

Winning Back Your Time

Our population experiences increasing time pressure with each passing year. Human orientation to time has constantly changed throughout the ages, but never so markedly as in the last few decades, the Information Age. Enhanced physical and informational mobility adds to our expectations regarding what we can and should accomplish in our lives. We all want to do more.

The key to winning back and maintaining control of your time is not allowing unnecessary "time culprits" to creep in. Some of the biggest culprits are junk mail, subscriptions and mismanaged reading, packrat-ism, and other people's clutter.

ELIMINATING JUNK MAIL

The reason you get junk mail is that each time you make a purchase by mail, your name is sold and circulated dozens of times. Even your state department of motor vehicles sells its list of licensed drivers to whoever wishes to buy it.

You can eliminate 40% of your junk mail with one letter by writing: Mail Preference Service, Direct Marketing Association, 11 West 42nd Street, New York NY 10163-3861

Simply state: "I want to have my name removed from your direct mail lists." Sending this letter will effectively reduce your junk mail by 40% for three to six months. Months later, write the same letter again to the Direct Marketing Association.

To trace who is selling your name when you make a mail order purchase, rotate the letter you use for your middle initial. Or add a code to the end of your street address such as "IA." When you receive mail with the coded middle initial or street address, you know who sold your name to whom.

Also, when making any mail order

purchase, or *any* purchase for that matter, feel free to include or mention the following: "I hereby forbid you to rent, sell, swap or otherwise submit my name to any third party for any reason."

You can fight junk mail by saving all your junk for three months in a cardboard box. Then hire a high school student to send a form letter to every group sending you junk mail more than once. Explain that you are never going to buy from them.

IN-COMING MAIL AND CORRESPONDENCE

You are able to reduce correspondence reply time by creating your own "speed reply letters" to the mail you received. Copy the letters you receive and use the bottom portion or reverse side to jot down a response. Then fold the letter and send back the reply, on the same day. Use the other party's return address from the envelope you receive as the label for your letter back. This system speedily reduces junk mail.

Do your subscriptions pile up? They are usually worth the price, but are they worth your time?

What would happen if you dropped most of your subscriptions? Do you need to read 12 issues a year or are three or four sufficient?

Become a pro-active information gatherer rather than a passive information taker. Active information gathering means assembling information on a topic of interest to you, and actively seeking out specific books, articles, and reports. Passive information intake involves reading whatever crosses your desk. If you read the paper each morning, the publishers and editors of the newspaper have decided what is important for you, because that is what you are in-taking.

STRIP YOUR FILES

Now the fun part of controlling the over-glut: the wholesale stripping of half of your files. You probably need to toss 80% of your files, but we'll go easy for now.

Truism: we all over-collect.

You are the primary force that can prevent intake over-glut from engulfing you. To take control of your time, eliminate at the top whatever clogs your system and interferes with your effective use of time.

MANAGE YOUR READING

If you can, read periodicals and books at a table. Get paper, a scissors, postage and file folders ready. When you come across something that should be entered into your system now you can do so easily. Tear out or copy only pages of books, magazines, and reports that are important to you.

Cut down your reading while traveling. Most people try to handle reading chores when they go out of town. This is an erroneous way of handling reading tasks. When you read out of town, what happens? Most of the time you have to act upon what you have read. That means bringing the materials back and acting upon them again.

Upon returning you may still not know what to do with what you have read. Also, while traveling, you don't have your copier, you don't have your scissors, envelopes, anything. Conversely, many people don't want to write while they are traveling and they feel that is something they must do when they are at their desk.

Surprisingly, just the opposite is true. Reading should be done in-house and writing should be done on the road. Often you can't write when you are "in" anyway because there are too many distractions. □

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