

# Management Memos

Planning ■ Organizing ■ Administration ■ Personnel

## Give Yourself Some Breathing Space

We live in a time-pressed society, and increasingly that isn't news to most people. As I travel around the country speaking to groups, I am struck by the number of people in my audiences who seem perpetually overwhelmed. The irony is that these people could take breaks throughout their day, and their week, but they don't.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to having what I call "breathing space" in your life — the ability to elect on occasion to simply drop back and punt — is the unwillingness to allow yourself to have it. I spoke to one group of executives and their spouses and learned from many spouses that their executive husbands or wives simply do not give themselves permission to have breathing space — time to get centered and balanced, take a deep breath and then proceed. Paradoxically, every shred of wisdom on the issue that I have ever encountered indicates that any executive will be more effective each day, if he/she simply pauses for an extra minute a couple of times each day. This could be done every morning and afternoon — when back from the water cooler or rest room, before leaving for lunch, when returning from lunch, and so forth.

Seven hours and fifty minutes of work plus ten one-minute intervals of rest or reflection in a work day will make one more productive than eight solid hours of work. To insist on proceeding full-speed throughout the day without giving yourself what amounts to no more than ten minutes of time to clear your mind, all but guarantees that you will not be as effective as those who do. Most people already perceive this on some level but do not grant it to themselves.

Some of the most productive and

energetic people in history learned how to pace themselves effectively by taking a few "time outs" each day. Thomas Edison would rest for a few minutes any time of the day when he felt his energy level dropping. Buckminster Fuller often worked in cycles of three or four hours, then slept for 30 minutes, and then repeated the process. He found that in the course of a twenty-four hour period, he would get far more done than in the traditional waking and sleeping pattern. By giving himself rest at shorter intervals, Fuller was able to greatly extend his productive hours.

### CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

"Pause Before You Dip in Alertness" — Martin Moore-Ede, M.D., Ph.D. in "The 24 Hour Society" observes that the lowest alertness in a day for most people is between 2 a.m. and 5 a.m. Highest alertness is between 9 a.m. and noon, and 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. A person's alertness will vary due to hours of consecutive duty, hours of duty in the preceding week, irregular hours, monotony on the job, timing and duration of naps, environmental lighting, sound, aroma, temperature, cumulative sleep deprivation over the past week, and



much more. Have you taken the time to map your own times of highest and lowest alertness during your typical work day?

### STRATEGIC PAUSES EVERY DAY

You'd think that entrepreneurs, running their own businesses and hence managing themselves, would be more inclined to take strategic pauses throughout the day since they are essentially in charge of their own schedule. Too often, being in charge of your own schedule does not necessarily mean that you take strategic pauses. Conversely, those who work for others, perhaps in large organizations, often erroneously believe that if they paused for the total of ten strategic minutes throughout a workday it would somehow jeopardize their standing. This misconception is unfounded.

The CEO's in many top organizations routinely take naps in mid-day to recharge their batteries. Understandably, they have executive secretaries who shield them from the outside world, take their calls, and arrange their schedules appropriately. You are not the CEO of a large organization and the thought of being able to take a nap in the middle of the workday may seem like Nirvana to you. Yet, the ten strategic minutes of which I have been speaking provide nearly the same benefit.

If you can't take a flat-out nap, ten strategic minutes may be your best alternative.

Viewed from the impending turn of the century, today will appear to be a time of relative calm and stability. If you're already swamped by the challenges you face today, you need to give yourself permission to have breathing space throughout your day.

**Jeff Davidson**, MBA, CMC, is a professional speaker and the award-winning author of 18 books, including *Breathing Space: Living & Working At A Comfortable Pace In A Sped-Up Society* (\$10.95). For information on available speaking dates, call Jeff directly at 919-932-1996