

Time: Your Most Precious Resource – *How to manage the clock and the calendar*

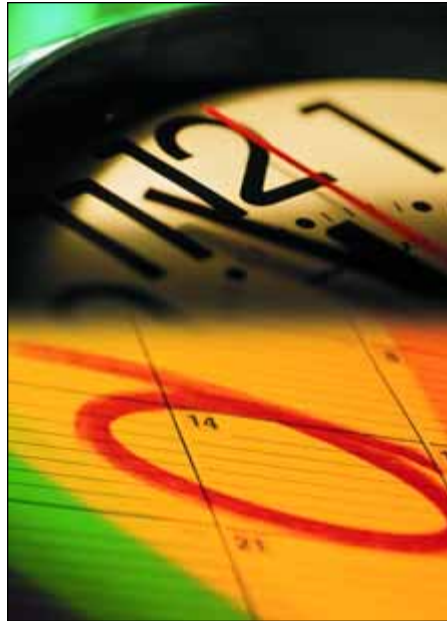
By Lee Silber

We all have the same amount of time. It is the people who are able to get the important things done in less time who get ahead.

It is that simple; if you can't manage your time, you can't manage your career, business and, maybe more importantly, your life. Where you are and where you will be in five years is the result of the choices you make. One of our most basic choices is how we spend our time. That is why the following 10 time-saving tips are so important. These basic time-management principles will help you get a handle on your time and your life.

1. Where does the time go? A look at what wastes our precious time.

We like to blame others for everything, including wasting our time. However, nobody can waste your time without your permission. Take control of the time-wasters in your life – most of which we are responsible for. For instance, if people want to meet you for lunch you can suggest doing a virtual meeting via e-mail or talking on the phone. If they insist on a face-to-face meeting, make them come to you and save the commute. If you ever really took the time (pun intended) to see where your time goes, you would be shocked. Pay attention for one day and ask yourself for every task you take on, “Is this the best use of my time? Is this bringing me closer to, or taking me further away from, my goals? What should I be doing right now?” If you can cut one hour of wasted time a week (and this should not be hard), you gain 52 hours of FREE time at the end of the year. Imagine if you can cut out an hour a day of wasted time!



2. There's no time like the present. Don't just do it, do it now.

Almost everyone procrastinates. Yet, winners do what they say they will do when they say they will do it. How? Most simply force themselves to “just do it.” Others use one or more of the following techniques. Try leaving a project in progress, or something you have been putting off, out where you can see it and begin working on it whenever you feel the whim to do so. This could mean leaving a file on the desktop of your computer or a file out on your actual desktop. It only takes one excuse or impediment to hold us back (finding something and then getting it out to work on it are two too many obstacles.) Now that it is out where you can see it, try starting at the easiest possible place. This may not be step one, but it can be something so simple you can't come up with a good excuse not to do it. If you need more motivation, set up a reward for beginning the task or any step of the task. Other procrastination busters include working on something when the mood is right and your muse is into it, too. Try combining something you don't like to do with something

you enjoy. Take your paperwork to the park, a bar or home with you and do it while you watch TV. Lastly, tell someone what your intentions are and make them hold you accountable and no matter what, give yourself a deadline to shoot for.

3. Time flies when you are having fun. How to get things done and still have fun.

Life is made up of mostly maintenance tasks – things we must do no matter what. When we are done with these, then we can have fun. What if we made the mundane stuff more fun? Try competing with yourself or a co-worker to see who can finish first or to beat your time from the previous day. Have fun prizes set up if you are able to get everything done quickly. Get others involved and just the act of hanging out with people you like and pooling your resources can make a dull task more desirable. What if you traded tasks with others? Maybe they like paperwork and you enjoy more manual labor. By doing more of what you enjoy and do well, you get it done faster and better.

4. There isn't time for everything. Figure out what matters most.

I'm sure you have heard of the 80/20 rule. It goes something like this: “80 percent of your success comes from 20 percent of your efforts.” The secret is to figure out what the most important things are and focus your time and energy there. It's not as complicated or convoluted as it seems. If your home were burning to the ground, what are the five things you would take with you if you could? Of all the things you have to do during the day, what are the top five tasks that make the most difference? If you could eliminate 10 tasks from your life, what would they be? If you had more time, what would you spend it

on? Look at the people you spend time with; who are the top five people in your life? (These are the people you love and who love you, make you feel good about yourself and encourage you and most of all, you feel like time with them is time well spent.) There simply isn't enough time for everything – or everyone, for that matter. We must choose what to focus on at work, who to spend our time on and what matters most in our lives. If you are tempted to add more things to your busy schedule, you have to use the one-in, one-out rule. To add something you must give up something.

5. Timing is everything. There is a right time for everything.

One of the secrets to time management is to do things when others aren't. Leave early or late to avoid traffic, go to lunch when others aren't so your wait time is less, run errands at a time when people are

also doing them and finally, find a time to focus without distractions. You also have to match the task to the time. If you are like most people, the morning is a key time to get things done. Don't fritter away this productive time on unproductive tasks. Instead, end the day with easy-to-complete tasks so you can finish with a flourish.

6. Take the time to plan. One minute of planning saves hours of time.

The most basic time-saving tools are the calendar, clock and a things-to-do list. The calendar is used to block out time to work on key projects and to stay on top of deadlines and key dates. The best calendar is one you will use. It is best to have one calendar, if possible, so nothing has to be transferred from one to another. Keep the calendar with you or out where you can see it. The clock is also an obvious time-management tool, but most people don't realize how important it is. Get a BIG clock and

put it where you will see it. Be more aware of time and how you are spending it. Create a custom clock and use red numbers to indicate your key times. Put a fake clock on your door that says, "Be back in ..." or "Do not disturb until ..." so you can get some work done. The things-to-do-list is also a key component in managing your time. The key is to not let your day get away from you and the best way to do that is to plan what YOU want to get done.

7. Two at a time and other time-saving tips. How to get more done in less time.

Multitasking got a bad rap a few years back. I think it is a great time-saving tool. If you can combine and conquer (do two things at once) you have more time left to do what you want. Sure, people have taken multitasking to extremes – driving, drinking coffee, talking on the phone and applying makeup all at the same time. But what if you met with someone to brain-

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Left-brain/Right-brain Quiz

Adapted from "Organizing From The Right Side Of The Brain" by Lee Silber

We use both hemispheres of our brains at different times in different situations, though many people favor one hemisphere over the other. This is a test (and only a test) to determine which "style" you prefer and what hemisphere of the brain dominates your thinking.

Relax. There is no pass or fail, there are no wrong answers. Just choose the one that comes closest to describing you:

1. When meeting someone a. I usually show up early or on time. b. I am usually running a teensy bit late.
2. When it comes to paper a. I like to file it. b. I prefer to pile it.
3. I prefer to a. work on one task at a time. b. I like to juggle several things at once.
4. At the beginning of the workday a. I make a list of things to do and plan my day around my list. b. I shuffle through the piles of papers on my desk before I finally decide what to do first.
5. When reading a magazine I will a. start at page one and read in sequential order. b. jump in wherever looks most interesting.
6. When learning how to use a new piece of equipment, a. I read the instruction manual before beginning. b. What manual?
7. When someone gives me directions, I a. write them out (with street names). b. draw a map with landmarks and visual references.
8. When I see something I want to buy, a. I save up until I have the money. b. I charge it. You only live once, baby.
9. When I'm telling a story to a friend, a. I cut to the chase, yada, yada, yada. b. I'm very animated and am likely to get sidetracked.
10. When faced with an unpleasant task, a. I do it a little at a time, step by step. b. I either jump in and get it over with or put it off and hope it goes away.
11. When it comes to projects, a. I am known for my stick-to-itiveness. b. I always intend to finish them, but ...
12. My work space looks like a. the top of an aircraft carrier (nothing lying around). b. Disneyland (neat stuff and office toys jumbled in with the piles of work).

Total number of "a" answers: _____

Total number of "b" answers: _____

If you have 8 or more "a" answers, you can consider yourself left-brain dominant. With 8 or more "b" answers, you're a right-brainer. Otherwise, you're probably "whole-brained" or at least partly lateralized. To find out what this means, read the descriptions below. No matter what your predisposition, it'll help you live your life and do your work painlessly and effectively.

Left-brainers

The left hemisphere of your brain is the timekeeper (linear awareness), logical (just the facts, please), ana-

lytical (good with relationships, abstractions), linear (prefers a sequential, step-by-step approach), critical (judgmental), verbal (language and speech and spelling), compartmentalized (likes to do things one at a time, keeps home and work separate). It's also the memory center (names but not faces). People who are left-brained are usually good at researching and retaining information, fact gathering, math, tidiness, and written instructions. They are responsible, good at organizing, obsessive, compulsive, dislike change, are easily overloaded, can be seen as dull, into conformity, controlling, and may be insensitive at times. They can be strong finishers; focused; perfectionists; detail oriented; goal oriented; list makers; orderly; stable; punctual; decisive; cautious; successful and productive. They are also amazing.

Right-brainers

Right-brainers can do as much as their left-brain counterparts (maybe more) but prefer to do it in their own unique way. With a little savoir faire. Despite the negative bias against right-brainers as unproductive, undisciplined dreamers, they can get things done and have some fun doing it. The right brain is artistic (can draw and paint), intuitive (perceptive and receptive to hunches), rhythmic (can see and feel patterns), fun (spontaneous, with a keen sense of humor), visual (non-verbal), spatial (it's the part that works jigsaw puzzles), nonjudgmental (sees and accepts different points of view), imaginative (creative and makes odd associations), metaphorical (uses imagery), emotional (people oriented and empathetic), holistic (sees the big picture), divergent (deals well with more than one thing at a time), sexual (just thought you'd like to know that), non-linear (likes to jump around rather than follow a step-by-step approach), illogical, irrational and persuasive, too. This is also the site of the unconscious mind (where dreams reside). Right-brainers may be unpredictable, impatient, sloppy and offbeat. They loathe routines, lack follow-through, abhor structure and rules, take a wait-and-see approach more often than not, juggle several tasks at once, and deal well with change. Organizing comes natural to them (stop laughing) but not organizing that anybody else might recognize as such. They want to have fun and are freewheeling rather than focused. They are daydreamers and their thoughts tend to wane and wander – often. They are oblivious to time. They are very visual but lose things easily and frequently. Most see tidiness as a waste of time. Right-brainers are independent, impulsive, flexible, easygoing, dramatic and actually like to have drama and chaos in their lives. They are also wonderful.

Whole-brainers

If you had an equal amount of "a" and "b" answers congratulations, you are "fully lateralized." Or put another way, you are a whole-brainer. You will recognize some of yourself in the descriptions of both right- and left-brainers.

storm ideas while going for a walk – with your dog. What if you put a basket of easy-to-do tasks by the phone or next to the computer so while you wait on hold or for the printer to warm up you get another quick thing done. (Send a thank you card,

pay a bill, or complete some paperwork.) Finally, use the time spent commuting to listen to books on tape. It makes the drive go by faster and depending on what you listen to, you can learn Spanish or a new skill.

8. If you've got the time. Learn how to say "No."

Just because the phone rings does not mean it must be answered. Just because you own a truck does not mean you have to help everyone move. You don't have to accept every party invitation. And no, the customer isn't always right. When you say "No" to helping someone else reach their goals you are saying "yes" to yourself.

One thing I did that was a big help was to make a things-NOT-to-do list. These were all the things I hated doing, shouldn't be doing and didn't want to do again. I started my list with helping people move and went on from there. I also made a "Joy" list. These are things I want to do but don't seem to have the time. Now I realize that if I say "no" to something I don't want to do I have more time for things I truly want to do.


9. Time is money. There is no such thing as "free time."

One of the most important things I have learned the last few years is that time equals life. What do I mean? We all have a certain amount of time we have to live (I know, it's not something we like to think about) and when we spend it we are using up a piece of our life. If you hate your job then you are using up your life on something that gives you little or no return on your investment of time. When you purchase something you pay for it with your life. If you make \$50 an hour (work with me here) and you purchased a product for \$250, you spent five hours of your life to pay for it. And if you hate your job, then this really stinks. Imagine with big ticket items how much of your life you spent to acquire them. The point is, some of us have chosen a life of goods and that is not the good life. When it is all said and done we will look back on how we lived our lives, not what we owned,

and wish we had more time. Spend your time wisely because there is no "free" time.

10. This is the time of your life. How to be in the moment and not let life pass you by.

Some people say they will be happy as soon as ... they own a home or buy a bigger one, get married or get divorced, make more money and/or get out of debt, get in shape or reach a certain ideal weight. My advice is, don't wait to be happy. The time to be happy is now, regardless of what you have or don't have, what you've done or haven't done. Our lives go by so fast and they go by even faster when are wishing and waiting for something better. These are the times of your life. Live like there is no tomorrow.

This article was part of a presentation by Lee Silber at TCI EXPO Spring 2005. Organizing from the Right Side of the Brain: Creative Ways to Get Organized, a book by Lee Silber, is published by St. Martin's Press. 

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