

***Time
Management***
FOR
DUMMIES®
MINI EDITION

by Dirk Zeller



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Time Management For Dummies®, Mini Edition

Published by

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

111 River St.

Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774

www.wiley.com

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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ISBN 978-1-118-55069-4 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-118-55070-0 (ebk);

ISBN 978-1-118-55071-7 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-118-55072-4 (ebk)

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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Introduction

Time Management For Dummies, Mini Edition is about using your time more effectively to create greater results at the office and at home. This book provides real techniques, strategies, and tools that I've personally used and taught. I've seen them bring forth a bounty of results in my life as well as in the lives of countless others.

Here, I help you mentally wrap your brain around the problems of time management. Then I explain how to establish a solid system that you can replicate over time.

Note that in the spirit of saving you time, this is also a reference book. In other words, you don't have to read it from cover to cover. Just look up what you need and put those ideas in action.

Icons Used in This Book

To help you navigate this book a bit better, you can rely on the icons in the book's margins. The icons act as little signposts pointing out the important info.



This bull's-eye icon points out little-advertised nuggets of knowledge that are certain to give you an edge in increasing your time-management skills.



This icon denotes critical information that you really need to take away with you. Remember these points, if nothing else. They address the issues that you come across repeatedly with time management.

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Consider this the flashing red light on the road to making a sale. When you see the Warning icon, you know to steer clear of whatever practice, behavior, or response I indicate.

Where to Go from Here

Chapter 1 is good place to start because it gives you the foundational information you need to know about managing your time successfully. However, if you're really itching to take some action, head to Chapter 2 where I show you how to prioritize your tasks and schedule your days.

After that, you may want to pick topics that cause you the most challenge or frustration. For instance, you can check out Chapter 3 for ways to organize your work-space to be more productive, Chapter 4 for tips on defending against interruptions, or Chapter 5 for help overcoming procrastination.

If you want even more advice on making the most of your time, check out the full-size version of *Successful Time Management For Dummies* — simply head to your local bookseller or go to www.dummies.com!

Chapter 1

Setting Yourself Up for Success

In This Chapter

- Tapping into your time-management strengths
- Building a solid system of time management
- Facing up to time management's biggest challenges

You may not have the power to get yourself more time, but you *do* have the power to make the most of it. You really are in control of your time, even though you don't always feel like it.

Discovering how to manage your time well is part mental restructuring and part creating a system. Effective time management requires a little introspection, some good habits and organizational skills, and more than a few logistical and tactical tools. But all are achievable and are covered in this book. Get ready for a journey that's certain to show you how to make the absolute most of the 24 hours in your day.

Getting to Know Yourself

The better you understand yourself — your strengths, weaknesses, goals, values, and motivations — the easier it is to manage your time effectively. In this section, you look at your strengths and goals, think about how much your time is worth, and observe personal energy and behavior patterns that affect your focus throughout the day.

Assessing your strengths and weaknesses

Chances are that by this point in your life, you've discovered some skills that you come to naturally or perhaps have worked hard to acquire. Maybe you're a master negotiator. Or a whiz with numbers. You may be a good writer. Or you may have a silver tongue. Whatever your strengths, developing the handful that brings you the most return on your efforts, propelling you forward to attain your goals, is a more productive course of action than trying to be the best at everything.

In addition to pinpointing your strengths, you need to identify the areas where your skills are lackluster. Then figure out which tasks are essential for meeting the goals you want to accomplish, and build those skills. Invest time in honing and maintaining your strengths, and improve the weaknesses that you need to overcome to reach your goals.

Naming goals to give you direction

Your goals can serve as inspiration in adopting good time-management skills. After all, managing your time isn't really a benefit in and of itself, but managing your time so you can spend more of it doing what's important to you *is* — whether you're saving for a retirement

of travel and adventure or buying the house in the perfect neighborhood.



Using your aspirations to fire up your time-management success means you have to identify your goals and keep them in the front of your mind. Pinning down what's most important to you may require some soul searching.

Assigning your time a monetary worth to guide your priorities

Most people think about the value of their time as it relates to on-the-job activity. But to be truly aware of the value of your time, you need to carry this concept into your personal life as well. The value of time in your personal life is at least as valuable as your work life time. In some cases, personal time is priceless.



One of the most important points to remember as you work through this book is that it's okay not to get everything done. What's critical is making sure that the *important* things are getting done. By assigning value to your time and using the skills you acquire from this book, you can clearly identify what's important and make conscious, wise choices.

In Chapter 2, I introduce you to the universal truth that 20 percent of your efforts produces 80 percent of the results. So after you uncover which efforts produce that return, you can crank up those efforts to increase your results.

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Identifying your rhythm to get in the zone

If you know your rhythms — when you're most on, what times of day you're best equipped to undertake certain tasks — you can perform your most important activities when you're in the zone. Everyone works to a unique pace, and recognizing that rhythm is one of the most valuable personal discoveries you can make. Some of the aspects you need to explore include the following:

- ✓ How many hours can you work at a high level each day?
- ✓ What's your most productive time of the day?
- ✓ How many weeks can you work at high intensity without a break?
- ✓ How long of a break do you need so you can come back focused and intense?

Following a System

Establishing a solid system you can replicate is a key to succeeding in managing your time. Systems, standards, strategies, and rules protect your time and allow you to use it to your best advantage. These skills are applicable whether you're the company CEO, a salesperson, a midlevel manager, an executive, or an administrative assistant. No matter your work or your work environment, time management is of universal value.

Scheduling your time and creating a routine

Sticking to a time-scheduling system can't guarantee the return of your long-lost vacation days, but by regularly tracking your meetings, appointments, and obligations, you reduce your odds of double-booking and scheduling appointments too close. And by planning ahead, you make sure to make time for all the important things first.

For years, I've followed the time-blocking system, which I detail in Chapter 2. The system ensures that you put your priorities first before scheduling in commitments and activities of lesser importance.

Such time-management techniques are just as applicable to the other spheres of your life. There's a reason why I advise you to plug in your personal commitments first when filling in your time-blocking schedule: Your personal time is worthy of protection, and you can further enhance that time by applying time-management principles.

Organizing your surroundings

A good system of time management requires order and organization. Creating order in your world saves time wasted searching for stuff, from important phone numbers to your shoes. But even more, physical order creates mental order and helps you perform more efficiently.

Yes, your workspace should be clean and orderly, with papers and folders arranged in some sort of sequence that makes items easy and quick to find. Your desk should be cleared off, providing space to work. Your

important tools — phone, computer, calculator — ought to be within reach. (For more on keeping your office in order, read Chapter 3.)

Overcoming Time-Management Obstacles

Anyone can conquer time management, but it's not always easy. If your experience is anything like mine, sometimes your days feel like a video game, where you're in constant threat of being gobbled up on your course to the finish line. But instead of cartoon threats, your obstacles are your own shortcomings (poor communication skills, procrastination, and the inability to make wise and quick decisions), time-wasting co-workers and bosses, phone and people interruptions, and unproductive meetings.

Circumventing interruptions

Interruptions creep into your workday in all sorts of insidious manners. Besides the pesky co-worker stepping into your office with "Got a sec?" interruptions come in the form of unproductive meetings, phone calls, e-mails, and more.

Additionally, most poor time managers interrupt themselves by trying to do too much at once. Study after study supports that multitasking isn't the most effective work style. The constant stops and starts disrupt a project, requiring startup time each time you turn back to the task.

I explore a number of these interruptions in Chapter 4, and I offer plenty of advice on preempting such disruptions, as well as cutting them short so you can get your train of thought back on the track.

Getting procrastination under control

Sometimes, it's tempting to use interruptions as an excuse to postpone a project or a task. How nice to have someone else to blame for not getting started! And before you know it, you've found so many good reasons not to do something that you've backed yourself into a really tight eleventh-hour corner, and the pressure's on.

Procrastination has a lot of causes, but most of the reasons to procrastinate leave you headed for trouble. Chapter 5 addresses the perils of putting things off and offers secrets to overcoming that all-too-human tendency to postpone until tomorrow what you could've done today.

Garnering Support While Establishing Your Boundaries

Sometimes your family, friends, and co-workers are your biggest challenge to managing your time successfully. Whose phone calls interrupt your train of thought when you're on a roll? Who expects you home for dinner, despite a pressing proposal deadline? For whose meetings do you have to take a break from your critical research?

Yet despite all the challenges they throw your way, these same folks can also serve as your allies as you pursue the quest of better time use. Getting them on board and perceiving them as comrades in shared goals is a great way to offset the interruptions that they also inevitably bring to the table.

Balancing work and time with family and friends

All work and no play, as they say, means something is askew with your life balance. Recognize that although your job and career are critical components of who you are, they're also a means to support aspects of your life that, I suspect, are more important to you: your personal life, which includes your family, your friends, your community, and your leisure and social activities.



If you find yourself constantly putting in long hours at work for months on end, something's off-kilter: Either you're not managing your time effectively, or something's wrong with your job. No one — not even Wall Street lawyers — should be putting in 70-hour weeks on a regular basis. A 70-hour work week leaves little time for sleep, recreation, family, or relationships.

Still, getting the support of family members is critical for success. There's no doubt that my family comes before my job, but that doesn't mean I can drop work whenever I want. My family and I all work together to manage our time so we have more of it together.

Keeping your boss on track

Trying to keep co-workers from impinging on your productive time is ticklish enough; things get even more sensitive when you have to tell your boss that you don't have time to waste. But your supervisor is often the one who throws the most curveballs your way when it comes to using your time in the most productive way. How do you deal with the boss who waits

until the last minute to drop a big project on your desk that needs to be done yesterday?

When trying to keep a rein on a time-wasting boss, you need to be prepared to summon up all your powers of diplomacy. You also need to be more direct from the outset. You may even have to suggest some of the time-management tips and tools from this book.

Keeping Motivation High

Like most goals, mastering your time-management skills isn't something that happens overnight.

Throughout the process of working to improve the way you manage your time, you'll occasionally encounter points where you start feeling disappointed, wondering whether your efforts are paying off. Whenever you hit those lows — and you will — remember to give yourself credit for every step you take in the right direction.



One great way to stay motivated is to reward yourself. For example, if you complete certain actions that tie to your goals, give yourself Friday afternoon off. Or savor an evening on the couch with a good movie or dinner at a favorite restaurant. Do whatever serves as an enticing reward.

Take motivation to the next level by involving others in the reward. Let your spouse know that an evening out awaits if you fulfill your week's goals before deadline. Tell the kids that if you spend the next couple of evenings at the office, you can all head for the amusement park on Saturday. I guarantee this strategy is a sure-fire way to supercharge your motivation.

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As you work through this difficult but worthy bout of self-improvement, keep your mind on the positive side and remember two simple truths:

- ✓ You're human.
- ✓ Work always expands to fill the time you allow for it.

No matter how productive I am, whether I have just a couple things to accomplish or a sky-high pile on my desk, and whether I leave work on time or stay late, there's always something that doesn't get done. So I don't get hung up on those things I don't accomplish — I just keep my eyes on the goal, prioritize accordingly, delegate what I can, and protect my boundaries carefully so I take on only as much as I know I can handle while still remaining satisfied with all parts of my life. When you start to get frustrated about the never-ending flow of work that comes your way, remind yourself that you're blessed with more opportunities than time — and that's not a bad place to be.

Chapter 2

Prioritizing Your Tasks and Blocking Your Time

In This Chapter

- Utilizing the 80/20 rule
- Prioritizing activities
- Developing and perfecting the habit of time-blocking

An old time-management adage says that for every minute you invest in planning, you save ten minutes in execution. The best way to achieve your goals is to prioritize them and develop an ordered plan to reach them.

People who are most productive have another common trait: They treat everything in life as an appointment. They lend importance to their duties, commitments, and activities by writing them down and giving them a time slot.

To ensure you act on your priorities in the order that's most important to you, you need to follow a method to your scheduling. In this chapter, I help you match your overall time investment to your goals, prioritize your tasks, and create a schedule to take you safely to your destination.

Focusing Your Energy with the 80/20 Rule

You can apply the *80/20 rule* (also referred to as the *Pareto principle*) to almost any situation. I've heard it used in the workplace ("20 percent of my staff makes 80 percent of the revenue") and even by investors ("20 percent of my stocks generate 80 percent of my income"). You can also apply the 80/20 rule to time management.

Generally speaking, only 20 percent of those things that you spend your time doing produces 80 percent of the results that you want to achieve. This principle applies to virtually every situation in which you have to budget your time in order to get things done — whether at work, at home, in your relationships, and so on.



The goal in using the 80/20 rule to maximize your productivity is to identify the key 20-percent activities that are most effective (producing 80 percent of the results) and make sure you prioritize those activities. Complete those vital tasks above all else.

In this section, I show you how to implement the 80/20 rule.

Step 1: Taking an honest look at how you spend your time

Before you can do any sort of strategizing, you need to take a good, honest look at how you use your time. For people who struggle with time management, the problem, by and large, lies in the crucial steps of assessing and planning. Start your assessment with these steps:

1. Observe how you currently use your time.

What do you spend most of your day doing? How far down the daily to-do list do you get each day?

2. Assess your personal productivity trends.

During which segments of the day are your energy levels the highest?

3. Take a close look at the interruptions you face on a regular basis.

During what segments of the day do you experience the most interruptions? What sort of interruptions do you receive most frequently and from whom?

Step 2: Determining your goals

Some folks tend to follow the squeeze-it-in philosophy: They cram in everything they possibly can — and then some. These people almost always end up miserable. To work efficiently, you need to identify your 80 percent — the results you want to achieve. In other words, you need to clearly define your goals.



Numerous studies suggest people who clearly define and write down their goals are more likely to accomplish them — and in a shorter time frame and more direct fashion. When you take the time to write down your goals, you clarify them and sharpen your vision for attaining them.

Step 3: Identifying the top tasks that support your goals

Once you have a clear set of goals, identify the tasks you need to do that align with those goals and then ask yourself the following questions about these key tasks:

- ✓ How much time do you devote to those activities? Twenty percent? Less? More?
- ✓ What are you doing with the remainder of your time?
- ✓ How much return are you getting for the investment on the remainder?

After you identify the tasks and activities that you need to accomplish to achieve your goals, assign a value to those goals so you can decide how to order your daily task list.



Having a solid understanding of the company's priorities, goals, objectives, and strategic thrusts guides your own prioritization so you can get the edge on the company's competition. Ask your direct supervisor for his or her priorities so you can make sure you align yours accordingly.

Getting Down to Specifics: Daily Prioritization

After you identify the vital few tasks you need to accomplish to meet your goals, break them down a bit further into daily to-do items. Then prioritize them to make sure you accomplish the most important tasks

first, identifying which ones you must do on a given day. Here's how:

1. Start with a master list.

Write down everything you need to accomplish today. Don't try ranking the items at this point. You merely want to brain dump all the to-do actions you can think of.



Be sure to account for routine duties that don't have a direct effect on your company's mission or bottom line: turning in business expense reports, typing up and distributing meeting minutes, taking sales calls from prospective printing vendors.

2. Determine the A-list.

Focusing on consequences creates an urgency factor so you can better use your time. Ask yourself, "What, if not done today, will lead to a significant consequence?" Designate these as *A activities*. If you have a scheduled presentation today, then that task definitely hits the A-list.

3. Categorize the rest of the tasks.

Now move on to B-level tasks, activities that may have a mildly negative consequence if not completed today. C tasks have no penalty if not completed today, followed by D tasks: D is for *delegate*. These are actions that someone else can (and should) take on. Finally, E items are tasks that could be eliminated, so don't even bother writing an E next to them — just mark them out completely.

4. Rank the tasks within each category.

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Say you've categorized your list into six A items, four B items, three C items, and two D items. Your six A tasks obviously move to the top of the list, but now you have to rank these six items in order: A-1, A-2, A-3, and so forth.



If you have trouble ordering several top priorities, start with just two: Weigh them against each other — if you could complete only one task today, which of the two is most critical? Which of the two best serves your 80/20 rule? Then take the winner of that contest and compare it to the next A item, and so on. Then do the same for the B and C items.

Now you're ready to tackle your to-do list, knowing that the most important tasks will be addressed first.



Don't expect to complete as large a number of cross-offs as you may be used to. Because you're now focused on more important items — which likely take more time — you may not get as many tasks completed. In my view, however, the measure of a great day is whether you wrap up all the A-list items. If you follow this system and consistently complete the As, I can assure you success. Why? Because the B and C items quickly work their way to As — and you always get the most important things done.

Don't assume that you just move the Bs and Cs up the next day. You need to complete the whole process each day. Some of the Bs will move up, but others will stay in the B category. Some of the Cs — due to outside pressure, your boss, or changed deadlines — may leapfrog the Bs and become the highest-priority As.

Blocking Off Your Time and Plugging in Your To-Do Items

After you identify and order your priorities, you place them into time slots on your weekly calendar, broken into 15-minute segments — this process is commonly called *time-blocking*. I've discovered no better system for managing time on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, and lifelong basis.

Time-blocking can be tricky because it requires a lot of thought and adjustment, both in the initial stage where you're doing it for the first time and for a while thereafter, when you're developing the skill. Figuring out how to best manage your time depends on two things:

- ✓ Consistent, diligent practice
- ✓ A span of time (18 to 24 months) to improve

Implementing time-blocking to help organize your schedule takes a bit of time, but you reap huge dividends on that initial investment. This section walks you through a general outline of the process I follow.

Step 1: Dividing your day

To start, you need a daily calendar divided into 15-minute increments. Why such small bites of time? Because even 15 minutes can represent a good chunk of productive activity. Losing just two or three of these small blocks each day can diminish your ability to meet your goals.

Begin by dividing your day; draw a clear line between personal time and work time. When you take this step, you're creating work-life balance from the start. Don't

take it for granted that Saturday and Sunday are time off just because you work a Monday-through-Friday work week. Block it into your schedule, or work activities may creep into your precious downtime. The more you take action on paper, the more concrete the time-block schedule becomes.



Apprehensive about drawing a line between work and personal time because you're wary of having to tell a business associate you can't attend a business function that extends into personal time? Not to worry. You don't have to tell a client that your Tuesday-morning workout is more important than a breakfast meeting with her — simply say you're already booked at that time. That's all the explanation you owe.

Step 2: Scheduling your personal activities

Blocking out personal activities first gives weight to these activities and ensures that they won't be overtaken by obligations that have lesser importance in the long run.

Scheduling personal activities is twofold:

1. Schedule routine activities you participate in.

Do you have dinner together as a family every night? A weekly date night with your significant other? Do you want to establish family traditions? Don't just assume these activities will happen — give them the weight they deserve and block out the time for each one.

2. Schedule personal priorities that aren't routine.

Put those personal agenda items first before filling in your day with tasks and activities that don't support those priorities.

Step 3: Factoring in your work activities

Begin with the activities that are a regular part of your job and then factor in the priorities that aren't routine. Whether you're a company CEO, a department manager, a sales associate, an administrative assistant, or an entry-level trainee, you're responsible for performing key tasks and activities each day and week. For instance, if you report to work daily and always spend the first hour of your day returning phone calls, time-block it into your schedule.

Step 4: Accounting for weekly self-evaluation and planning time

Use weekly strategic planning sessions — ideally for Friday afternoon or the end of the work week — to review your progress toward those near-future business projects as well as your larger career aspirations or personal goals. This is an opportunity to review the previous week and jump-start the upcoming week.

I recommend spending 15 to 30 minutes daily and then taking a 90-to-120-minute session on self-evaluation and planning at the end of the week.



This strategic planning time is probably your most valuable time investment each week. It gives you a tremendous wrap-up for the week and a good start to next week, and it reinforces your vision for your long-term success. It also enables you to go home and spend time with your family in the right frame of mind.

Step 5: Building in flex time

Plug segments of time into your schedule every few hours to help you to minimize the fallout from unplanned interruptions or problems. About 15 or 30 minutes is enough time to work in at strategic intervals throughout your day. Knowing that you have this free block of time can help you adhere to your schedule rather than get off track.



As you begin to build your time-blocking skills, insert 30-minute flex periods into your schedule for every two hours of time-blocked activity. This may seem like a lot of flex time, but if it allows you to maintain the rest of your time-block schedule and maintain or increase your productivity, it's worth the investment.

Assessing Your Progress and Adjusting Your Plan as Needed

Becoming comfortable with time-blocking takes time, and achieving a glitch-free schedule that you can work with for a stretch may take a half-dozen revisions. Even then, routinely evaluate your time-blocking efforts and adjust them periodically to make sure you're getting the desired results. It's not a huge time investment — you can check yourself with a few minutes a day or use 15 to 30 minutes of your weekly time to review your results. Ask yourself the following:

- ✓ What took you off track this week?
- ✓ What interruptions really affected your success with your time?

- ✓ Is someone sabotaging your time-block?
- ✓ What shifts would help your efficiency?

In this section, I discuss this review in detail.

Surveying your results

Your success in meeting your objectives tells you whether the time-blocking is working for you. I suggest both a weekly review that focuses on the past week and a periodic review of where you stand in relation to your overall goals.

The weekly review is a time for you to replay the tape of the week, looking at the highs and lows. As for the periodic review, review your job description, key responsibilities, and the ways in which your performance and success are measured.

You can also turn to other measuring sticks, which are especially useful in the workplace:

- ✓ What went well this week? What could you have done better?
- ✓ Did you accomplish what you really needed to do? How many high-priority items did you carry over to the next day or week?
- ✓ How would you rate your week on a 1-to-10 scale, with 1 being utterly overwhelmed and dissatisfied, and 10 being completely in control of and happy with how you spend your time?
- ✓ How do you feel you performed at work? How does your supervisor feel you're performing?
- ✓ Did you meet your goals at home?

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- ✓ Has what you've accomplished this week positioned you better to achieve your long-range goals?
- ✓ What are the key improvement areas for you next week?
- ✓ What adjustments to your long-range plans do you need to make?
- ✓ What's diverting you from your schedule?
- ✓ Were you unrealistic in your time estimates for tasks?
- ✓ What segment of the day or activity is tipping your schedule off track?

Tweaking your system

Looking back at your personal behaviors and skills and the interruptions you routinely face, identify two or three steps you need to take in order to increase your success. Here are a couple of tips to point you in the right direction:

- ✓ **If you're not completing the most important tasks or working toward the most important efforts each day:** Weed out some of the trivial tasks to make room for the most important ones.
- ✓ **If your most productive times of day are filled with trivial tasks:** Shift the tasks and the time slots you fit them in.

After you figure out what you need to change, you can adjust your schedule accordingly.

Following are some examples of quick evaluation questions that can help you make the most-effective, results-oriented changes to your schedule:

- ✓ **What's the standard?** Do you have a sales quota that needs to be met? Are you getting your boss's priorities done? Going home, how are you feeling about your progress?
- ✓ **How accurate does the time-block schedule need to be?** In time-blocking, a little goes a long way. The real question is how well you did this week with the most important activities — the vital 20 percent of the 80/20 rule.
- ✓ **How much have you improved?** How have you improved since you started working your time-block? How large is the improvement? Would you be happy if you improved each week for a year at this level?
- ✓ **With additional revision, how much additional productivity would you gain?** Before revising a time-block schedule, look at the anticipated return on investment. Is this change going to bring significant benefit in productivity, efficiency, or personal satisfaction?
- ✓ **How good is good enough?** Where is the point where you'll achieve diminishing returns on your effort? At some point, further refining your schedule can lead to reduced results. Where do you think that'll happen?



Perfectionism is a scourge of people who are trying to achieve more with their time. The obsession with revising, redoing, and readjusting one's time-block schedule every few days — or even hours — leads to frustration. In your time-blocking, clearly define the line of success so you can achieve your goals without going overboard.

Time-blocking: Making small investments in big success

Time-blocking doesn't require a huge commitment to produce results. A few years ago, one of my clients, a top sales performer in her region, exploded her sales by more than 125 percent in one year! I knew that time-blocking had played an important role in her success. I asked her what percentage of the time she had managed to adhere to her time-blocking schedule. She confessed that she'd stuck to the schedule only 35 percent of the time. The undeniable truth is that *a little goes a long way*. As you continue to use your time-blocking skills, that percentage increases, and your productivity grows accordingly.

I also have a client named, Sam, a salesperson, who increased his contacts by ten per day after adopting time-blocking. These ten additional contacts led to an increase of five leads per week. He averages one appointment for every 2.5 leads and has a 50-percent close ratio on appointments. So from ten contacts per day, he gains one extra sale a week. At an average of \$5,000 commission per sale, he has the potential to increase his income by \$250,000 a year. How's that for results?

Chapter 3

Saving Time with a Productive Workspace

In This Chapter

- Taming your desk and limiting clutter
 - Halting the paper parade
-

If your work area is a parking lot for everything from C-level “someday” tasks to hotter-than-hot, this-project-can-make-my-career assignments, you’re the Titanic heading for an iceberg. Ask yourself the following:

- ✓ Do you know all the tasks you have to get done, complete with time lines?
- ✓ Do you have all the materials, documents, and tools you need right now to take each project to completion without putting out an all-points bulletin?
- ✓ In short, do you have everything you need to do an exceptional job in record time?

If you can answer all these questions with truthful and unequivocal yeses, you can skip this chapter. Everyone else, read on.

Streamlining Your Workspace

“Don’t touch my desk! I know exactly where everything is.” I’ve heard that line endlessly, and I’ve used it myself. If you’re like me, however, most of the time, as you stare at the forest of papers on your desk, you *are* clueless. You may have known where that phone number was yesterday, a few weeks ago, a month ago — or even a few minutes ago — but more stacks have since been added to the mix.

It’s not enough to know which chart, report, or snippet of paper is on which pile, whether it’s on the left or right side of your desk, or whether it’s stashed in the catch-all drawer of your filing cabinet. This is your career you’re talking about. Get a handle on it!

Make way! Clearing off your desk



Repeat after me: My desk is not a parking lot. My desk is not a parking lot. My desk is not a parking lot. If you want to get your desk under control, remember: Less is more.



The cleaner and clearer your desk, the better you can use your time. Remove everything that isn’t absolutely necessary from your desk. Be brutal. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- ✓ Move family photos to your credenza or bookcase.
- ✓ If you have other pictures — perhaps of you with mentors or celebrities — hang them on the wall.
- ✓ Store extra tools, supplies, and items you use weekly in desk drawers and filing areas.

- ✓ Don't allow items you rarely use or haven't looked at since slipping them into a pile to take up desk space. Put those items away in a filing cabinet, storage box, closet, or other less-accessible area.

Tackling piles systematically

To de-clutter yourself, you need to remember this simple rule: Put the important things where you can remember where they are and where you can get to them quickly. Here's how the de-cluttering process breaks down:

1. Figure out what you can get rid of.

Ask yourself whether you really need this and what value there is in saving it.

2. Condense the offending material into smaller piles by selecting items to go into a single master important pile.

Many piles are simply files in disguise: documents that haven't been put away where they belong. By collecting the most important items into a single pile, you get an idea of how much time you need to dissolve this pile into nothing.

3. Schedule an appointment with yourself in the next 48 hours to rid yourself of your master important pile.

Friday afternoons are a good time to file with comparatively few interruptions. (If you're struggling with interruptions, turn to Chapter 4 for help.) Don't worry about your other piles yet.

4. After making your master important file disappear, go back to your remaining clutter and repeat the process.

Start a *second* most-important master file and move all most-important items into that pile; then file them. Then make a third most-important master file. By now, you can probably see the surface of your desk, and you may even have a substantial area cleared.

Keeping Clutter from Coming Back

The best strategy for maintaining a clutter-free workspace is to avoid creating piles in the first place. You need to be more strategic in your work time to circumvent pile explosion. This section gives you two quick starts to circumvent the explosive growth of piles on your desk (or bookshelves, filing cabinets, extra chairs, window ledges, the floor, or any other flat surface).

Following the five Ds to handle papers

Those who master paper have mastered single-handling. These people touch a paper and take action. They don't pile, table, ponder, check, reconsider, or delay. They get rid of the paper the first time they handle it.

If you want to become a single handler, follow the five Ds:

- **Dump it.** If you don't need it, get rid of it!



Sort your mail over the recycling bin or waste basket. Everything that swirls into the bin or basket is no longer your problem.

- ✓ **Delegate it.** Delegate and give yourself more time to work on high-value tasks while building the skills and confidence of people you delegate to.
- ✓ **Detour it.** Maybe you need more information before you can delegate or dispose of a paper, or perhaps the paper raises significant questions that need to be answered before you act. If you can detour and park the paper for later follow-up, you've saved time deliberating *now*.



Don't park paper permanently! Create a detour file for delayed papers, but be sure you get the information you need and deal with the paper.

- ✓ **Do it.** Take action, either to get the task done quickly or because there's a high level of urgency associated with it.
- ✓ **Depot it.** A *depot* is a place where something is deposited or stored. Establish an effective depot for papers you need to keep (and *only* the papers you need to keep).

Filing regularly

Because the task of filing is mundane, it's all too easy to allow other tasks, people, and priorities to creep into the time you set aside to deal with your piles and files, and in a few short weeks, the weeds can take over your garden again. Don't let that happen!



Schedule a weekly filing appointment with yourself and put it on your calendar. As you look ahead to assess your week and see your filing appointment, you begin mentally preparing for it. You may find yourself throwing away

more marginal items throughout the week and completing the task in less time.

Taking notes that you can track

If you know you'll need to file the notes, make sure you go with large paper so you can find it later. When you finish writing, add action items to your priority list for the following day and then drop the notes into the appropriate file for record-keeping. If your action items make it to the A level during the next day's priority sort, all you have to do is pull out the file folder and find your notes there as you left them, safe and sound.



Although sticky notes are great for attaching quick reminders to your computer screen so you don't forget to buy ice cream, they're one of the worst places to jot down information. Here's why:

- ✓ They're too small for extensive notes.
- ✓ Sticky notes tend to sprout legs, sticking where you don't want them to: to the wrong document headed to the wrong file.
- ✓ Aged sticky notes lose their stick over time.



If you're not sharing a document with others, consider taking notes directly on the document rather than on a sticky note. You can take notes in the margins around the key issues in the document or use the white space at the beginning or end for summaries or more-general points.

Limiting the Paper You Receive

Many people receive more material via snail mail and e-mail in one day than they can read in one year. No one wants to miss news or seem out of it, but few people have time to read, let alone organize, the printed grid-lock paralyzing their inboxes and mailboxes.

The question isn't how to handle the information, because you can't. All you can do is decide what's important and try to limit what you receive. You may have an information-overload problem if you

- ✓ Have stacks of periodicals around that you intend to read but never do.
- ✓ Buy books that sound good, only to get home and find that they're already on your shelf.
- ✓ Get frustrated because you haven't read your weekly news magazine in six months.



Here's how to cut down on the paper overload:

- ✓ Cancel subscriptions that you don't read regularly. Don't immediately renew subscriptions to magazines you read infrequently – take a break for a couple of months and see whether you really need them or miss receiving them.
- ✓ Move to Internet-based subscriptions. Most quality publications now offer Internet-based subscriptions. They save you time because you can search issues by topic and you can read only the articles that interest you.

- ✓ Get off mailing lists. If you're like me, unsolicited correspondence easily makes up 60 to 80 percent of your daily incoming mail. If you're on one mailing list, your name is bought, sold, and bartered to numerous others before you can say "spring catalog." Most reputable firms belong to the Direct Marketing Association (DMA). Visit online at www.dmaconsumers.org and ask the DMA to remove your name from its list.
- ✓ Tear out articles you want to read, file them in your tear file, and throw the rest of the publication into the recycle bin. Carry your tear file with you all the time, so whenever you're waiting, you use your time productively. If the same article remains unread in your tear file for more than a couple months, pitch it.

Chapter 4

Defending Your Day from Interruptions

In This Chapter

- Keeping intruders out of your workspace
- Making sure interruptions are short
- Managing interruptions from co-workers
- Reigning in disruptive managers
- Keeping customer incursions at bay

In many ways, communication technology has robbed workers of their ability to control their own time. Multiplying points of access — voice mail, e-mail, instant messaging, audio and video conferencing — can shackle you like a house-arrest ankle bracelet, sentencing you to a life-term of perpetual availability. Business colleagues can track you down on vacation, and friends can interrupt an important client presentation. I'm not sure I'd describe this as *progress*, but it's inarguably a fact of modern life.

Consider this: Every one of these interruptions — no matter how small or insignificant — robs you of at least five *additional* minutes of productive time. Whether

your spouse calls and talks to you for 30 seconds or 30 minutes, you can subtract at least five more minutes from your day. Tally up 20 interruptions over the course of your day, and you lose nearly two hours of productivity — and that totals to the loss of 36 hours a month!

Distractionitis is the scourge of time-block adherents; the fastest way to render a time block or even a day useless is not to deal with distractions well (see Chapter 2 for more on time-blocking). So now's the time to gain control of the interruption game, whether you're at risk from wandering bosses and colleagues, demanding clients, or the technological tools that can slice through your best defenses. I show you how in this chapter.

The Fortress: Guarding Your Focus from Invasion

Being successful in time management and adhering to your time-block schedule happens through controlling access: You need to limit the frequency of the interruptions you allow. Recognize that I use the word *allow* here. You're the one who controls your time and allows other people and situations to pull you away from your goals, dreams, objectives, and time-blocked schedule. You're in control, and you're the master of your time.

Think of yourself as the castle guard: Your workplace is a fortress, one that must be protected in order for it to remain a happy and productive place.

Protecting your domain from intrusions

The modern work environment is often designed on an open-office concept. Few, if any, employees are granted an office with a door, and most workers are parked in open cubicles, often with partitions that do little to block views (and definitely not the noise) of co-workers. It's supposed to manifest a more unified effort and team spirit, I guess. But it doesn't do much to protect you from your teammates' intrusions on your time.

When you have little in the way of a physical barrier, defending your border from invasion becomes a challenge. But it can be done — just because you don't have a door to keep people from entering your space doesn't mean you can't create *virtual* barriers when you're unavailable. Try the following:

- ✓ Post a do-not-disturb sign outside your cubicle, perhaps indicating the critical project you're working on.
- ✓ Verbally communicate your schedule to others so they know when you're unavailable for interruptions.

Scheduling time offline

Because modern communication allows for easier interruptions, it creates a greater loss of production, performance, profitability, and advancement than ever before. The fact that you *can* be reached easily and at any time seems to dictate that you must be available to anyone — all the time.



When you stop to open each and every e-mail as soon as it arrives or answer the phone every time it rings, you are, in essence,

multitasking, trying to perform one or more tasks simultaneously. And multitasking is just not time-efficient.



To keep your focus, set aside time — daily or several times per week — during which you simply do not take calls, check e-mail, or allow other interruptions. Such prescheduled segments ensure blocks of concentration, a tactic certain to raise productivity and lower frustration. If you're concerned about being unavailable for too long of a time, then limit these periods to one or one and a half hours, with time afterward to return messages.

The toughest decision you may face is whether to check your e-mail first thing in the morning when you fire up your computer. Wait and knock out a few priorities first? Or open it up and relieve the suspense — and possibly get waylaid by some marauding issue you feel compelled to pursue? It's your choice — do what works best for you. But by staying offline for the bulk of your workday, you're likely to stay focused on the tasks at hand and get much more accomplished.

Secondary Defenses: Minimizing Damage When Calls Get Through

If you set up the defense mechanisms and blocking techniques I cover throughout this chapter, you can avoid more than 90 percent of the interruptions that most people experience each day. But no matter the

system or strategy you use to protect yourself, telephone interruptions are certain to penetrate your defenses. When this happens, your best strategy is to accept it and go with the flow.

In this section, you discover a few plans for handling the phone calls that make it through to you.

Delegating the responsibility

When the call penetrates your defenses, attempt to delegate the call to someone who can handle it for you. Inform the caller that you're booked, buried, under a deadline, committed, or heading into a meeting — and that you're shifting the responsibility for the call as the fastest way to resolve the problem or challenge. Assure the caller that you're bringing in someone qualified to help.



You also convey a strong reassurance when you explain that the other person is better equipped to resolve the situation. Often, especially if you're the boss, clients and business contacts want to talk to *you*. When you confess that you aren't the best person to fulfill the request, you're more likely to gain the caller's confidence that you have his or her best interests in mind.

Shortening or condensing the conversation

When a call does sneak past the fortress guard, your best defense is to bring that call to a close as quickly as possible. Your focus has been broken, and it'll require

five minutes from the point you wrap up the call to regain your momentum. You want to keep the conversation short so you can get back in the groove.



Inform the caller upfront how much time you can offer. You may, for example, explain that you're in the middle of an important project and have only ten minutes available. You can also plead an appointment — and if you've implemented the time-block schedule (see Chapter 2), you've blocked out your day, so your claim is true.

Rebooking discussions for a better time

If now's a bad time to handle the call, then reschedule. The caller certainly doesn't know your schedule, and it probably never occurred to the caller that this could be a bad time. Offer a brief explanation — you're in a meeting, on your way to an appointment, or simply tied up at this time. Then without allowing time for a response, offer two options of when you're available:

"I'm not able to give your situation the full attention it deserves at this moment. Can we schedule a phone meeting for this afternoon after three or first thing tomorrow morning?"

By offering options, you give back some control to the caller. If you've been caught without your day planner, give a general time, such as Wednesday morning or Thursday afternoon. Then don't forget to transfer the call appointment to your planner.

Limiting phone interruptions from loved ones

In some cases, family calls are the primary source of telephone interruptions. Have a frank talk with your family members about when it's appropriate to call you at work.

If you have young children, you know how they want to tell you all the cool things that happened during the course of their day, well before family dinnertime. You likely expect and welcome these calls. Certainly you want to set opportunities for them to reach you, but it's good to establish boundaries at the same time. You may, for example, ask your kids to call you and fill you in on their day at a certain time – say, after they get home from school or in the case of preschoolers, after lunchtime. Same goes for your spouse or partner.

Most job environments allow for some personal-call time, but few are tolerant of employees you receive calls throughout the day. That type of phone interruption can undermine your productivity, not to mention your career. At work, you really don't need the kinds of emotional distractions that'll dramatically affect your performance and productivity for the next 30 minutes, an hour, or even the rest of the day. Calls from family can move your mind to home even though your body is still at the office.

Handling Recurring Interruptions by Co-workers

Being very clear on your personal boundaries is essential with your co-workers. However, there's a fine balance between being viewed as a hermit, loner, or

outcast and conveying your commitment to your job and the deadlines that you've been given, so you have to approach the confrontation with finesse.

Time-wasting co-workers fall into a few categories, each of which can cause you interruptions that are detrimental to your career. Watch out for the following types of co-workers and respond in a way that'll effectively remedy the specific situation:

- ✓ **The colleague with nothing to do:** If you get interrupted by someone who clearly doesn't have enough to do, ask her what she's working on. What are her priorities and deadlines? Inform her of yours and ask for her help. Asking offenders to help or to work sends most of them the other direction to their own cubicles — voila!
- ✓ **The colleague who just doesn't want to work:** Make sure your own responsibilities aren't at risk. You have to be direct and firm, noting (with a smile) that you don't have time for frivolity. Better to confront your co-worker than miss a deadline and be viewed as not trustworthy of performance under pressure. Don't allow someone else's agenda to diminish you in the eyes of your boss.
- ✓ **The employee who's wrapped up in his world:** Some people are constantly talking about their weekend, their date last night, their favorite team, and their family ad nauseam. The real challenge is that they don't get the subtle hints you drop that you're busy. It's as if you have to hold them still, bring your face to theirs, and say, "I am busy!" Be direct.

- ✓ **The person who treats work as her sole social outlet:** Some people have such a limited life outside of work that they want to know all about yours. Short of being their dating or activity secretary, you need to limit the interaction. The lunch hour is usually a bad option for talking with these people because it can wipe out time before and after lunch as well as lower productivity, but if you want to help them get their life in order after work, go for it.

Dealing with Interruption-Oriented Bosses

In most companies, probably the biggest offenders who interrupt the staff are people in supervisory positions.



Most bosses aren't out to find ways to deliberately disrupt their employees' work. More than likely, they're focused on their goals — whether those goals are meeting sales quotas, completing a project on time, reducing costs, or maintaining production. And in their quest to meet those goals, they're often simply not sensitive to others' need for focus.

Perhaps you've interacted with one of both of the following types of managers:

- ✓ **The seagull manager:** These types of managers do the aerial attack of interruption by flying over, pooping on everyone, and flying back out. Their bombing run of new ideas, changed priorities, and emergency deadlines is ever-changing because their organization and skills in management are lacking.



With seagull managers, your best bet is to play up to their desire to achieve. Ask for your boss's help in assuring that you fulfill your role in the process.

- ✓ **The verbal delegator:** This type of manager can really gum up productivity and performance. He often delegates because something popped into his head and he wants to move it off his plate because he doesn't want to think about it again. He moves into some subordinate's world at that moment, regardless of schedule.



Urge your boss to put any work request in writing. This ensures that you get the directions straight and avoids the risk that the boss will double-assign a task. Also, if your supervisor has to put the order in writing, he's sitting at the computer writing up an e-mail rather than buzzing you on the phone or stopping in your cubicle.

Enlisting the cooperation of your direct supervisor may take some more diplomacy and tact, but it can and must be done. Meeting with your boss to discuss your time-block schedule or to ask your boss to help you with your schedule is a good opening salvo. Get your boss's commitment not to interrupt you during a certain segment of your day — it can pay large dividends for you both.

Working with Intrusive Clients

You know that to provide the best service to each customer you have to seek some balance. If the squeaky-wheel clients take up more than their share of your

time and resources, you won't be able to give the attention to other deserving customers.

The truth is that some customers and clients really do have more value than others to the company. Their revenue to the company is larger. They buy products and services that have higher profit margins. They're more influential in the marketplace as your advocates in sending you more business through referrals.

When dealing with intrusive clients and investing large amounts of time, make sure they're worth it. If they're high maintenance, they must be also high revenue and high reward.

Try the following suggestions for how to handle customers who want attention:

✓ Giving a bit of attention that goes a long way.

Sending your customer a handwritten thank-you note for their business, remembering birthdays, and calling them on a regular basis make them feel appreciated and — at the same time — reduce interruptions from them.



Another technique is calling customers back and telling them that they're so important that you squeezed them into your schedule or that you called them first. This technique is extremely effective when you return a call before the appointed time. If you informed them on voice mail that you'll be calling them back at 11 a.m. and you manage to get your priorities done early and can start calling the high-interruption clients back at 10:30 a.m., they'll think you walk on water.

✓ **Set clients' expectations.** Educating customers about your availability is important. Let new customers know your schedule and the best times to reach you as well as how to leave a message when you can't be reached. As part of this education, you also want to establish how quickly they can expect a response from you after they leave a message: Within 24 hours? The same business day?



Creating reasonable expectations is key in good customer relations. Taking 24 hours to return a client's call may be reasonable — but it won't seem that way if the client expects to hear from you within an hour.

Chapter 5

Overcoming Procrastination, a Notorious Time Thief

In This Chapter

- Understanding when putting something off is good
- Taking action to stop procrastination in its tracks
- Advice for recovering procrastinators

Although many people believe that they postpone the unpleasant when they indulge in procrastination, fact is, putting things off carries a lot of emotional unpleasantness. Boiled down to its purest form, *procrastination* is simply deferring or delaying action. But of course, it's not nearly that simple. Understanding what provokes and how it affects you is the first step in overcoming the impulses that keep you from moving forward.

Not all procrastination is bad, however. So in this chapter, I help you see the difference between good reasons to postpone action and mere excuses to put something off.

But most importantly, I provide tools and tactics to help you overcome that debilitating paralysis that keeps you from getting started or the attacks that slow you down or stop you mid-project.

Knowing Whether to Put It Off

Postponing action isn't productive when it holds you back, costs you time and money, and results in a negative outcome. But sometimes, putting something off is the best course of action. The challenge is knowing when it's right to procrastinate. This section helps you sort that out.

Poor procrastination: Considering the costs

With procrastination, the bottom-line loss of time, money, and productivity is enormous — enormous to you, to your company, to your country, and to the world. A global tally of the cost of procrastination is more than a little overwhelming to take in, but the negative impact is clear in closer-to-home examples, too. Here's what poor procrastination costs you:

- **Money:** Consider the impact when you pay your bills late: You get dinged with a late fee, which can be as much as \$25 or more. If you do that half the time, you rack up \$150 per year. And that's not factoring in the increased interest (compounded daily) you pay.

Now crank it up a bit. When you routinely pay your bills late, your credit rating isn't so hot. So when you apply for a mortgage or home equity loan, you don't get the best interest rate. You may not even realize how much that fraction of an interest point can make over your 30-year mortgage. Your habit of procrastinating can cost you as much as \$50,000 over the loan's lifetime!

- ✓ **Quality:** Putting things off until the last minute means you have less time to do the job than it probably warrants. Some of you can boast pulling an A out of such an experience. But most people, if they're honest, confess that the eleventh-hour cram session doesn't bring them their best grades — or a meaningful understanding of the material. So as you try to cram ten days into five doing a job you're not comfortable with in the first place, you lose even more sleep, work even more fatigued, and — surprise — your paper is returned to you for major rework.
- ✓ **Time:** When you put off a task, you spend a limited amount of time actively choosing not to start your project. And then there's the time that the thing you should've been doing but weren't takes up residence in your mind, even though you're doing other things. It still counts as time invested in the task you're putting off because it's affecting the quality of whatever else you're doing in the moment.
- ✓ **Your well-being:** The responsibility doesn't go away simply because you put off doing the job, and you end up carrying the guilt of not doing what you know you should. The stress of the work ahead and the not-doing it causes both emotional anxiety and physical stress, from loss of sleep to stomach problems to depression. In short, procrastination feels lousy.

Wise procrastination: Knowing when to hold 'em



The secret to successful procrastination is to do it deliberately, based on the time that you have and the status of the tasks. Take a look at what's on your plate and choose the tasks that are least time-sensitive and least at-risk, and then postpone them for a bit. In other words, allow yourself to procrastinate — but give yourself a deadline by which to complete those tasks.

The following list covers times you can afford to — and probably should — procrastinate:

- ✓ **When haste could cause harm:** When you feel pressured to make a choice or are forced to take an action you're uncertain of, in most cases, putting it off until you're clear-headed and can think through your decision is a good use of procrastination.
- ✓ **When the timing isn't right:** Learn to recognize those times that you're swimming against the current, and then stop and re-evaluate your priorities and change direction if needed.
- ✓ **When the task isn't critical:** You're loaded down with projects and commitments, all of them important and none of them offloadable. Heck, you're not procrastinating — you're *drowning*. In situations like this, procrastinating can be a survival strategy. You just need to decide which items to put off.



If you have to put off doing something because of time limitations, make it one of the routine day-to-day tasks. These are the low-value, low-reward actions that produce limited results, something you can most likely delegate to someone else.

Laying the Groundwork: Altering Your Mindset and Instituting Discipline

Everyone has three weapons in the arsenal for fighting procrastination. Call upon these formidable forces, unleash their power, and reclaim control of your time:

- ✓ **Decision:** First, it's important to recognize procrastination when you see it and admit that you're guilty. At that point, you can take action to squelch the urge. Decide to begin the steps to stay on course with your obligation. In short, make a commitment and hold fast.
- ✓ **Determination:** Determination is the push that gets you through the late hours, the long days, and the uncomfortable places that make you want to put off your obligation. It's the commitment to see the task through to completion and on time. Although determination is often an innate sense of responsibility, it's also a habit that you can learn, and constant practice keeps it working.
- ✓ **Discipline:** Just as you use discipline to train yourself in other areas — picking up a sport or taking a class; sticking to a time-management plan and schedule-planning system; going on a diet or

undertaking an exercise plan — your vigilant effort to keep on course with your commitments can serve as a major motivator. Approach your procrastination with the same focus: Discipline yourself to get started and stay on course.

The following sections name a few alternate routes to keep you on track so you arrive at your destination — on time.

- ✓ **Motivate yourself with the carrot-or-stick approach.** When you feel the urge to procrastinate, maybe what you need is a carrot dangling in front of your face — an incentive to keep pressing on. On the other hand, some folks respond better to reminders of consequences — the threat of the stick. For them, avoiding negative consequences scares them into action.
- ✓ **Recognize excuses and shove them aside.** Procrastination is definitely in your control, but some influences in your life certainly seem to affect your inclination to procrastinate. And when that happens, the tendency is to make excuses, to blame someone or something else.
When another person encourages you to forsake your work, before you submit to the pressure, acknowledge that you're likely using this person as an excuse. Then remind yourself what you need to do to meet your priorities now. Here's the real question: Is taking time off with your friend bringing you closer to or further away from your goals?
- ✓ **Put off procrastination.** Here's how it works: Identify the ways you're likely to put off working

on your project. Then, instead of fighting a losing battle with your willpower, tell yourself it's okay to do those activities — after you put in a set amount of work on your project.



When postponing your procrastination, give yourself fairly short time commitments. Tell yourself you'll just spend a half-hour or an hour on the project before you allow yourself a break. This is more likely to keep you on task than if you commit yourself to three hours of work.

Conquering Dreaded Tasks with Sandwich Tactics

Sometimes what's on your plate seems so big that you can't sink your teeth into any of it. In these cases, taking things apart may be the best way to make progress, stay on track, and put away that project. Here's the breakdown.

- ✓ **The eat-the-crust-first approach:** One extremely successful technique to move beyond procrastination is to tackle the toughest job first. Or if you're working on a single, big task, take on the most difficult aspect of it before the rest.
- ✓ **The Swiss-cheese approach:** When biting into a major or complicated task seems overwhelming, start with the easier pieces — the aspects that you know you can complete quickly and with little effort. In this way, you poke holes in the project, making lighter work of the steps that remain after you polish off the manageable aspects.

- ✓ **The salami approach:** The salami approach is a great tactic for those long-term projects in which the deadline seems so far away that you convince yourself you don't need to start yet. So you don't resort to cramming at the eleventh hour, take the time immediately to cut up the project into bite-sized pieces. These slices should be small enough that you can schedule them day-by-day or at least week-by-week.
- ✓ **The discard-the-garnish approach:** Just as with a restaurant meal, you probably have a few commitments on your plate that aren't really a key part of your responsibilities. Take a look at your schedule and see whether some of these tasks are mere garnishes. You then have choices:
 - Remove them from your plate.
 - Give them to someone else.
 - Save them until you finish everything else.

Maintaining Your Motivation as You Press Ahead

Everyone has struggled with procrastination, and many still do. Recognizing your tendencies is the first step toward recovery. By following the strategies outlined in this chapter, you can make remarkable progress in overcoming the procrastination.

Staying on the right course, however, is a never-ending vigil. Use these maintenance tactics to do so:

- ✓ **Keep your expectations realistic.** Before you beat yourself up for your woeful procrastinating ways once again, take a look at your schedule and first figure out whether what you're attempting to accomplish is realistic.
- ✓ **Handle the big stuff and delegate the rest.** When you find that too many obligations and projects are demanding your attention to the point that you're putting off making headway on any of them, it's time to lighten your load.
- ✓ **Prevent clutter overload.** You may be on overload. You may have too many projects at once. At any rate, it's time to clear your head and your desk. Take a day once a month or a few hours to purge, file, respond, and clean up. (See Chapter 3 for tips on clearing your workspace.)
- ✓ **Focus on maintaining a healthy balance.** Both your work life and your personal life are important to your well-being. Keep an eye on the scale to be sure that these different areas are in balance. If you get weighted down at the office, you lose energy and perspective, and procrastination creeps in. If family issues take over, you risk your performance at work.

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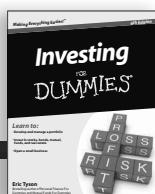
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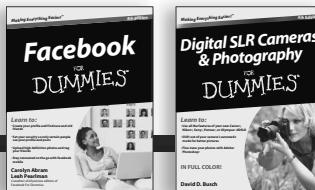
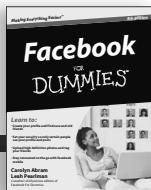
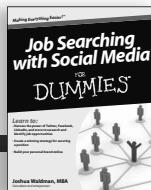
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