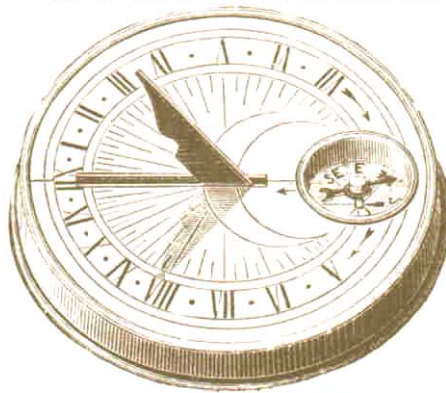


# FAVORITE EMPLOYEE --- **TIME**



# **WASTERS**

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By Jeff Davidson

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A number of activities other than those for which they are paid occupy the time of employees during business hours. Below is a review of favorite time wasters that infringe upon the productivity of an organization. While isolated instances may not in themselves produce a sizeable effect on company performance, repeated occurrence by numerous employees will have a pronounced effect, indeed.

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### ***Coasting Until Check-Out Time***

Many employees have a tendency to quit work 15 to 30 minutes before the end of their workday and "coast" until check-out time. While it may not be possible for everyone to remain productive during the closing minutes of each day, widespread coasting until check-out time, within a department or throughout an entire company, can create a net loss that is staggering. As an illustration: if 45 employees earning an average of \$6.00 an hour habitually coast for the last 15 minutes of each day, one month of coasting (twenty workdays) will cost the company \$1,350 for non-productive time, for an annual total of \$16,200. Adding benefits and other costs incurred yields a figure of over \$1,600 a month or \$19,200 a year.

If the time spent coasting is used to plan the next working day or to make mental preparations for future tasks, this use of time becomes productive. However, if many employees use the closing 15 or 30 minutes of each day merely to observe the hands of the clock finally reach the hour of five, a major problem exists.

Clock watching may also occur before the lunch hour. When many employees coast for 15 to 20 minutes before lunch, as well as before coffee breaks, department meetings and other planned events, the cumulative possibilities are mind boggling.



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### ***Organizing and Reorganizing***

Another favorite time waster is the continual organization and reorganization of desks, files, shelves, etc. One's working materials can only be organized so many times before a state of diminishing returns is reached; as a general rule, someone who is able to extract needed information from a desk or files within a minute or two is sufficiently organized. Any further time invested in the organization or reorganization of materials is wasted.

One note, however: it is important not to confuse unnecessary reorganization with necessary reorganization. Some employees use the

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last 15 to 30 minutes of the day to organize themselves for the next day, so that they may start fresh on new projects or resume with renewed vigor. So, it is possible that employees may appear to be "coasting" until check-out time, or to be overorganizing, while they are actually engaging in a useful and productive period.

### ***Carefully Reading Junk Mail***

Mail order houses, manufacturers and distributors, and business and professional services groups all use the mail to build business. Any employee who has been with an organization for longer than three months may start to receive a steady stream of junk mail as his or her name is added to an ever growing number of mailing lists. It is quite possible for an employee to receive five to ten pieces of unsolicited mail a day. When this occurs, it is important for the employee to accurately judge what should be discarded immediately.

Unfortunately, many employees take delight in reading every piece of information that has been sent to them and using the reviewing of mail as a procrastination technique.

It is nearly impossible to legislate how mail should be circulated to

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employees. Holding the mail until late in the day is not recommended because an employee may need a vital piece of information. One way to reduce the amount of junk mail sent to your office is to contact the National Mailing Center in New York City and request that individuals' names be removed from master mailing lists. Another way to reduce the flow of miscellaneous mail to employees is to instruct the receiving secretary to direct groups of similar packages to the head of the department, who can then decide who else should receive such mass-mailed correspondence.

#### ***Taking Two Lunch Breaks***

This technique has been widely practiced, particularly in job, shop, and factory settings where an employee can easily sneak behind a machine or other shelter and munch a sandwich before the designated lunch hour. When the lunch hour arrives, the employee has created free time beyond that normally taken to eat. This practice is unfair to the employer. In a factory setting, spills and food stains often end up on company documents and paper work, diminishing the professionalism of the entire office. Unless there is no designated area within your organization where an employee may have refreshment, employees should be discouraged from consuming food at work stations.



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A related problem results when employees bring breakfast to work. It is often difficult for an employee to eat breakfast before departing for work, particularly in an urban setting where one has to fight morning traffic. Allowing employees to bring breakfast into work produces the following harmful side effects:

- The amount of time that the employee spends eating breakfast is, of course, non-productive to the company;
- Employees who have adequately planned their day and eaten breakfast before work are in essence penalized;
- The potential for soiling papers, carpeting, or company owned equipment is high; and
- The practice detracts from the professionalism of the entire organization.

#### ***Waiting for Pay Checks***

An all-time favorite time waster is waiting for the pay check. Whether checks are delivered every week, bi-weekly or monthly, most employees are keenly aware of pay day. If the time of day at which pay checks arrive varies, many employees will shuffle through the day waiting until the check arrives and then make

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a mad dash to the bank for a deposit. The best policy in fighting this time waster is to distribute the checks at the *same time* each pay day. When it is known throughout the organization that checks will be delivered exactly at 10:30 a.m., employees can make plans accordingly. It might be wise to issue checks immediately on pay day so that employees may receive their checks, deposit them and get back to work. Distributing pay checks early in the day also has the advantage of reducing the time that employees waste calculating what the amount will be.

Use of the direct deposit system, by which pay is transferred directly into an employee's account, should be encouraged. The system saves both actual time (spent standing in the bank's deposit line) and potential time (spent wondering when the checks will come).

#### ***Tangential Discussions***

While it is virtually impossible to eliminate non-productive discussion that occurs throughout the day, there is one type of discussion the employees can be instructed to eliminate because it will help save them time and help the company. This can be termed "interesting, but tangential task discussion." Several employees working on a

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project may undertake hypothetical, pie-in-the-sky discussions regarding the project; the discussions, however, may not add to their understanding, insight or productivity in completing the project. A manager or supervisor should, of course, be careful here, since it is difficult to determine when extended discussions on a task or project can ultimately produce useful information.

#### ***Excessive, Elaborate Travel Arrangements***

Often, an employee who has to travel has the tendency to spend more time on travel plans than is necessary. Particularly when the trip is to an area that is near resort facilities, there is a tendency to waste time beyond the normal pre-trip banter, discussing the trip. One way to eliminate frittering away time on travel plans is to have a clerical or support person complete all travel arrangements including the itinerary, and submit a comprehensive package to the employee who has been authorized to travel. At the very least, this will eliminate some of the questions and conjecture as to where one will stay, when one will be arriving, etc.

#### ***Extensive Review of Timesheets***

In nearly all organizations some type of timesheet or weekly reporting log must be completed and submitted to management. If this work report has been compiled on a daily



basis, there will be relatively little to do to complete the form when the end of the recording period rolls around. Since the time spent trying to complete a time sheet a week after the fact is far in excess of the time required to record information as one goes along, employees would be instructed to maintain timesheets or logs on a daily or regular basis.

#### ***Toasting the Weekend on Friday Afternoon***

A large number of employees, particularly in downtown office environments, think nothing of getting a head start on the weekend in a local tavern during the Friday lunch hour. Often a normal lunch period turns into two hours and more, and the employee is a basket case for the rest of the day.

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This favorite employee time waster can only continue to flourish in the absence of good supervision. While it is common to conduct a farewell lunch for a departing employee, have a celebration near a holiday, or hold a staff luncheon after a good monthly or quarterly effort, significant costs to the company are incurred when a sufficient number of employees start their weekends every Friday noon.

Liabilities to the company that accrue when employees overimbibe include the following:

- The productivity of the employee is low;
- The employee's judgment and decision-making capabilities are diminished;
- The employee may not be able to adequately represent the company with visitors or over the telephone;
- The hard working, non-imbibing employee may be resentful; and
- The professionalism of the organization has—once again—been diminished.

It is recognized that the list above is by no means comprehensive. However, the manager or supervisor who is aware of some traditional time wasters will be able to more readily recognize when they are occurring, and perhaps to diminish their effect. The ultimate payoff to the organization is old-fashioned higher productivity.

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