportunity and for advancement is sometimes a good move. But to abandon a position because of burnout only to go to a new job and burn out again is only self-defeating.

**College assistants**

Each of us has 10-20 hours per week of minutiae, low-level outside tasks that need to be done. Buy groceries, clean the house, mow the lawn, put gasoline in the car, and run other errands. Perhaps grocery shopping on Saturday morning permits you to meet and greet the neighbors and have quality time with a family member.

But if you are spending 10-20 hours per week doing these rather low-level items and yet complaining that you do not have enough time to do your important lab work, perhaps there’s a choice.

Hire a college assistant. To recruit someone, simply call the placement office at your own university or other schools and colleges and you will be flooded with applicants.

You are looking for three qualities: a level head because the job is not closely supervised; access to a car; and a good driving record. Beyond that, if the individual has ever held a paint brush in his hands, it is a bonus. You are not going to get a master craftsman at this level. And the students love this type of job. It gives them more freedom than the fast-food type of employment they may have to accept.

Then delegate all those mundane tasks to this person, freeing up your time to do things that are more meaningful to your career.

**Hired help**

This means hiring someone who has professional expertise to get certain jobs done. Get a professional to prepare your tax return, pay for the lawn service, engage a professional resume preparation service, etc.

Look at all the To Do list items and all the appointments and scheduled events you have coming up. As you study each item, ask yourself, “Is this the best use of my time?” If not, try to figure out a way to delegate it out of your hands.
Chapter 5: Maximizing Meeting Time

Did you ever waste time in a meeting? It is frustrating spending D time while A items go unattended. Meetings can be among the biggest institutional time-wasters.

Here are some ideas to help you to maximize meeting time.

Is it necessary?

We are all creatures of habit. We attend the regular ones because we have always done so and nobody ever asked, “What would happen if it didn’t occur? What if we had it every other week?” The process of change begins only when we consciously examine what we are doing rather than continuing to do what we have always done.

Meetings do not always involve large groups of people. Sometimes it is just you and one to three others getting together. When someone asks you for a meeting, instead of an automatic “yes,” perhaps ask, “Is it necessary?”

A good question to help determine whether it is necessary is “What's on the agenda? Sure, I would like to meet with you, but, so that I may be prepared, what's on the agenda? What are we going to discuss?” In many cases it is some relatively simple matter than can be handled over the telephone in a few minutes rather than taking an hour to meet face to face.

Demand vs. deserve

To become a good time manager you need to stop allocating your time on the basis of those who demand it and, instead, allocate on the basis of those who deserve it. Do not be negative or arrogant as if to say or to imply, “You don’t deserve my time.” It is just that the demands for your time far outstrip your supply.

“No” does not always have to be “No.” Rather, you can say, “This is not a priority with me,” “I have too much on my plate already,” or “I won’t be able to meet until later in the week.” Use the words with which you are comfortable.

If the meeting is necessary, the next questions to ask are, “Am I necessary? Do I get anything from this meeting? Do I contribute anything to it?” If the answer to all questions is “no,” see if you can avoid the meeting. Or perhaps, the first half-hour applies to you but the remaining 90 minutes does not. See if you can get away after that first half-hour. It will not work 100 percent of the time, but if it works 80 percent of the time you will be that much farther ahead.

Write up an agenda

The next suggestion is to have a written agenda and use the power of the pen. Just like you have an agenda for your day through Daily Planning, have a written agenda for your lab meeting. It does not take a lot of time to prepare. Then circulate it among the staff so that you can secure feedback before the meeting and allow everyone the opportunity to be prepared. Maybe the feedback will allow you to remove items from the agenda, saving everyone time. Maybe items can be added to make the meeting more productive.
Why hold a meeting by ambush? Why not let the participants know in advance what they will be addressing? Circulate it in advance. Include times in the agenda. Have a starting time and stick to it.

‘I can get to meetings on time’

There are some people who absolutely believe they cannot make meetings on time. They believe they have a set of responsibilities that prevents it. So here is what happens: The meeting is scheduled for 2 p.m. It is now 1:58 and this post-doc gets up from his desk to go to the meeting some 30 paces down the hallway and his phone rings. What does he do? He picks it up. “I have to. This could be an important call.” It is now 2:06, and he walks out of the office and runs into another staff member who asks, “Can I see you for a minute? This will only take a minute.” What does the post-doc do? He stops to speak with him or her. And he drifts into the meeting at 2:26 p.m. convinced that he could not have done otherwise.

Now here is the irony. The post-doc who could not possibility make the 2 p.m. meeting on time because of his unique responsibilities, that very same person, never, never, is late for a 2:08 p.m. flight at the airport. Why?

It is 11:58 a.m., he’s in his office and just about to go to the front of the building to get into the last car to the airport so he can make the flight on time. If he’s not in that car in two minutes, he will not make the flight and he will miss the scientific conference he’s registered to attend. On the way out, the phone rings. What does he do? He lets it ring. He has to. He cannot take the risk of getting caught up on the phone. Down the hallway, he runs into a lab staffer who asks, “Can I see you for a minute?” What does he do? He says, “I’m sorry but I’m on the way to the airport. You’re important to me, but I’ll have to call you from there.”

What he’s doing is simply making different choices. If he can make it to the airport on time, why is it that he cannot make it to the meeting on time? The answer is he can. There is a world of difference between “I can’t” and “I won’t.” It is a choice.

Assign time for each item on the agenda. Did you ever have this experience? There are 10 items on the agenda, and the meeting is to last two hours but the first item takes an hour and 45 minutes? So set a time frame. For example: “2:20-2:45 New lab-task rotations: 2:20-2:45 Change in security procedures: 2:45-3:15.” This will tighten up the discussion.

But in spite of these tools, there are some who will be tough to rein in, so here are a couple more ideas:

• If you have to meet with someone who does not respect agreed upon ending times, schedule that meeting for a Friday afternoon. For example, you know your discussion should only take an hour and you know that person wants to leave the office at 5 p.m. See if you can schedule your meeting for 4, and that way the meeting will end on time and you are not in the uncomfortable position of trying to extract yourself from it. Or schedule it one hour before any other commitment that you know this person has.

• Have no chairs. Everyone will file in and say, “What’s going on? Where are the chairs?” Your reply: “Oh, this won’t take too long. Bernice, tell us about the new lab-task rotation.” The more comfortable you make a meeting, the longer it will last. If that is your objective, then roll in the heavy leather chairs, turn the lights down low, provide a variety of refreshments. Your meeting will last a long time.
If you have to meet with someone on the outside — a lab vendor, for example — and you need the information but do not wish to spend a lot of time with them, suggest a meeting at a fast-food spot. If, on the other hand, you would like the meeting to last some time, perhaps with a prospective new post-doc when time will help to develop a relationship, choose a nice cushy restaurant. Just by the choice of the venue, you can affect the time and also the quality of the meeting.

During the last six months or so, which meetings that you attended could have and should have been avoided? Looking at all meetings coming up in your future, which ones should you not attend?
Chapter 6: Managing Paperwork

Studies have shown that the person who works with a cluttered desk or work environment spends, on average, as much as 90 minutes each day being distracted by things or looking for things. It is not a solid block of time, but a few minutes here and there.

Let us discuss two dimensions to this problem: First is how to get your cluttered desk or workspace cleaned up and then how to keep from being re-buried under that blizzard of paperwork again.

Some people get their desks cleaned up then the next day they get a bunch of new papers, deal with half of them and set the other half aside. The day after, the same thing happens: Soon the piles grow, and in a few days they are back where they were.

Cleaning up the messy desk

Straightening up the messy desk is a choice. On the day when you think you will do it, put it on your To Do list as your A-1. Then, one by one, take every piece of paper, look at it and decide what day you are going to take action on it. Move it to that day’s To Do list until you’ve handled them all. It might take all day but will be worth it.

Did you ever visit with a university president, top dean, or other senior administration official? When you enter their offices what do you observe? Usually a clean desk, with maybe two or three things on it. Because of that a lot of people would think this senior person has a lot of staff to delegate to and many tools at their disposal. While this might be true, if you went back 20 years in these people’s careers, you’d probably find them working with clean desks then as well. There is a good lesson in that for all of us.

Did you ever find that, returning from lunch or an errand, someone has left something on your desk or chair? Taped to your telephone? What do you do? You respond to it. You get thrown off the track. But do not allow that. People will treat you, for the most part, the way in which you allow them to treat you. If you always respond to those items dropped on your desk, you are teaching that person that that is how it ought to be done.

Keeping the desk clean

Now that you have the desk cleaned up, how do you keep from being re-buried in the constant flow of paper?

The best way to deal with a problem is to never have it. Try to get yourself removed from unneeded distribution lists, report lists, junk-mail lists. Then you will not have to deal with that paper in the first place.

Second, have the paper screened so that only the important items relevant to you end up on your desk. If you don't have someone to do it, you can accomplish the same benefit through self-screening teams. Appoint four other people to help you. On Monday, you can screen the incoming paperwork for everyone in the group. On Tuesday, the second person does it for the group. Rotating the responsibility through the rest of the week among the group members will keep the task light for all.
Third, if it is a “quickie,” if it can be done in less than a minute, do it right then. So write a quick note, “Bonnie, please send this data over to Dr. Johnson in Building C.” Over. Done.

Finally, if it is going to take any amount of time, then schedule it. Put it on your To Do list on the day you think you will get to it and then file it away.

Follow these suggestions and you will get your desk cleaned up and keep it clean to give you a better focus for increased daily productivity.

Schedule the time you will clean up your work area to enhance your focus.
Chapter 7: Controlling Interruptions

You must characterize this challenge ("enemy") to deal with it. In order to get a handle on your interruptions, set up a log. Take a pad of paper and across the top, label it "Interruptions Log" and make six columns:

Date—Time—Who—What—Length—Rating

"Date" is for the date of the interruption; "Time" is for when it begins; "Who" is the person who brought it to you; "What" is a note or two to remind you of the gist of what it was about. "Length" is for the actual time it took; and, finally, "Rating" is its value to you, using the same A-B-C-D system.

Put down the value to you, not the value to the interrupter. To the interrupter, the value is almost always an A, crucial, and has to be addressed now. But you put down what it was worth to you. Be brutally candid. No one needs to see it so you do not have to account for your rating with anyone. But if you are not recording it accurately, you will not have accurate information to take proper corrective action.

Two logs for two problems

Prepare one log for “In Person” interruptions and a second for “Telephone Interruptions.” Separate logs are necessary because they measure different things. Another suggestion is to run the logs for a period of three to five days. If you run the log for only a day or so you may get a distorted sense of what is happening. Three to five days will tend to even out those blips and give a more accurate picture.

It may seem a pain in the neck to be bothered with logging interruptions, but it only takes a few seconds to log in each one immediately after it occurs. If you wait until the end of the day to fill it out, you will not remember.

Did you ever notice how, when we project how long things are going to take, it almost always takes twice as long? The same is true when we go back, in hindsight, to figure out how long something took. We will almost always underestimate the actual amount of time it took, or will take, by 50 percent. Most of us do not have a good clock in our heads to keep track of time spent or to estimate how long things will take. Take the time after each interruption to log it in.

Use an “In Person” interruptions log as our example. It is Monday, Oct. 16, at 9:02 a.m. and Dr. Fran stops by your desk. She has a new way to get that tissue experiment done in half the time. What a great interruption. This is going to save you time in the future. Rate this as an A.

Then, at 9:45 a.m., post-doc Bill stops by to complain about how the baseball season is progressing, how your team could have done better this season. You spend 15 minutes with him and rate this a D. Is Dr. Bill himself a D? No. He is a great post-doc, worthy of your respect. It is just that the time spent with him on this subject, in this case, was a D. There is a difference.

From your viewpoint, maybe spending that 15 minutes with Dr. Bill had some value or a lot of value. Perhaps you are interested in baseball, or maybe you are a new PI and Dr. Bill is doing a little schmoozing. Grade what you think it was worth to you. It was your time.
Continue to record your interruptions immediately after they occur — for three to five days. You’ll accumulate a lot of useful information. First, you will determine how many interruptions you are getting. And, you will tend to see the patterns when interruptions occur. Perhaps: Early in the day vs. late in the day. Early in the week vs. late in the week. This is helpful so you can plan larger tasks around and away from interruption time to avoid procrastinating the important items.

The 20/80 rule

You will determine who is bringing the interruptions to you. Here, you may find evidence of the 20/80 rule at work. The 20/80 rule is formally known as the Pereto Principle. Pereto was an Italian economist who discovered that about 20 percent of the companies in an economy would be responsible for generating 80 percent of the then Gross National Product and the remaining 80 percent of the companies in the same economy would generate the other 20 percent. But our concern is not about macro economics. This is about Time Management. But the 20/80 rule has a lot of application in our daily lives.

If you belong to a scientific organization, have you noticed that 20 percent of the members are there 80 percent of the time, doing 80 percent of the work and the remaining 80 percent of the members are there 20 percent of the time?

It may not always work with that exact ratio, but, typically, it is the small group that produces the big chunk of results. If you would like to double your results, you do not have to double the time you put in. All you need to do is identify how much of your time you are already spending on the things you do best, which produce the greatest results. And then through adjustments, find more time in your day to do those things you do so well, in essence, significantly increasing your results and personal productivity.

Most people find that about 20 percent of the people around them will be responsible for 80 percent of the interruptions and the other 80 percent will deliver the other 20 percent of the interruptions. The “What” column reminds us of the issues discussed, just a note, a word or two. The “Length” column, when totaled, will disclose how much time we spend being interrupted. [Editor’s note: This is independent of the value of these interruptions.]

We know that the average person during the working day gets, on average, one interruption every eight minutes. (Your actual mileage may vary. This is why you want to run your own Log.) One interruption every eight minutes calculates out to around six interruptions per hour. In an eight-hour day, that is 48 interruptions.

The ‘three great lies’

How long does the average interruption last? Are you familiar with the “Three Great Lies”? Typically they are: “The check’s in the mail,” “Trust me,” “I’m from the government, and I’m here to help.” These three are minor compared to this fourth one: “This will take just a minute.”

It could also be classified as a great line. It never takes “just a minute,” does it? We know that the average interruption takes 5 minutes. (Again, your actual mileage may vary.) But just going with that number for a moment, if you experience 48 interruptions in your day and each takes, on average, 5 minutes, that calculates out to 240 minutes in a day. When divided by 60 minutes per hour, that is 4 hours out of an 8-hour day, or 50 percent of the workday getting interrupted.

The last column is most instructive, the rating column. Most people who compile the Interruptions Log report back that only about 20 percent of their interruptions are of the A and B variety and that 80 percent are C and D variety. If you spend
four hours on interruptions and 80 percent are C’s and D’s, that is a bit more than three hours per day going down the drain on things that have little or no value.

What is the solution? Easy. Go to the “Dr. Bills” in your day, the people who repeatedly interrupt and waste your time, and ask for their cooperation. Say something like: “I didn’t realize how much of your time I was wasting each day. You’re a great guy and I love to talk about baseball, but how about if we hold those discussions for after work? Maybe we can get a beer and I’ll pay.” This is the easy part. The real task is to clearly identify the problem. That is what the Interruptions Log does for us.

But are you such a Time Management nut now that you can’t give good Dr. Bill 12 lousy minutes out of your precious day? No. That is not the issue. Sure, if he is an occasional and infrequent interrupter, you needn’t be concerned. It is not a perfect world. But let us say that every day, around the same time, Dr. Bill comes by to complain about baseball or the price of lab supplies. Twelve minutes per day is 60 minutes per week. An hour. Over the next year, that is 50 hours. But if you learned that you would have to sit at a table for the next 50 hours and listen to Dr. Bill moan and groan about whatever was on his mind, you would think that was crazy and you would refuse.

While we would never consciously do it that way — in one consolidated block of time — we do the same by losing a few minutes each day. If you were told you could pick up one workweek free of charge over the next year, you’d jump at the chance. You can. Just eliminate Dr. Bill’s interruptive behavior and you gain the equivalent of a new workweek over the next year.

Nothing’s perfect

Will you correct all the C and D interrupters, plug up all those holes? No, of course not. There may be situations where you feel uncomfortable confronting someone like Dr. Bill. Perhaps it just does not bother you. Maybe you have an interest in baseball. Will you have C and D interruptions in your day, no matter what? Of course.

A lot of people will not attend a Time Management seminar because when they hear about the topic they think, “This guy is going to make me into a robot, making sure that I always have an A item to work on.” Nonsense. The idea of Time Management has little to do with the notion of being productive 100 percent of the time.

One of the greatest values of learning better time management is that you usually end up with more goof-off time. More time to just kick back and watch the clouds go by. We all need it. It is just as essential a part of overall productivity as is the focus on high-priority items.

So do not worry about recapturing all the lost interruption time. If you recapture just half of it, that is an hour and one-half each day or seven and one-half hours per week. Over the next year, that is better than 370 hours or nine work weeks coming your way, all with only a little effort on your part.

The phone is ringing

We are a slave to the telephone at times. It rings, we stop what we are doing and answer it, responding like Pavlov’s dog at the sound of the bell. It would be swell if every time we picked it up the call was important, but we know it is not. We cannot tell from the ring how important it is.
What if you don’t answer it? They will leave a voice-mail message, or they will call back. But when you let the phone ring, it just rings. And it continues to ring until it does not ring anymore. And that is about all there is to it.

“But what if it’s important?” you ask. They will call back. They always do, and you know that most of the time it is not important. Do not throw common sense out the window. Certainly, if you are waiting for an important call, answer the phone. But most of the time the calls are going to be D's, and you have the right to let it ring. You teach people how to treat you by the way you allow them to treat you. If you make yourself available for every call, you teach people to call at all times.

Schedule when you will run your Interruptions Log so that you can plug up some of the drains on your time in your day.
Chapter 8: Tools to Beat the Clock

You have gone away on vacation, had a great time and spent a lot of money. To make that investment last and enhance its value, you might have taken a lot of pictures and maybe even put them into an album to review and remember from time to time.

The album gives us the big picture, the overview of our fine time away. How about if we did the same thing for our day? If we could get a clear picture of how our time was being spent, we would then be in a position to take corrective action so that we could enjoy greater productivity.

The time log

We cannot use a camera for this. Instead, we recommend using the Time Log. The Time Log does the same as the camera; it permits us to take a series of snapshots throughout our day, developing a collage or a photo album so that upon review, we can take corrective action to enhance our overall success.

Choose column headings appropriate for your day, perhaps eight or nine major ways your time is actually spent. For example: meeting, budget entry, work on grant application, lab notebook entry, etc. The current day is entered in the upper right-hand corner: Monday, Dec. 6, 2010, and the “Start Time” of your day is entered in the upper left-hand corner: 8:25. Then, periodically, throughout the day, stop to take a photograph of your time spent for whatever task and enter that under the appropriate column.

Create a space where rate the value to you of that time, from A through D.

If you were interrupted for 12 minutes by Dr. Bill, who wanted to complain about something, perhaps you rate that as a D. The time spent with him was of “No Value.” To Dr. Bill, that time may have had a higher value, but do not put down what the other person thinks it is worth. Put down what you think it was worth. It was your time. If you do not put down accurate ratings, you will not be able to take the appropriate corrective actions.

Can you wait until the end of the day to fill this out? No. Somehow or other, most of us don’t have a good “estimator clock” in our heads. If you wait until the end of the day to reconstruct it, the information will typically be inaccurate. It takes but a few seconds to log in the time spent after each major period. Take the time to do it as you go through your day.

Run the Time Log three to five days to even out distortions and give you a more accurate picture.

You now have accumulated a wealth of information. First, add up each column to determine how much actual time is being spent in each area. Say you spent 98 minutes in “Meetings,” 65 minutes on the “Telephone,” 90 minutes on “Grant application” and so forth. Then calculate the relative percentage of each column as it relates to the entire day. In the lower right hand corner, total the entire day. On this day, say you tracked 875 minutes or 14.6 hours. Divide each column’s total number of minutes by the total number of minutes tracked for the day, or 875.

In the first column, you spent 98 minutes in “Meetings.” If you divide 98 minutes by the total of 875, the result is approximately 11 percent of your day spent in meetings. The “11 percent” is inserted at the bottom of the “Meetings” column in the “% of Work Day” row. Next, you spent 7 percent of her time on the telephone, and so forth.
Want to double your productivity?

You find you are not putting in anywhere near a full day on your primary responsibility as a PI, but only a relatively low percentage. The rest of your day goes to other events and items. Let us assume that this is a constant result in your Time Log analysis. What if you continue to put in the same number of hours per day but adjust the components so you get 90 minutes more of laboratory work? You will substantially increase your productivity over a week, a month, a year.

Whatever it is you do to produce great results in your day, the Time Log will show you exactly how much of your time is being spent on the things you do so well. Then, by applying the 20/80 rule, you will soon discover that you spend only about 20 percent of your time achieving 80 percent of your results.

If you would like to double your results, you do not need to put in twice as much time. All you need to do is isolate and identify, through the Time Log, how much of your time is being spent to produce the biggest percentage of your results. Then, through a series of adjustments, getting rid of interruptions, getting out of meetings, delegating better and other skills we have discussed, you can almost always find more time in your day to do more of what you do so well to significantly increase your productivity.

Calculate your ratios

One final benefit from the Time Log, after you have run it for a period of three to five days, is to take a plain sheet of paper and head it up with four columns: A B C D.

Go back through it and take the actual amount of time recorded in the small blocks and put it under the appropriate column. Continue posting the rest of the entries from all the Time Logs run for three to five days and then add up all the A time, the B time, C and D time. If you are going to have a productive period, do you think it is a fair expectation that 100 percent of your time will appear under the A column? Of course not.

Are you going to have some D time in your day? Certainly. D time serves a purpose. You are not a machine or a robot. We all enjoy and need “down time.”

What if you discover that the larger segment of your time was spent in the A and B columns and the smaller segment in the C and D columns? Would you feel you had a good and productive day or week? Certainly. Did you have some wasted time? Yes. But so long as the bulk of your time was under the A and B columns, you can feel good about your time management.

You are a success when you know it

Success is not when we all have the same things. Most successful people define what their lives should be and have attained that goal. And if you have defined success in your life in terms of the A and B vs. C and D ratio as 80/20 or 20/80 or 50/50 or anything else and you are operating at that level, you are successful, productive person.
If you were operating at about a 20 percent A and B effective rate and could raise this (through the methods and tools described) to 80 percent on the A and B side, that represents a four-fold increase in personal productivity. Imagine four times the productivity without four times the time input. Raise your ratio to whatever level you choose, not by working harder, but by working smarter.

**The life-improvement chart**

Another worthwhile tool is a Life Improvement Chart. So many people are striving to climb the ladder of success quicker and faster. They focus on the speed and the velocity of their progress. But if you ask, “Where are you going?” the response often is: “I don’t have time to think about where I’m going. I’ve just got to get up this ladder.”

Then at the top of the ladder, at the end of his life, that person discovers he was on the wrong building. Time Management is not doing the wrong things quicker. All that will do is get you nowhere faster. Time Management is doing more of the “right things.” This necessitates a hard look at the Seven Vital Areas of Life.

We all go through our days with a book under our arms. It is the book of our life, and it has seven chapters in it, one for each of the Seven Vital Areas. Every day we put a page in each chapter. Daily, we are writing the story of our lives. How do you want those chapters to read on the last day of your life? That it is the only day we cannot change the story.

It does not matter what is broken in our lives today — problems in our relationships, poor finances, or a stalled career. With time, we have a fairly high probability of fixing those things.

Thus we can determine now how each chapter will end. Then we can figure out what it is we have to do each year, each month, each week, and each day to make it all become a reality. What we are talking about is goal planning.

**Goal planning: have-to, want-to**

If you do not know where you are going, you will never know when you get there. What difference does it make what road we are on? If it is not taking us where we want to go, it does not serve us. There is little intrinsic reward in being a PI, a Nobel winner, or in having a lot of recognition or wealth unless it is meaningful and important to us, personally.

So many get caught up in the “have-to’s” — spending most of their time doing the things they have to do. You have to do your job. You have to make the mortgage payment or face foreclosure. Doing the have-to’s is not wrong or immoral. Spending a lifetime doing have-to’s will provide you with a living, keep you out of trouble, and give you a level of pleasure. However, none of us will ever live a fully satisfying life unless we devote some time to want-to’s.
Chart your course

The Life Improvement Chart helps us to identify the things we want and to start taking action toward their achievement. It also helps us to quantify our lives now and to re-quantify our lives after the desired improvements are implemented.

The chart should have four sections. The first section, in the upper left is “Rating Now.” Here you will be able to take stock of your current situation and quantify where you are.

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<th>DESIRED IMPROVEMENTS</th>
<th>ANTICIPATED RATING WITH IMPROVEMENTS</th>
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TOTAL QUALITY POINTS: ___

ACTION STATEMENT TO BRING ABOUT DESIRED IMPROVEMENTS

HEALTH
FAMILY
FINANCIAL
INTELLECTUAL
SOCIAL
PROFESSIONAL
SPIRITUAL
The upper middle section, “Desired Improvements,” is for listing those changes you want in your life to make your life “perfect.” Perfection is an elusive goal but at least, in theory, the things that will bring about a higher level of personal satisfaction are those that would lead toward perfection.

The third section, in the upper right, is to measure the “Anticipated Ratings with Improvements.” In other words, once the desired improvements have been implemented, what will the level of quality be like in our lives, in a quantifiable way?

The final section, down below, is for the “Action Statements to Bring About Desired Improvements.” This is for the specific steps necessary to achieve the “Desired Improvements” and will be entered onto your daily To Do list on the day you think you will get to them, using your To Do lists as the tool that takes it from concept to reality.

Back to the upper left section, “Rating Now.” The first column is “Relative Value.” Here you want to value each of the Seven Vital Areas on its value to you using a scale of “1” (Very little importance) to “10” (Of utmost importance). Each is independent of the other. They can all be 1’s, they can all be 10’s or anything in between.

Say a colleague of yours determined that his health, family, and financial areas are all 10’s, of utmost importance. His intellectual area is a 6, which means that, compared to the three above, it is only 60 percent as important. His research career and social areas are each valued at 8, which makes them more valuable than the intellectual area but not as important as the top three. Finally, his spiritual area gets a 9. It has more value than intellectual, research career and social, but not quite as important as health, family, and financial.

**Fill out your report card**

The middle column, the 1-10 Scale is your actual performance, your current report card. Given that an area holds a certain level of importance in your life, how are you doing in that area? Again we use a 1-10 scale. A 1 indicates a low level of successful performance and a 10 indicates perfection.

In our example, your colleague is saying, with regard to his health area, that, while it is worth a 10 to him as dimension in his life, his performance is only a 6, or he is only operating at a 60 percent level. There is lots of room for improvement. The intellectual area commands a 6 for its value, and his performance is at a 4, only halfway there, a lot of room for improvement. The spiritual area is worth a 9 and his performance is an 8, not a lot of room for improvement.

Having completed both columns, now multiply the two numbers in each row for each area and record the result in the third column labeled, “Total Value.” Under Health, which is worth a 10 and has a performance value of 6, the result is 60. Under Family, which has an importance of 10 and a performance of 5, the result is 50. Add up the “Total Value” column and arrive at 344 Total Quality Points which will become a meaningful number when we complete the rest of the chart.

**So what do you want?**

Now go to the upper middle section entitled, “Desired Improvements.” The objective here is to answer the question, “What would it take to make my 1-10 Scale just perfect in each area?” You know perfection is probably not attainable, but at least, in theory, what would have to change in your life to make each area a 10 in terms of actual, current performance?
In our example, the colleague is saying, “If I can reduce my weight to 160 and exercise daily, then my health will be a 10.” Under financial, “If I can increase my income 30 percent, it will be perfect.” You might require a lot more space in this section than has been provided, as there may be a lot of new things to change in each area to achieve greater happiness.

Over to the third section, in the upper right hand, repeat the same values in the “Relative Value” column, as each holds its same relative level of importance, but what will change is the middle column, the 1-10 Scale. Here, all areas will score a perfect 10 for performance (again, an ideal).

Finally, multiply both numbers along the row for each area and record the result under the “Total Value” column. Under health, this person winds up with 100 points, under intellectual, 60 points and so forth. Finally, add up the “Total Value” column. This person gets 610 Total Quality Points vs. 344 from the “Rating Now” section, before the improvements. In a measurable, quantifiable way, this person almost doubles the quality of his life.

Down below, the “Action Statements to Bring About Desired Improvements” section, list the specific steps necessary to bring about the desired improvements listed above along with the deadlines for commencing action. If you do not insert a deadline, you are likely to procrastinate.

Your colleague will “Start weight control by Oct. 3” and will “Develop additional income plan by Oct. 31” and will “Schedule church attendance starting this Sunday.” Take these action steps, put them on your To Do lists for the specific days and start taking action on these new items to help improve the quality of your life, doing more of the things you want to do.

The 7 x 7 technique

Another tool for your use is the “7 x 7 Technique.” Can you imagine experiencing 2,548 little improvements in your life over the next 12 months and it would not take you more than 10 minutes per day? Would your life be better with 2,548 little improvements? Sure. It goes without saying.

Here is the technique:

Each night in daily planning, in addition to putting down all the things you have to do and the specific action steps to realize your dreams and goals, take a moment to build in one little improvement in each and every one of your Seven Vital Areas. Little improvements that you would not ordinarily do.

For example, under health, perhaps when you go to the lab each day you always park close to the door. So, just tomorrow, make it a point to park on the other side of the parking lot and walk a bit further for a little extra exercise. Or maybe you take the elevator to the third floor. So tomorrow, make it a point to walk up the stairs rather than ride the elevator.

Or maybe you have been meaning to control the waistline and every night you enjoy a dessert after dinner. So tomorrow, skip the dessert. Now record this new task that you are going to accomplish on your To Do list for tomorrow and put a “.” to its left to denote it as a “quickie” item that can be done in less than a minute, e.g., “skip dessert.”

Under family, how about leaving a little love note under someone’s pillow or bringing home a surprise rose?
Compounding benefits

Put down one little improvement in each of your Seven Vital Areas for the next day. You will have seven new entries, all “.” items, quick to do. In less than 10 minutes you will achieve seven little improvements in your day tomorrow. This will not dramatically change tomorrow, but tomorrow will be a little sweeter, a little more fun. Then every day for the next week, build in seven little improvements and at the end of the week, you have accomplished 49. Continue the process for the next year, and you will get 2,548 little improvements in your life just be taking 10 minutes per day.

Is it necessary to come up with something new in each area every day? Yes, if you want to get the full 2,548 improvements. But if you find a particular improvement works for you and you would like to repeat it, that is fine. Maybe you only get 1,000 improvements in your year. That is not bad. Perfection is not the goal.

Complimentary overload?

Here’s a suggested 7 x 7 Technique for your social area: Almost every day, go out of your way to sincerely compliment someone for their good work, something you perceive to be of value.

The three most important words in the English language are, “I love you.” Sure, we all enjoy getting a paycheck, but we appreciate just as much that occasional pat on the back, that “Attaboy. Good job.” No one suffers from “complimentary overload.” We never hear enough good words from others about our scientific work or other good things we do.

Let us say that over the next year you send out 365 compliments, deliver 365 surprise roses and send out 365 surprise acknowledgment notes or greeting cards. First of all, it will be enough of a reward just to do it and see the reactions you will receive. But beyond that, do you think it is fair to assume that during the course of the year you might receive back some sincere, reciprocal compliments, some of those roses and some of those acknowledgment notes? Of course, and some will come at a time when you probably need them the most. You have set up a whole system of fun in your days, and it only takes 10 minutes per day.

Schedule when you will apply all the tools you received in Chapter 8.
Chapter 9: The Personal Productivity System

If you follow the steps I present below, which make up the Personal Productivity System, you will see marked improvement in your personal time management and overall productivity. Here are some key take-home points:

**Daily planning**

Again it starts with daily planning, taking time each day, the night before, to plan the most precious resource at your command, the next 24 hours. It is like having a daily Board of Directors meeting in the most important corporation in the world: “Me, Inc.”

As a result of daily planning, you will have a road map for tomorrow, having built in all the things you **have** to do, and, more importantly, the things you **want** to do. You also have prioritized the items according to their importance using the A-B-C-D system, then sub-prioritized within each so that all your scheduled tasks are laid out in a way that gives you the biggest bang for the buck for the next day — handling the more important matters first, leaving the less important ones for later. Understand that it is not what you leave undone that makes a difference, but rather what you **do** accomplish that adds up to high personal productivity.

It is done the night before so that you have created a sense of control about our next day that you would not ordinarily have.

**Get enough sleep**

The next step up the ladder is adequate sleep. Studies show that about 75 percent of the population is tired almost any time, mostly because of the way they are running their days. So many people experience such highly stressful days because they’re not doing the planning and they are always reacting to the “stuff” thrown at them. Then, when bedtime arrives, while most will get enough sleep, many will not get **quality** sleep. And without a good night’s rest, much of what we have discussed cannot work well for you.

Another suggestion is to make sure that during the last 30 minutes of your day, you think positive thoughts. What you go to bed with emotion, you have a tendency to carry that with you while you’re sleeping and it is what you will wake up with the following morning.

There is an old expression that says, “Don’t let the sun set on your anger.” There is a lot of truth in that. A lot of people load up with negativity just before bedtime. Fill the last 30 minutes of your day with something pleasant. Skip the late nightly news (perhaps watch the earlier news). Later, view a re-run of your favorite comedy show, read a light novel, or have a pleasant conversation with that special person. You’ll sleep better and wake up feeling great.

**You have to take time to wake up**

Up another level is the “One-Hour Wakeup” step. We all need a wake-up hour. A lot of people use their first hour at work to wake up. Take advantage of this concept by getting up one hour earlier than usual each day to do three very specific things.
During the first 15 or 20 minutes of your waking day, did you ever notice how you are awake but not fully so? You are putting one foot in front of the other but are not quite 100 percent alert. It is during this time that you are in the “alpha” state. You’re conscious, but not at that fully awake state known as the “beta” level. In alpha, your brain waves and physical cycles are slowed and it is during alpha that you are at the highest level of learning receptivity. Studies have shown that while in the alpha state you can nearly double your learning rate because your brain waves and physical cycles are slowed and more conducive to learning.

A lot of people, not understanding this, get up and turn on the radio to listen to the news. They hear of unpleasant things that happened while they were asleep. Or they pick up the newspaper or lie in bed wondering what to do about this or that project. What is occurring during those first few minutes of the day is literally setting the stage for the kind of day you will have.

Did you ever hear someone say, “Paula is having a bad day. She got up from the wrong side of the bed this morning.” Does it have anything to do with how Paula got out of the bed physically? No. But it has everything to do with how she got out of the bed mentally. You must take control of that.

Get up an hour earlier and sit on the edge of the bed so you aren’t tempted to hit the snooze alarm. Get out of bed, brush your teeth or whatever you need to do, and for the next 15 minutes focus on positive events in your life, do positive visualization. See yourself landing that grant, achieving tenure, winning recognition for your research, or traveling with your family. It can be one item or several; as long as a positive message is coming in, the negative messages are blocked.

For the second 15 minutes, read something that you find positive or uplifting. It may be a magazine article or a portion of a biography. What is happening? You are continuing to take control of that alpha state. Now you are ready for your morning walk or other exercise, breakfast, shower, etc.

**A triple reward**

What you have done in that first hour or so is to take control of your mind, your body, and your environment — a triple reward. You have had an opportunity to service some, if not all, of your Seven Vital Areas. You did some good things for your mental health, and the walk was for physical health. Perhaps you take a family member along with you during the walk and enjoy some quality time together. You read, so there is an intellectual component. You may run into a neighbor or two for a social benefit. You can get some career ideas and some spiritual thoughts in order, all within that one hour. And what did it cost you? One hour of sleep — a loss your body will adjust to. If you find it does not, then plan to go to bed an hour earlier. Not bad.

**Basic values**

Next on the Personal Productivity System is the notion of “Basic Values.” Basic values are the foundation blocks upon which we build our lives. No amount of success can ever be permanent and lasting unless we act consistent with our basic values. We all have these, but few ever articulate them or write them down.

Where do you find basic values? Often it will be in your reading of something positive — concepts that you identify with will pop out at you.
An example: Most people have as a basic value spending quality time with family. But let's assume there's a researcher who puts in 60 hours a week in the lab. In addition, he attends classes three nights per week. Also, he's an officer in a university club. All these responsibilities translate into “no time for family.” The insidious thing about it is that the people around this person are praising him for his achievements. And that person knows it should all feel good but it does not. Why? Because there is no time left for family, one of his basic values, he feels empty.

Without a list to see what can be corrected, that emptiness may grow and soon he may abandon his course of action and, in effect, sabotage his own productivity. But if he can identify the problem, he can make the adjustments to carve out or re-allot the time to spend with family — because there is always enough time for the important things. Then it all feels right again and the success continues.

The ‘To Do’ list, our road map

The “To Do list” that you prepare each day incorporates all the action steps to accomplish what you need and want to get done.

Production

Finally, we come to “Production.” This is the actual doing. All the talking, writing, and planning you do will not substitute for the doing. This is the area where you will spend the bulk of your time, but it is small in relation to the overall system. It is all the preceding steps that make the production meaningful.

Where do most people fit in the Personal Productivity System?

At the top, production. Virtually everyone is out there working, getting paid, and paying their bills. They are staying out of trouble and living day by day. Nothing wrong with that.

How many people are at the next level, preparing a daily to-do list? Our studies show that about 70 percent of professional people use one most of the time. But here is the problem: Many will say they don’t need time-management help because they use their to-do list. They work with a clean desk. Nothing slips through the cracks.

But if asked about their family goals, they might ask what those have to do with time management. And what do basic values have to do with it?

The answer is that time management is more than just making up a good to-do list to administer the have-to’s. It should include taking time to do the want-to’s. You get there by integrating the entire Personal Productivity System.

How many people do a good job of goal planning? You would be hard-pressed to find someone who would speak against the concept. But if you ask someone to show you their goals or articulate them in the Seven Vital Areas, likely very few, perhaps less than 20 percent, can do so.
Life balance — when?

Down to the Seven Vital Areas. Any one of them can disappear overnight. You could suffer a health crisis today. Your family may not be there when you go home tonight. You may fail to win the next grant. Your money could go down the drain in a downturn in the economy. It is not that we can’t or don’t take steps to prevent experiencing these tragedies, it is just that nearly everything is at risk. But if you live a life built on seven legs of the table and if one or two are taken away, you have five or six legs to hold you up. But if you are supporting your life on only one or two legs and those are taken, your table collapses.

Think about the really successful people in your life, those you admire most. Are they always perfectly in balance? No, but by and large they are pretty well in balance first, and that permits them to attain and hold the success for which we admire them.

Thus, achieving balance throughout your life is not a reward once you become successful. It is the key necessary ingredient to get there.

Use this Personal Productivity System as your guide to a balanced life — one in which you manage your time effectively every day on the way to accomplishing your goals.