

## **6. GET STARTED RIGHT NOW**

**THE LIFETIME GOALS STATEMENT** helps bring your future into the present by giving you a clearer view of what your ideal future looks like. The second tool for planning your time continues where the Goals Statement leaves off. It helps you decide on specific activities that you can do now to help you achieve your long-term goals.

You cannot *do* a goal. Long-term planning and goal-setting must therefore be complemented by short-term planning. This kind of planning requires specifying activities. You can do an activity. Activities are steps along the way to a goal. Let's say you desire security. Putting \$10.00 in the bank or talking to your stockbroker about your investment plans are activities that will move you toward your goal.

When you have planned well on both long-term and short-term levels, then goals and activities fit together like well-meshed gears. Most if not all of the activities specified in short-term plans will contribute to the realization of the goals specified in long-term plans.

### **How to List Activities Toward Your A-Goals**

If you wish to accomplish such goals as happiness, success, or financial independence, an immense number and variety of actions are of course possible. Suppose you just want to enjoy yourself tonight. I bet you could list twenty-five or fifty ways to do it without even including anything fattening or illegal. The same is true of any goal, no matter how crucial or trivial.

To determine the right activities for achieving your A-goals you must (1) list the possible activities for each A-goal, and (2) set priorities to allow you to select the most effective activity to do *now*.

In listing activities, be as imaginative as possible. Quickly write down as many ideas as you can—it's a good way to get creative juices flowing. Trying for quantity and speed will allow your intuition to operate. Your perceptions will come directly, unfiltered by your reasoning processes. Also, the pressure of having to list activities will create new insights. The speed also allows you to run right past your inhibitions, because you simply don't give them a chance to operate. The important part of the Listing Activities exercise is to keep writing. You're wasting your time if your pen or pencil point is not moving across the paper.

Do not make any attempt to evaluate or censor your ideas yet. This list is for your personal benefit only. If you attempt to hide anything, you'll be fooling only yourself. It's important not to characterize activities as "good" or "bad" or "frivolous"—at least not while you're listing them. We'll catch the less significant activities later when we prune the choices.

Also, don't handcuff yourself by the thought that you might not be able to do a particular activity. It may turn out, upon analysis, that you can do an activity even if at first blush it seems difficult or impossible. Just reserve judgment for the present.

And don't let the fear bother you that once you list an activity you will have to do it. No one is going to force you to do it. When you set priorities you may decide that the required time and effort indicate that the activity is not worth the time and effort required. But even impossible dreams may have some future usefulness.

If you run out of activities to list, you might try repeating a previous entry. Try variations on a theme, reactions to previous entries, extensions, additions, implications, reactions, greater or lesser detail, broader or narrower focus. The important thing is to keep writing!

Suppose your goal is to become an expert mountain climber. List all the mountains you might climb in order to achieve your goal, including the seemingly impossible dreams: the Matterhorn and Mount Everest. Perhaps your interest lies in conquering only North American peaks? European? Asian? Breaking activities down by categories, sub-categories, and sub-sub-categories can help. The important thing is to keep writing.

While I've encouraged you to list as many activities as you can without censoring or inhibiting the responses you put on paper, I do have one caution: Don't confuse goals with activities. Remember, an activity is something that can be *done*. Your goal might be to live a healthier life. The specific activities that might contribute to this end could be not eating dessert tonight, exercising three times this week, and giving up smoking for twenty-four hours.

Now you're ready to make your list. Take three fresh sheets of paper and write one of the A-goals selected earlier at the top of each. We're going to break your goals down into do-able activities. Keeping in mind the above instructions, spend three minutes making as long a list as possible of activities that could conceivably contribute toward achieving the first A-goal. Then spend three minutes each to list activities for the second and third A-goals. Go back over the three lists of activities, spending a minimum of three minutes on each list, adding, deleting, consolidating, refining, and even inventing further activities. Identify as many activities as you can.

Let's take the case of a high school sophomore who wants to be a professional baseball player. This is an A-goal for him. But he also wants to go to college, another A-goal. And he has a third A-goal that is more immediate: He wants to be the starting pitcher on his varsity team. The latter A-goal is most immediate. To accomplish it he'll keep in shape through the winter, running a mile every day and throwing indoors in the gym three times a week so that he'll be ready when spring comes. To make sure that he'll be accepted by the college of his choice (let's say USC, which has always had great baseball teams), he'll keep up his studies. Preparing for an important math exam this week is an A-activity. And, of course, putting forth his best effort in a championship game is an A-activity toward his A-goal of being a major-league ballplayer.

A classic example is the woman who wants to return to work. Her three children are now in school and she has some free time. She worked as a nurse before her marriage twelve years ago. To reach her A-1 goal of returning to work she has a number of A-activities she can do: taking refresher courses to help her catch up on what's been happening, talking with other nurses about recent developments, making sure

that she's satisfied all the current requirements, seeing what openings are available and how they fit into her schedule.

Another good example is a person who is just graduating from college. His long-term goals include living a happy life and earning a comfortable income. But there's also the shorter-term goal of finding the right career. And that comes down to finding a job. The A-activities for now include deciding what occupational areas to look into, talking to people in various fields that interest him, preparing a résumé, writing letters, making a selection, and finally going to and scheduling interviews.

One client I had felt he was wasting an enormous amount of time. He said, "I'm very unhappy in my job. I'm an insurance salesman but I really feel I belong in public relations. I'm busy looking for a job every coffee break I get, and each lunchtime I'm on the telephone calling people and telling them what I'm looking for."

It turned out that he had talked to five people in the past month, and those were the same five people he had talked to the month before. In short, he was getting nowhere fast. To find a new job in a competitive field like public relations he might have to contact fifty people a month, at a minimum. He should continually be trying new people as the old people did not pay off. This was his A-activity.

### **Eliminate Low-Priority Tasks**

If you were conscientious in listing lots of possible A-activities you should now have too many activities and not enough time for all of them. The time has come for you to set priorities: to switch from being creative and imaginative to being practical and realistic. The way to start is by spotting and eliminating low-priority items.

For each activity on each list ask yourself: *Am I committed to spending a minimum of five minutes (or less if it can be completely finished in less time) on this activity in the next seven days?* If the answer is "no," draw a line through the activity.

You don't have to offer any particular reason for crossing an activity off your list. You may not feel like doing it. It may depend on someone else who cannot help you in the

next week. It may be too hard. Perhaps you're too busy this week. Leave only what you are committed to starting for five minutes (and possibly finishing) in the next seven days.

If you have eliminated almost everything from your list, go back, taking as much time as you need, and come up with at least four items you consider meaningful and which you will put time into in the next week.

Don't be concerned about eliminating large or important items (like getting a new job) from your list. If you don't want to tackle it now, draw a line right through the item so it doesn't clutter things up. You can consider it again next week.

After you've pruned all three A-goal activity lists, combine the results into one list. This list will contain perhaps a dozen or so activities that are important and that you are willing to put time into during the coming week. The next step is to set priorities. Classify the most important activity as A-1, the best use of your time. Other A-activities should be numbered accordingly A-2, A-3, A-4. With these priorities in mind, set deadlines for the various activities and schedule them into the next seven days. If you go to a night school class three evenings, that leaves only two weekday possibilities to have dinner out. Which day will it be? And if you are going to start reading *War and Peace*, when will you start? Perhaps commuting on the train to work? Make a note of such decisions on your list.

### Pick a Priority for Now

How can you move closer to your lifetime goals? Each day provides a fresh opportunity. Select at least one A-activity to work on right away and do it. You now have the beginning of an action program for achieving your lifetime goals.

Initially, when you select the A-activity to work on each day, make it as short and as feasible as possible. If the A-activity you have selected seems too overwhelming, divide it into smaller segments, then begin with the easiest part, or the one that involves the least problems, or the one you value the most.

Once you've singled out and defined this one task, you've given yourself a clear priority for the day. In the sixteen

hours or so that you're awake each day, you can find a few minutes to work toward fulfilling an important lifetime goal. How about starting now?

The Lifetime Goals chapter and this chapter are fundamental to good time management. For quick review, here are the essential points: (1) List possible long-term goals; (2) set priorities for now and identify A-goals; (3) list possible activities for A-goals; (4) set priorities and identify A-activities for now; (5) schedule the A-activities; (6) do them as scheduled.

## 7. HOW SCHEDULING HELPS

IF YOU FELT overwhelmed before, you may feel doubly so now that you already have added the A-activities for now to whatever else you have been doing already. Presumably, you still want to do everything you did before (wash the dishes, go to work, shop), but now you want to do even more (the A-activities you identified in the previous chapter).

To find a way out of this dilemma put your lifetime goals in the background for a few minutes and start at the other end of the time scale. *What do you have to do today?*

Obviously, you need time for essential activities such as eating and sleeping, and while the amount of time you allocate to them may be variable, there are minimums necessary for normal functioning. Unless you are independently wealthy or have someone to support you, you will have to work to bring in money for food, clothing, and housing. This means dressing, grooming, commuting, and being on the job—all necessary and all time-consuming.

Then you need time for routine tasks: getting out of bed in the morning, reading the morning paper, opening the mail, going to weekly staff meetings, keeping your work area orderly, watching television, washing dishes, chauffeuring the children. The routine tasks are determined by your position in an organization, family ties, civic responsibilities, social obligations, and the like.

Essential activities and routine tasks are everyday motions that you don't normally think much about, and yet they fill up much of your day. In fact, they can easily preempt your life!

One secretary complained to me that she never had time for special tasks that her boss wanted her to do and that she particularly enjoyed. After our discussion she realized the trouble: She spent her whole day on routine duties the boss had asked her to do the day she was hired—answering the

telephone, taking dictation, doing the filing, showing people into the office, answering questions, maintaining the stationary inventories. Her routine work load was so heavy that she wasn't able to absorb fun assignments. This is often true of homemakers, also.

Recognize that you may be doing all you can by working very hard and conscientiously just to keep up with these routine tasks—if that is your choice.

Today's tasks are also preordained to some extent by what is already in process: whatever got started yesterday, last week, or last month. It includes activities scheduled on a regular basis as well as commitments for which you have made special appointments. A celebrated author who was an overnight success with his first book received many invitations in the year following his acclaim. Even though he would have loved to have a free day to spend with his family, or to begin work on a new book, he was committed months in advance to speeches, lectures, and TV appearances. On any given day he couldn't decide to sleep late or stay home and read a book. You too may find much of your time taken up by commitments made long ago.

Unexpected interruptions and crises make still further—and often annoying—demands on your time. You wake up to discover you left the headlights on last night and the battery is dead, so instead of getting into the office fifteen minutes early to catch up on some of your work, you find yourself arriving two hours late. You learn that Mr. Jones has called five times to complain that the gizmo you promised him yesterday still hasn't arrived, so you have to rush around like mad to expedite delivery.

Essential activities, routine tasks and previous commitments coupled with interruptions and crises, can wipe out anybody's dream of having a few minutes to pursue a lifetime goal. But they don't have to wipe it out. It all depends on how well you recognize (and deal with) these inevitable time-consumers and whether you are prepared to make time for yourself. I know of no other way: To increase the likelihood of accomplishing important lifetime goals, you've got to plan your time each and every day.

## "Who's Got Time for Planning?"

No matter how busy you are, you should always take the time to plan. The less time you feel you have to spare, the more important it is to plan your time carefully. Spend only ten minutes at the beginning or end of the day planning, and it will repay your efforts many times over.

Sometimes you will be so busy that you'll feel you really don't have time to plan. O.K., maybe you don't have time to plan *and* do absolutely everything else you'd like to get out of the way. But think about this: By failing to plan, you will free very little if any time, and by failing to plan you will almost certainly fail to discriminate among ABC's. Even if you are confining yourself to doing A's, you still might not do the best A's. Therefore, although you think you never have time to plan when you are busy, you always come out ahead by investing time in planning *anyway*. Yes, I mean it: Exactly because we lack time to plan, we should take time to plan.

Planning is usually done best first thing in the morning or at the end of the day. There are many advantages to planning in the morning when you are fresh. You gain momentum as you go along. Having just thought about what you have to do, you move easily to getting it done. With the day's priorities clearly in mind you are less likely to be sidetracked as you go along.

The advantage of planning in the evening is that you know where you have come from and this perspective helps you select activities for tomorrow. Also, if you have your day all set when you arrive the next morning, you don't have to debate what to do and consequently waste time. Another advantage is that your unconscious can work overnight on developing ideas so that you arrive at work all primed for action.

The distinctly different benefits of morning and evening planning are both worth taking advantage of. So I suggest you plan in the morning as well as in the evening.

Can you afford the time? I have had several clients keep careful track of how much time they spent on various activities during the week. They were conscientious people concerned about time and planning, more so than the average

person. They were convinced of the importance of planning and committed to spending as much time as necessary on it. They found that all of their planning time came to less than four hours a week. They concluded that it really doesn't take long to plan—considerably less than an hour a day—but the results are substantial: more A-1's get done, less trivia interferes. Planning kept them focused on the important things.

Some executives I know have made it a rule not to leave their offices until they have the next day's plan on their desks. A further extension would be to come in fifteen minutes early the next morning and sharpen up that plan. (Of course as interruptions and crises come up during the day, still further adjustments must be made.)

I do almost all my planning early in the morning. As hard as I try, I can't seem to average more than three and a half hours a week at it. I wake up around 5 A.M., before anyone else in the house, and I put this quiet time into my most important activity—planning.

Every morning as part of my planning effort, I look at my Lifetime Goals list and identify specific A-activities I can do today to move ahead toward those lifetime goals. The rest of the time before breakfast I spend doing A-activities. Finishing this book is one such activity and a lot of this work got done before my family got up.

I recommend using Friday afternoon for reviewing the week, planning the following week's projects in a general way but those you'll do on Monday in detail. Use Monday morning for refining your plan and starting your A-goals of the week.

## How to Block Out A-Time

One of the main planning tools I emphasize is scheduling. But scheduling means more than just fitting into the hours available all the things you *must* do: meetings, appointments, deadlines. It means also making time for what you *want* to do—your A's.

In laying out a weekly schedule the key is to block out time for the A's that require a lot of time. Schedule large-enough blocks of time to build up momentum. Reserve particular days of the week (say, Tuesday and Thursday morn-

ings) for major projects. Even if your day is fragmented by interruptions, you can still attempt to keep blocks of time intact for the high-value A's.

To find more time for the A's, set aside a special A-time each day and firmly banish all C-items during this period. To create a block of time for A's to get done, start small and allocate, for example, fifteen minutes each day to use exclusively for A-items. You can gradually increase this time for the A-items as you grow more comfortable with the idea of putting first things first.

Try blocking A-time horizontally on a weekly calendar—at the same time each day, say, Monday through Friday, 9:30-10:30 A.M. You can also block vertically down the page—say reserving Wednesday afternoon from 2-4 P.M. as A-time for this week's A-project.

One husband, whose wife was in the habit of accepting many dates for them to go out and who felt he didn't have enough time to be alone with her, went through her calendar and wrote "busy" alongside all the Tuesday nights. When she was asked out for that date, she looked on the calendar and found that she was "busy." He thus freed A-time to spend alone with her.

I've read articles in management literature suggesting that the way to get hold of your time is to record what you do every minute 24 hours a day, 168 hours a week. I emphatically disagree with this approach; not only is it time-consuming and burdensome to keep track of all your time, but I'm convinced that it's a *waste* of time. Suppose you feel the need to make a change in your eating habits. You already know intuitively that you ought to reduce the quantity of fried foods and add a little more protein and a few fresh vegetables to help balance your diet. It would be a waste of time to keep track of every single item you eat before deciding what to change. On the other hand, keeping a daily record of the fried foods and vegetables you eat during a month can significantly help you decrease the fried foods and increase the vegetables. You immediately gain the benefits of better health, and you're freed from the drudgery of spending a month keeping track of everything you eat. Likewise with time. I feel it's much better to watch your time selectively, keeping track of particular problem items which you feel are consuming an inordinate amount of time.

In my experience, people who try to report everything find it so hopelessly complicated that they give up in despair within a couple of days without having made any changes. I believe that recordkeeping for sake of recordkeeping has very little value, but that selective recordkeeping for the sake of influencing the way you do a particular task has a great deal of value.

### Make a Time Change

Just as you make a diet change, so you can make a time change. If you feel there's too much work time in your life and not enough family and personal time, start quitting when everybody else does and stop working overtime; start scheduling more weekends with your family.

Too much golf and not enough civic activities? You don't need any complicated time-accounting to get you to cut back on the golf. Too much housekeeping and not enough time for creative pursuits? Let the dust accumulate for a day or two.

You don't want to recordkeep but you do want to schedule your time, because you can find a great deal of time through careful scheduling of whatever you really want to do. Remember: *There is always enough time for the important things.* The busiest people are able to find time for what they want to do, not because they have any more time than others but because they think in terms of "making" time by careful scheduling.

Trying to do the same thing at the same time each day both conserves and generates energy. It conserves energy by cutting down on indecision. You perform menial tasks by rote. It generates energy through habit—the habit of expecting to make phone calls, plan the meals, read the paper, attend a class, or go to a meeting—all at a particular time.

### You Have Two Kinds of Prime Time

Another very important aspect of scheduling is "prime" time. *Internal prime time* is the time when you work best—morning, afternoon, or evening. *External prime time* is the best time to attend to other people—those you have to deal with in your job, your social life, and at home.

Internal prime time is the time when you concentrate best. I know early birds who never get a good idea after 7 A.M. and night owls who are most creative between 10 P.M. and midnight. If you had to pick the two hours of the day when you think most clearly, which would you pick? From 10 A.M. to 12 noon? From 4 P.M. to 6 P.M.? The two hours that you select are probably your own internal prime time, but during the next two weeks you might check to see whether your concentration really is best during those hours.

Try to save all your internal prime time for prime projects.

Most business people pick the first couple of hours at work as their internal prime time, yet this is usually the time they read the newspaper, answer routine mail, get yesterday's unanswered telephone calls out of the way, and talk to colleagues and subordinates. It's much better to save such routine tasks for non-prime hours.

One housewife experienced a great spurt of energy after her husband and kids left the house. She rushed around madly making beds, washing dishes, doing the laundry, picking up toys, so that by 11 she had gotten all of her housework out of the way. Then she collapsed until 2:30, when it was time to pick up her children at school. Her intentions were excellent: She thought that if she got all her repulsive chores out of the way she would have lots of free time for candlemaking, a part-time income-producing project she enjoyed doing. But she found she was too tired after her chores to do her own-time things. Since she had the house all straightened up by 11, she was also reluctant to take out all her equipment and spread it all over the place and make a mess again. The result was that she felt she didn't have enough time for candlemaking. As an outsider I was quickly able to see that she was making a basic scheduling mistake. The simple change of reversing her candlemaking and house-cleaning activities netted her two hours of prime time for her candlemaking project.

The chemical research analyst who spent the afternoon skimming through professional publications for recent developments in his field and completing routine administrative forms was making the same mistake, but he did it in reverse. He was a late starter, and really got going after lunch. When he switched his routine chores to the morning, he had the afternoon free to do the more creative part of his job.

External prime time is when external resources (usually people) are most readily available for decisions, inquiries, and information. It's the time when you can catch the boss for that needed decision before he leaves for a week's business trip. Salesmen recognize that their external prime time runs from 9 to 5—the hours when they meet face to face with their customers. So they schedule routine matters for before or after that period.

It's important to make sure in advance that you're going to be able to see the people you have to. The housewife will have to make appointments to see the dentist, the doctor, and her hairdresser. She knows when the stores she uses for shopping open and close. She's in touch with other mothers about the scheduling of next week's car pool to get the kids to school.

The executive makes sure that when he places a phone call he has a high chance of finding that the person he needs on the other end is available. He has to know when his colleagues are free for consultation—and he should plan to take advantage of that time.

Most people aren't very good at putting themselves into the other fellow's shoes, and therefore aren't very good at thinking in terms of another person's schedule. Yet there are big dividends when you do so. One executive I know spends extended periods with his boss during the lunch hour because he knows the boss rarely goes out. They have a sandwich in the office without being interrupted, since everyone else is out to lunch.

Another choice time to catch the boss might be just a shade after he comes in, as he is taking off his hat and coat and before he has a chance to get immersed in other things.

### *For Effective Scheduling—Stay Loose*

Flexibility is needed to accommodate whatever situation may arise. If you fill up every moment in advance with appointments, without any breaks except for lunch, you are bound to go home frustrated, nervous, and tense.

The unexpected happenings need their time, too. Even with a light schedule in prospect, the incoming mail, visitors, and telephone may put enough demands on your time to create an overload. Experience will tell you that although you may

not be able to anticipate specifics, there will be interruptions and distractions during the day that will take up your time. You need some slack time to handle whatever unexpected crises and opportunities come your way during the day.

Therefore, always reserve at least an hour a day of uncommitted time. Leave holes in your schedule for recovery from a long interview, and set aside time enough to read the mail and catch up on paperwork. Try to get absolute musts out of the way early in the day so you will feel less frantic about interruptions and distractions.

Rigidity in setting and following demanding schedules without variation creates the feeling of being regimented by the clock, and living your whole life with a constant eye on the clock can be unpleasant. A proper balance of scheduled and unscheduled time carefully planned and then used well can help you get your life flowing more smoothly with fewer fits and starts.

## 8. HOW TO FIND TIME YOU NEVER KNEW YOU HAD

MANY PEOPLE "on the way up" allow their family and personal lives to be heavily impinged upon by work demands. Others are so achievement-oriented that they feel guilty taking time out for anything that is not in some way related to their work.

Horror stories abound of men who work so hard that they hardly ever see their families and who end up with ulcers and heart trouble. One study several years ago of successful and unsuccessful executives indicated that many men who ultimately fail had made their personal lives expendable to their jobs.

My experience with clients has convinced me that when executives find themselves on a treadmill they tend to lose perspective of what's important. They spend time unnecessarily on secondary matters and let many important ones go undone. This often tends to be cumulative. The more overtime they put in, the more exhausted—and the less efficient—they become. The answer is not to spend more hours on the project but to work more effectively within the time allotted.

I recall one architect who came to me suffering from too much work and not enough play. He had only recently recovered from a bleeding ulcer and again was working sixty hours a week. His complaint was that he never had time to see his wife and young children. I suggested that he take off at noon on Friday and, since summer was just beginning, take his family away to his favorite spot at Lake Tahoe. He rented a cabin, where he and his family spent each weekend during the summer. Not surprisingly, he fell in love again with his wife, got to know his children, and his health improved. Since he knew that he couldn't make up for low productivity by long hours, he concentrated on getting the important things done in the time he had. He actually got more done than he ever had working sixty hours, even though he shaved more

than fifteen hours off that total. As a bonus, he got some of his most creative ideas while he was relaxing at the lake, so his leisure time paid off handsomely. All he really lost by cutting back those fifteen hours was the detailed drafting that he compulsively had felt the need to do himself. He delegated it to a draftsman.

Can you work effectively if you are too fatigued from excessive hours? Probably not. Maybe a better solution would be to quit early, take the afternoon and evening off, and come back the next day refreshed and physically able to work twice as hard.

### Get More Done by Doing Nothing

I think you will find that if you arrange things so that you find time to relax and "do nothing," you will get more done and have more fun doing it.

One client, an aerospace engineer, didn't know how to "do nothing." Every minute of his leisure time was scheduled with intense activity. He had an outdoor-activities schedule in which he switched from skiing and ice hockey to water-skiing and tennis. His girlfriend kept up with him in these activities, although she would have preferred just to sit by the fire and relax once in a while. Like too many people, he felt the need to be doing something all the time—doing nothing seemed a waste of time. His "relaxing by the fire" consisted of playing chess, reading *Scientific American*, or playing bridge. Even his lovemaking was on a tight schedule.

For an experiment I asked him to "waste" his time for five minutes during one of our sessions together. What he ended up doing was relaxing, sitting quietly and daydreaming. When he was finally able to admit that emotional reasons caused him to reject relaxing as a waste of time, he began to look more critically at that assumption. Once he accepted the fact that relaxing was a good use of time, he became less compulsive about being busy and started enjoying each activity more. Previously he had been so busy *doing* that he had no time to have fun at anything. He began to do less and have more fun. When I saw him about three years later, he still had as busy a schedule as ever, but he was able to balance that activity with relaxing so that he came back to work

Monday morning not pooped out from a strenuous weekend, but refreshed.

In my opinion, nothing is a total waste of time, including doing nothing at times. Anything can be carried to extremes, of course, and I recall one client who needed to be peped up from his indifference to any activity. He rediscovered his energy after we sat down with his unpaid bills and figured out how few days could go by before he'd find himself in serious trouble.

Sometimes the only way to get more leisure time is to reduce arbitrarily the demands of the job. If your attempts to get more relaxation don't succeed, you may have to make some basic changes in your work situation. A credit manager for a men's-clothing store struggled overtime for two years. He never could get his boss to let him have an assistant to take over some of the details. He finally decided it was hopeless and found a job with another firm where he didn't have to work eighty hours a week, and had more time to spend with his family. The chief accountant in the same firm solved the same overload problem by deciding to do as much as he could and not worry about what didn't get done. His solution was more successful: When the boss saw that the work wasn't getting done, he let the chief accountant hire more help. The credit manager would have been a lot happier if he had similarly confronted his boss's stubbornness—or changed his job sooner. He could have saved himself two years of misery.

### *The Homemaker's Special Problem*

The homemaker's problem of finding leisure time is particularly acute. The demands go on twenty-four hours a day, and such deadlines as getting a meal on the table or clothes on the family's back are unyielding. Interruptions tend to be traumatic; children get hurt or sick or need emotional help right now. Mother stays on the scene all the time. She can't turn off her job at 5 P.M. and come home to find dinner waiting. The truth is that, with purchasing, budgeting, minor repairs, husbandly complaints, family nutrition, keeping inventory, deciding how many kids can wear this sweater or use that bike—on top of the physical labor of it all—a

woman is running a tough little business in which the responsibility is all hers.

Given all these problems, a homemaker must work especially hard to find any leisure time for herself at all. The solution gets back to scheduling. She has to schedule time for herself on a regular basis. One homemaker arranged for someone to come in every Wednesday afternoon; she was a theater buff and used Wednesday afternoons to go to a matinee when there was something she wanted to see. Otherwise, she had it free for museum or gallery visits, shopping, or seeing friends.

I strongly recommend regularly scheduled free time for homemakers. If you say, "I'll take off some day or other this week," something always comes up that interferes. But setting aside time on a particular day leads to the expectation of having that time and results in getting the time you want. One homemaker I knew had a standing Thursday evening date with her husband—to get out of the house, be free of the cooking, and enjoy a restaurant meal as well as the relaxed atmosphere.

If a homemaker is on the alert for external changes that affect her time, she can often find extra hours that she has overlooked. One woman had entered an Adult Extension class on "The Changing Role of Women in Society." She had arranged for a babysitter and had gone each Tuesday afternoon for several months. She knew weeks ahead when the course would be over, but she did not make any effort to schedule that time profitably for herself, and so she let the sitter go when the course ended. She could have furthered some other lifetime goals in the time that was open for her on Tuesdays.

I find it a good idea on regular occasions to take a look two or three months ahead and ask what's on tap. What advantage can you take of the time when the kids are in school, or when your associates are on vacation? Note what events will influence your schedule in a major way: the semiannual national sales conference, the deadline for the seasonal catalogue. What has to be done to allow for pickup of activity after Labor Day? For people being away around Christmas? For the seasonable winter blues in February—maybe a weekend in Bermuda or Mexico City?

By taking note of these situations well in advance, you can

often make or find opportunities for furthering some of your most important goals.

## Make the Most of Your Transition Time

I've suggested that you need to balance work and play. And again you might say to me, "But I don't have enough time for everything." Well, again I say, "Let's see if we can find some time." More specifically, let's see if you can find some time that you have previously overlooked. One kind of time that is often overlooked is what I call "transition time."

This kind of time starts when you awaken in the morning and ends when you begin your regular day's work. For most people it amounts to about forty minutes a day, usually a bit longer for women than men. One man I know has reduced it to fifteen minutes. He uses the time only to do essentials—eat breakfast, shave, dress—and he does these as quickly as possible.

There may be an advantage in extending rather than reducing this transition time. If your day is broken into many parts, transition time offers you perhaps the only block of time you'll have alone and undisturbed. It is a good time to reflect on the best use of your time during the coming day and to consider those time management techniques that will help you get things done. As I mentioned before, I get up early—5 A.M.—and spend two hours of transition time planning the rest of the day and working on today's activities to further my lifetime goals. What is the right time to wake up in the morning? Almost every time you read about a busy, famous man (Senator Dirksen was one I remember), he started with paperwork at 5 or 5:30 A.M. and had accomplished mountains by the time the phones started ringing at 9.

There are other ways to enrich transition time. The late Robert Kennedy was reported to have listened to Shakespeare plays while shaving. One creative manager, realizing that he got some of his best ideas in the morning, has come to expect them and "catches" them for further development while they—and he—are still fresh. This can also be hobby time for jogging, painting, sculpting, reading, writing, or whatever.

### *How to Use Commuting Time*

If you feel it takes you too long to get to work, have you considered moving closer? In most cases this is not practical, yet more often than you might suspect a person does have the very real option of moving closer to his place of employment. If you're a professional person, how about working out of your house twice a week and skipping that forty-five minute commute on the freeway?

If you drive to work you're limited in the use you can make of the time you spend sitting in traffic jams. Safety comes first. But you can also listen to the radio. You can practice that new vocabulary exercise. More and more cartridge tapes on educational subjects are becoming available, so you might learn a foreign language, listen to a business report, or take a memory course. Commuting time offers a chance to preview and plan your day, though you should crystallize that plan on paper as soon as you sit down at your desk.

### *How to Use Coffee Breaks*

Coffee breaks can be a good time to relax. But suppose you're not particularly tense or tired. How about learning a word from your dictionary? Writing that unpleasant but important note to the bank telling them why your installment payment is late? Or calling your dentist for an appointment before that temporary filling falls out?

### *The True Price of Lunch*

In some selling jobs, of course, the client is crucial, and in such a situation a working lunch may be beneficial. But by and large, a full-scale lunch is a fantastic waste of time. For most people, lunch just adds calories and expenses they can well do without. Many doctors today are dead set against "Three square meals a day," and many first-rate M.D. diet specialists either skip lunch altogether or have some cottage cheese and that's it.

Lunch time offers a great time to get things done while the phones are quiet and others are busy. On the other hand, if

you have a hectic business day a lunch break may provide the only breathing time for you. In that event, if you cut back on your lunch time you might decrease your effectiveness the rest of the day. Maybe this is a good time for you to take a walk or a swim at the Y.

A general merchandising manager, recently promoted, no longer took a regular lunch time off. He felt that since his job involved more responsibility, he should be available all the time, and so he just grabbed a quick sandwich on the run. After several weeks of this, he found himself irritable in the afternoon, snapping at his colleagues, and having difficulty concentrating on important matters. I convinced him that he needed a sit-down lunch to restore his energy and inner calm. So he began having a more leisurely lunch and made certain that nothing interfered with this mid-day break. He developed the practice of going to lunch with a different person each day. Some were friends with whom he enjoyed a social occasion. But gradually he also lunched with all his subordinates and got to know them better. When he had to ask them to do something for him or when they were asking him for help, he had the benefit of personal relationships to support those quick back-and-forth requests.

He was careful, even though he took a long lunch time, not to eat too much, as he found it made him sleepy in the afternoon. But as this executive found out, what you eat might not be nearly as important as who you eat with and what you talk about.

### *How to Use Waiting Time*

If you have to wait for the subway, bus, or your car pool, you can use those patches of time profitably, too. You might read the paper, but suppose you've had a lifelong goal of reading the classics. Most of them are available in paperback. You may not always feel like reading *Don Quixote* as you wait for the bus at the corner of Main and Pine, but isn't it nice to have the option?

Waiting time can also help solve that particularly tricky problem that's been bothering you at work. Think it through sequentially. First, try outlining the problem step by step. Then, if you have more time, pick out an aspect that might be thoroughly explored in, say, five minutes. You probably

won't be able to solve the whole problem, but at least you have the ball rolling.

## Make Your Sleep Work for You

What time should you go to bed? If you decide to get up early, does that mean you should go to bed early? The largest single block of time is sleep time. Are you sleeping your life away? Doctors have found that often many people spend many hours in sleep for which there is no physical need. When these habits are changed and these people try to do with less, they often find no difference in health or efficiency.

You might experiment with reducing your sleep time by, perhaps, half an hour. Give yourself a few days to get adjusted to the new pattern. If you are as effective as you were before, you will gain the equivalent of a week of Sundays in the course of a year.

There is great variation in sleep needs, not only between one person and another, but also for each person. Weekend patterns usually are very different from weekday habits. And if you always stay up Tuesdays because that's your bowling night, perhaps you've noticed that you're not unusually tired the following day.

If you like, you can put some sleep time to work once you realize that most body functions continue while you are asleep. As your dreams show, your subconscious works while you sleep. Why not deliberately put it to work on your tough problems? Here's how:

Pose a question to your subconscious just before you fall asleep. Select one that requires hours of thought—after all, your subconscious will have four to eight hours to work on it. Now, don't waste time thinking about it consciously, but do expect a meaningful answer when you awaken. Many who have tried this method have found it successful. But if it only keeps you awake, by all means forget it.

What do you do if you have to put eight hours a day into a job you don't like? Whether it's for a summer or a year, let's say you have decided to stay at least temporarily in a job that is not satisfying. If you're simply working to bring in money, is there any way that you can do more than just mark time?

I had a fascinating talk recently with a young man who is a devoted fish breeder. He began breeding mollies at the age of ten and has worked his way up to breeding killifish. Probably because of his strong hobby interest—he spends three hours every evening on his fish-breeding project—he has found a very routine civil-service job. While he is filling out forms for the state, he also plans what he's going to do next about his fish. For example, he recently decided to breed a rare species of killifish which had to be imported from Africa. These fish were being imported under the Endangered Species Act, and he did much thinking about how to breed them successfully in his second-floor apartment, quite different from their natural habitat in the African stream. His routine job gave him the money and the free time he needed for his hobby.

Hawthorne is a famous example of what can be accomplished while working in a humdrum job. He spent years at the Customs House in Salem, Massachusetts, and produced four novels, including the classic *The Scarlet Letter*.

### How to Repeal Parkinson's Law

I feel that so long as people do the job they are hired and required to do, they shouldn't have to look busy every minute of the time. I have always tried to give the people who work for me a real incentive to make good use of their time by allowing them to do reading, writing, crocheting, or whatever they want, after they finish my work. I have even sent them home early when there was nothing else to be done.

The policy of making people sit at their desks even if they have nothing to do breeds bad time habits and accounts for a certain amount of psychological aggravation. It isn't surprising that work expands to fill the time allowed for its completion, as C. Northcote Parkinson has stated, since all too often there are no alternatives available. I propose that it's time to repeal Parkinson's Law by allowing people to reap the benefits of getting done early and letting them do their personal things.

In "limitless" jobs where there are truly an endless number of things that could be done—such as creating advertising copy, researching, selling encyclopedias, removing every

speck of dust from the house—Parkinson's Law theoretically doesn't apply; there is always enough work. In practice, certain tasks tend to be done on a particular day and are then stretched out. You really can't push people to be creative by the clock, and beyond a certain point simply putting in the hours is not necessarily the best way to get creative work done, as the architect I mentioned earlier learned.

Parkinson's Law is real, and work does expand to fill the time available, because you *need* to fill up time when you can't go home early. Try to convince your boss to let you go home if you've finished all your work by telling him what a great incentive it will give you to complete your work quickly. If you're unsuccessful, try to convince him to allow you to satisfy your personal priorities of reading books, writing your own letters, and the like while you handle the switchboard, the service counter, or the reception desk.

### Making the Most Out of One Spare Minute

You can squeeze in a start toward your lifetime goals if you are ready to pounce on all the spare minutes as they come along and convert them into lifetime-goal/A-activity time. A very helpful way to do this is to develop what I call "special-emphasis goals" lasting from a week to a couple of months. Each day do something to squeeze in at least one A-activity for each special-emphasis goal.

Let's say your lifetime goals include intellectual development. You decide to improve your vocabulary as a means to improving your intellect. A special-emphasis goal might be to learn a new word from the dictionary every day for a month. It takes only a minute to find a good word, check on its meaning, and think of a couple sentences you can use the word in. Then squeeze that word into your conversation several times during the day.

A budding gourmet cook had a special-emphasis goal of trying a new vegetable dish each day for a week; she laid out the whole week in advance and each day pulled out a new recipe and was quickly on her way.

A married couple, feeling a bit lonely, laid out a program of renewing acquaintances and meeting new acquaintances every weekend for a month. Their special emphasis goals

applied to Saturdays and Sundays only. In a month they had eight very pleasant social evenings or afternoons, going out to dinner, playing records together, and talking politics.

Isometric exercises can be squeezed in while you are making dinner or sitting, or even while waiting for another person to answer the telephone. Here again, if you keep in mind your added special-emphasis goal of fitting in some exercise, you will find many opportunities during the day to realize it.

Work goals can be developed as special-emphasis goals. A salesman can go after one big-ticket customer each day. A factory superintendent can personally check the quality of one finished automobile by driving it home directly off the production line. A freelance journalist can clip at least three story ideas every day for those times when he can't think of a thing to do. An office manager can take a couple of extra minutes to become more friendly and learn about a different employee each day. All these activities can be squeezed in when you have a special-emphasis program suggesting *now* is the time to make an extra effort toward realizing a particular goal.

Not only are these A-activities on a special-emphasis goal a practical step toward getting where you want to go; they also become tremendous morale boosters. Daily you see yourself coming closer to your lifetime goals by remembering what you want to do—and doing it.

You don't want your special-emphasis goals to be out of mind because they're out of sight. Write the goal on a letter card and slip it into your pocket as a reminder. Or how about putting up a sign? I suggested to one client that he put a little sign on his desk where only he could see it. It said, "Am I talking on the telephone too long?" He had admitted to me that he generally did talk too long. Putting this reminder by his phone each day for a week helped to reduce his overlong telephone calls.

A homemaker trying to do the least amount of dusting and homemaking possible this week put a sign in her kitchen saying, "Get out of the kitchen and have a good time."

No time? You've got to be kidding!

## **9. MAKING THE MOST OF PRIORITIES**

THE MAIN SECRET of getting more done every day took me several months of research to discover. When I first started delving into better time use, I asked successful people what the secret of their success was. I recall an early discussion with a vice-president of Standard Oil Company of California who said, "Oh, I just keep a 'to-do' list." I passed over that quickly, little suspecting at the time the importance of what he said.

I happened to travel the next day to a large city to give a time-management seminar. While I was there I had lunch with a businessman who practically owned the town. He was chairman of the gas and light company, president of five manufacturing companies, and had his hand in a dozen other enterprises. By all standards he was a business success. I asked him the same question of how he managed to get more done and he said, "Oh, that's easy—I keep a To Do List." But this was a list with a difference. He told me he considered it a game.

The first thing in the morning, he would come in and lay out his list of what he wanted to accomplish that day. In the evening he would check to see how many of the items he had written down in the morning still remained undone and then give himself a score. His goal was to have a "no miss" day in which every single item was crossed off.

He played the To Do List game much as you cover the squares on a bingo card, getting items on his list done during the day as opportunities presented themselves—talking to someone on the phone, bringing up points at a meeting, exploring a creative project in the evening with his wife. He made sure to get started on the top-priority items right away. Toward the end of the day he initiated whatever calls, actions, or letters were necessary to finish up his "bingo card" for a perfect score.

Again and again when I talked to successful businessmen and government administrators, the To Do List came up. So during one of my seminars I asked how many people had heard of keeping a priority list of things to do. Virtually everyone had. Then I asked how many people conscientiously made up a list of things to do *every day*, arranged the items in priority order, and crossed off each task as it was completed. I discovered that very few people keep a list of things to do every day, although most people occasionally make a To Do List when they are particularly busy, have a lot of things they want to remember to do, or have some particularly tight deadline.

### Only a Daily List Will Do

People at the top and people at the bottom both know about To Do Lists, but one difference between them is that the people at the top use a To Do List every single day to make better use of their time; people at the bottom know about this tool but don't use it effectively. One of the real secrets of getting more done is to make a To Do List every day, keep it visible, and use it as a guide to action as you go through the day.

Because the To Do List is such a fundamental time-planning tool, let's take a closer look at it. The basics of the list itself are simple: head a piece of paper "To Do," then list those items on which you want to work; cross off items as they are completed and add others as they occur to you; rewrite the list at the end of the day or when it becomes hard to read.

One of the secrets to success is to write all your "To Do" items on a master list or lists to be kept together, rather than jotting down items on miscellaneous scraps of paper. You may want to keep your list in your appointment book. One executive keeps a special pad on his desk reserved for his To Do List. I know one woman who never buys a dress without a pocket in it so she can keep her To Do List always with her.

Another homemaker was forever losing the lists she made. She spent more time looking for yesterday's list than she spent making today's. To help her get control of her time,

I had her put all her lists in a notebook. She had the added benefit of being able to cull undone A's from previous lists.

Some people try to keep To Do Lists in their heads but in my experience this is rarely as effective. Why clutter your mind with things that can be written down? It's much better to leave your mind free for creative pursuits.

### What Belongs on the List

Are you going to write down everything you have to do, including routine activities? Are you only going to write down exceptional events? Are you going to put down everything you *might* do today or only whatever you decided you *will* do today? There are many alternatives, and different people have different solutions. I recommend that you not list routine items but do list everything that has high priority today and might not get done without special attention.

Don't forget to put the A-activities for your long-term goals on your To Do List. Although it may appear strange to see "begin learning French" or "find new friends" in the same list with "bring home a quart of milk" or "buy birthday card," you want to do them in the same day. If you use your To Do List as a guide when deciding what to work on next, then you need the long-term projects represented, too, so you won't forget them at decision time and consequently not do them.

Before you even consider doing anything yourself, look over the list and see how many tasks you can delegate. Not just to your subordinates or the babysitter, but to those at your level and even higher, who do a job more quickly and easily, or who could suggest short-cuts you'd overlook.

Depending on your responsibilities, you might, if you try hard enough, get all the items on your To Do List completed by the end of each day. If so, by all means try. But probably you can predict in advance that there is no way to do them all. When there are too many things to do, conscious choice as to what (and what not) to do is better than letting the decision be determined by chance.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough: You must *set priorities*. Some people do as many items as possible on their lists. They get a very high percentage of tasks done, but their ef-

fectiveness is low because the tasks they've done are mostly of C-priority. Others like to start at the top of the list and go right down it, again with little regard to what's important. The best way is to take your list and label each item according to ABC priority, delegate as much as you can, and then polish off the list accordingly.

One person I know color-codes the entries, using black for normal entries and red for top-priority items. For people who have trouble living with priorities, I have found that it's helpful to use one piece of paper for the A's and B's and another page for the more numerous C's. The A and B paper is kept on top of the C list, and every time you raise the A and B list to do a C, you're aware that you're not making the best use of your time.

Items on the To Do List may be arranged in several forms. One form is functional: to see, to telephone, to follow up, to think about, to decide, to dictate. Or you can group activities based on the similarity of the work content (everything about water pollution), the same location (several customers in one neighborhood), or the same person (several topics needing the boss's opinion). You can have a single item on your To Do List represent a group (processing the papers in your in-box, doing errands).

### **Don't Worry about Completing Your List**

Now go down your list, doing all the A's before the B's and the B's before the C's. Some days you may get all the items on your list done, but more likely there will not be time to do them all. If you are doing them in ABC order you may not even finish all the A's sometimes. On other days you will do the A's and B's and on other days A's, B's, and some C's. One rarely reaches the bottom of a To Do List. It's not completing the list that counts, but making the best use of your time. If you find yourself with only B's and C's left, take a fresh look at possible activities and add to your list items such as revising your filing system for greater accessibility, finishing *War and Peace*, picking out a birthday present for your aunt—all A's that were in the back of your mind but didn't make it to the original list. With a little extra time, today they can be started.

Many office workers, homemakers, and professional people have come to my seminars because they felt the need to "get organized." Most report a couple of months later that they feel much more organized simply because they regularly list and set priorities. For example, a newly appointed head nurse used the listing/setting priorities approach for her home life after she had found how well it worked at the hospital. Good time use is as important off the job as on it. You don't want to turn your off-work time into a work-like situation, but you can relax even more if those things you have to do are organized with the aid of a To Do List, then gotten out of the way quickly.

The chief accountant I mentioned in the previous chapter spent his time making sure that of all the possible things he could do, he was really doing the most important. He took time to set priorities and went home feeling on top of his job because he had done the most important activities on his list.

If little things mean a lot, a list of things to do in priority order means a great deal because it provides you with the security of knowing that nothing is missing; an affirmation of all your important activities; a motivation to cross off items you don't need to do; and a reservoir from which you can select activities to be done next.

By doing more A's and fewer C's, the hierarchy of your accomplishments will change. You can break up your old A's into new A's and B's, downgrading your old B's to C's and dropping most of the old C's off your list entirely.

### *How to Do More Things That Matter*

For instance, a year ago attending Parents' Day at your daughter's school would have been rated A. But now you're involved in a part-time fashion-design business, and your daughter understands how busy you are and how much satisfaction you derive from your business, so you won't go to Parents' Day unless it's a slow time in your business. Last year you attended to every detail of the annual inventory yourself. Happily, while you were doing it, you recorded the necessary steps so that this year, with that reference guide in hand, last year's A (figuring out what to do) becomes this year's C: following a routine. Now you are able to delegate

the annual inventory to the new stock boy and use your time to merchandise your products better.

The salesman who continually upgrades his customers finds that last year's A—the \$100-unit customer—is this year's C. Now his A-customer is a \$500-unit account; his B is a \$250-unit account. He upgraded his business this way by conscientiously going after the A-accounts. He spent more and more of his time with those who bought over \$100, so gradually he was able to consider anyone below \$100 to be a C. To encourage this continual upgrading, he went through his customer files each week and threw away at least one low dollar prospect or customer. In my experience, most salesmen could benefit substantially by arbitrarily weeding out 20 percent of their customers in terms of present and potential volume.

Learning a musical instrument is much the same. When you first play the piano your A is to practice easy pieces. Once you become proficient, it would be a C to continue playing them. So you practice more and more difficult pieces. When you are learning a difficult piece, the A is to play it slowly but accurately and the C to play it fast with what would likely be many mistakes. As you become more proficient in playing a passage, the A becomes playing the passage at its correct tempo.

In learning and applying time use skills, it may be an A to watch how to spend every five minutes for an hour so that you become much more aware of time use. Once you become automatically aware of time use, it is a C even to think about time passing unless you want to sharpen up that skill again.

The good time user has a constant stream of A's going through the pipeline and is not hung up on which A to do or how to do it or trying to be a perfectionist about a particular A. Rather, he does a number of A-tasks daily and remembers that as soon as he has identified the best use of his time, the time to do it is now.

## 10. TASKS BETTER LEFT UNDONE

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU resorted to poking through routine work (to get a feeling of satisfaction because you're doing the processing efficiently) while you let more important activities go because you want to avoid the feeling of doing them inefficiently?

Resorting to desk-neatening and turning out gobs of trivia can provide more *temporary* satisfaction than tackling an important but perhaps frustrating high-value task.

For example, neatening the desk. You would be unlikely to label this as an A-activity unless it's become a disaster area. But because it's such an easy thing to do and the results show immediately, you might very well spend an extra few minutes unnecessarily neatening your desk when perhaps the thing to do is get away from your desk and go out and see what you can do about the personnel problem that needs solving down in department 73.

The harried field representative whose plane leaves in forty-five minutes gives one more instruction to the office help before going on a two-week trip. He is giving in to the urge to do a C which might very well mean messing up the most important A he can do, namely, catching the flight.

Why do people have this strong tendency to get bogged down with C's? One reason is that many activities of top value cannot, by their very nature, be performed well. Part of the value may be that they have never been done before. Examples include: setting up a committee to consider manufacturing a new, highly competitive product; diapering a baby for the first time; learning Chinese; switching to organic cooking; finding something else to do with your evenings besides watching television.

The homemaker who collects another delicious-sounding recipe when she has five hundred untried clippings is giving in to the short-term feeling of a great find but is truly wasting

her time because she never gets around to using the recipes she has been collecting. She wastes her time clipping instead of providing her husband and children with the substantial meals that she really wants them to have. She may kid herself into thinking that she is making herself a better cook, but the truth is that she is clipping rather than cooking.

You should not expect to do A-activities perfectly the first time. The problems associated with them are new, untried, unknown, and uncertain. Doing them means taking risks, which, whether calculated or not, will sometimes bring on unsuccessful outcome. An A-1 may appear to be of overwhelming complexity, or too time-consuming; or require reconciling views of people who can't or won't agree.

With all these things going against executing a hard A-1, is there any wonder you look around for something you can do well? One of the things you can do well is clear up all the easy C's And you justify it by saying you are clearing them away so that you will then be free to do the A-1 later.

You have very cleverly set up a situation where you won't leave the house until you empty the garbage, won't do the A-1 until all the B's and C's are out of the way. It becomes more important to do the B's and C's than to do the A-1, because you won't do the A-1 until you get the others done. You are making sure you do the B's and C's by hooking them onto the A-1.

There is a certain luxurious feeling that comes from doing whatever you want without regard to priority or time involved. Since you know you're not doing A's, you can waste time and gain the feeling of doing something well, starting something easy and finishing it, crossing an item off your list, and moving the paper from your in-box to your out-box. But don't kid yourself: it's because you're doing all those C's and *not* because you haven't any time, that you don't get to do your A's.

### The 80/20 Rule

When I deal with people who claim they are overwhelmed, one of the best ways I can help them is to have them become more comfortable with not doing C's. But people are often

very hesitant to let go of C's; therefore, I would like to suggest to you the following: the 80/20 rule.

The 80/20 rule says, "If all items are arranged in order of value, 80 percent of the value would come from only 20 percent of the items, while the remaining 20 percent of the value would come from 80 percent of the items." Sometimes it's a little more, sometimes a little less, but 80 percent of the time I think you will find the 80/20 rule is correct.

The 80/20 rule suggests that in a list of ten items, doing two of them will yield most (80 percent) of the value. Find these two, label them A, get them done. Leave most of the other eight undone, because the value you'll get from them will be significantly less than that of the two highest-value items.

These examples, drawn from everyday life, should enable you to feel more comfortable about concentrating on high-value tasks, even at the cost of ignoring many lower-value tasks:

- 80 percent of sales come from 20 percent of customers
- 80 percent of production is in 20 percent of the product line
- 80 percent of sick leave is taken by 20 percent of employees
- 80 percent of file usage is in 20 percent of files
- 80 percent of dinners repeat 20 percent of recipes
- 80 percent of dirt is on 20 percent of floor areas that is highly used
- 80 percent of dollars is spent on 20 percent of the expensive meat and grocery items
- 80 percent of the washing is done on the 20 percent of the wardrobe that is well-used items
- 80 percent of TV time is spent on 20 percent of programs most popular with the family
- 80 percent of reading time is spent on 20 percent of the pages in the newspaper (front page, sport page, editorials, columnists, feature page)
- 80 percent of telephone calls come from 20 percent of all callers
- 80 percent of eating out is done at 20 percent of favorite restaurants

It's important to remind yourself again and again not to get bogged down on low-value activities but to focus on the 20 percent where the high value is.

A local political candidate came to me for advice two months before the election. He was the underdog against an incumbent who had been in office for many years. He recognized that he would have to make maximum use of his time to win. But he had accepted many invitations to talk to unimportant groups, and found his schedule hopelessly clogged. Little of his time remained to go after groups with large memberships for crucial luncheon meetings and evening lectures.

He knew he had failed to exercise selectivity in accepting speaking engagements. While he felt that he could not cancel any engagements already accepted, he decided he would be much more conscientious about setting priorities in accepting future engagements. It took him some time to come around to this view, because he felt a great need to bring his message to all the voters. We ran down his list of speaking engagements and discovered that, unquestionably, 80 percent of his exposure was coming from 20 percent or less of his speeches. The 80 percent of his time that was going to low-exposure speeches contributed little to his cause. In fact, they wore him out so that he was ill at ease and exhausted for those speeches that really counted. He recalled that Nixon spent the last days of the 1960 campaign rushing to Alaska, Hawaii, Wyoming, etc., to fulfill his pledge to visit all fifty states while Kennedy concentrated on the larger states that would give him an electoral majority.

By the end of our talk the candidate realized he could get out of several unimportant speeches—they had not been definite commitments—and substitute more significant appearances. The real payoff for his selectivity came when he won the election handsomely.

A wealthy woman socialite accepted too many demands of others. She could always be counted on to do anything from licking envelopes to twisting the arms of congressmen. She felt she wasn't getting as much pleasure out of all these activities as she might, because she was letting other people set her priorities. She needed to recognize that 80 percent of her voluntary activities were unsatisfying busywork, and that the real joy came from a few activities which she felt strongly about.

What we did was sit down and create a massive list of over one hundred activities she had participated in (or agreed to participate in) during the past three months. She then

looked at them objectively and developed a profile of her A's: helping political candidates, talking with interesting people, working in the field of conservation, and collecting art. Her B's included charity benefits, work above the clerical level for the parents' group at her children's school. Everything else was a C, including supervising the church cake sale, doing hospital volunteer work, and participating in the women's group of the local symphony.

What she did was to take her courage in hand over the next several months and say "no" to all organizations, people, and activities on the C-list. This gave her much more time to become really involved at the art museum. She even began to do a little research on Oriental vases. She also initiated a very well received reorganization of her neighborhood political club.

### **When Not to Do C's**

One of the best ways to find time for your A's is by reducing the number of C's that you feel compelled to spend time on.

The main question with C's is "What can I *not* do?" Think of the great feeling of satisfaction of drawing a line through a C-item on your To Do List—without even having to go through the effort of doing it! Rather than think, "I have to do this C," get into the habit of thinking, "Maybe I *don't* have to do this C!"

Let's say your To Do List contains "Get the car washed." You have given this a C-priority, but are tempted to take a half hour out and get it washed anyway, just to get it off your mind and off the list. It is much easier to get it off your list and forget about it by deciding it doesn't need to be done at all.

Many C's can be turned into what I call "CZ's." CZ's are C's that can be deferred indefinitely without harm.

Definite CZ's include rearranging a pile of magazines, inventorying the freezer (when you just did it last month and nothing has changed significantly in the interim), mopping the kitchen floor just before the children come home on a rainy day, checking the morning mail when your secretary always brings it in immediately upon arrival. You can probably

think of many other items that are too trivial to do, or will settle themselves by the passage of time, or are best forgotten unless there is a demand from an outside source.

Some C's need to be deliberately deferred to test whether they become CZ's. They go through an "aging" period to see whether or not they die a natural death. Such possible CZ's include: watering the lawn when it looks like rain, shoveling the snow when it looks like sun, bundling the newspapers today for recycling when the Boy Scouts probably will be collecting in the neighborhood next week, preparing a meeting topic that probably won't come up.

When I am unsure of whether something can be ignored completely, I make a little note of the item on a 3x5-inch index card and stick the card in a file folder labeled "Possible CZ's," feeling secure that it will come up again some day if its important. Once a month I look through the file folder, and am able to throw most of the cards in the trash, congratulating myself on all the things I didn't have to do.

Many C's can be turned into CZ's without any great trouble and with little loss in value. Other C's, of course, must be done. Even though they are trivial, routine tasks, there is the possibility of great loss by failing to do them. You can make such C's palatable by thinking of the larger context into which they fit. A government employee who spends most of a day answering a trivial letter from a congressman makes sure it is done accurately and promptly, because when you work for the government it's wise not to arouse a congressman's ire. Similarly, the salesman who spends the better part of a morning tracking down a delayed shipment of a \$2.17 part for his best customer can keep in mind that 40 percent of his entire earnings last year came from this one customer.

### *When a C Becomes a Crisis*

Some things—such as refilling the gas tank in your automobile—that are C's and capable of being deferred, can develop into crises if put off too long. There is no great advantage in filling the gas tank when it is three-quarters full, but you do save time if you fill it when it is nearly empty, since this reduces the number of times you have to make a trip to the gas station. Needless to say, waiting a little bit too long can be very costly as well as time-consuming if you happen

to get stuck on a deserted road with an empty gas tank and no gas station within twenty-two miles.

A word of caution. Putting off buying insurance or making a will, even though you are in perfect health and can't imagine any problems, is certainly not advisable. Nor is putting off such a relatively trivial chore as washing laundry. While dressing for a big Saturday evening party, you might find you have no clean underwear.

Remember: Tasks rarely go from the bottom of the C-pile to crisis proportions without some warning. They gradually work their way up the scale. Let's say you've been asked to submit a routine production report. You have a hunch that this is a C that will die a natural death without your having to do anything about it. Several days later, a follow-up request comes into your in-box. You take the item from the bottom of the paper-work pile and place it on the top. Then a phone call comes in inquiring about the report. You now decide it's a B. When the boss says, "Give me this tomorrow or you're through," it becomes an immediate A and gets done. You can watch the priority of these items change. If you're smart, you will realize that fewer than one in a hundred C's ever becomes a crisis. The best approach is *not* to do all the C's just in case, but rather to watch for the follow-up requests to tip you off to a potential crisis, then nip the problem in the bud.

If you can let the dusting, washing, filing, or checking go one more day, then let it. You will have spent less of your life dusting, filing, and washing. If you continually resist the temptation to do the C's, you can significantly increase the number that become CZ's. Always keep in mind the question "How terrible would it be if I didn't do this C?" If your answer is "Not too terrible," then don't do it.

### *You Need a C-Drawer*

Give the ABC's their place. Rather than let the high-quality A's get buried by the much larger quantity of C's, try reserving a special place on the top of your desk for the A items. Create a special "C-drawer" where the unimportant items can get dumped safely out of the way. If you already have a C-drawer, get yourself a bigger one, or a whole cabinet for C's to be kept out of the way. As a start, try physi-

cally separating your paper work into small A-piles and B-piles and a much larger C-pile. Re-sort the B-pile into either the A or C group, and then put the A's in the "A-place" and the C's in the "C-drawer."

If you haven't cleared your desk for a few months, take everything off the desk and out of all the drawers, and put it on a table. Going through it, you will probably find there will be some A's, some B's, some C's, but there will also be a lot of useless material that you can toss into the trash can. You'll know the operation is a success if you have to borrow other people's trash cans to get rid of your junk.

If, like so many homemakers, you don't have a desk, then you probably have the same problem as Ms. Jones. She had one paperwork drawer where she dumped current mail, notes to herself, items clipped from magazines, her children's school schedules, notices of meetings and appointments, letters to be answered, coupons, announcements of department store sales, bills and check stubs, magazine-subscription notices, notes on the History of China course she took at night school two years before, string, ribbon and a fancy bow, and birthday cards.

When the time came to answer a letter, she had no alternative but to pull out the entire stack of stuff and search until she found the letter she wanted. Similarly, at the beginning of each month she had to search through her whole pile to pull out the bills she needed to pay. She sought every opportunity to avoid going into her paperwork drawer. She even delayed answering important mail because she dreaded the search.

The solution to her problem seems obvious—and it was, although not to her, because she felt so swamped. I suggested a file box, which she bought, and one hundred tabbed Manila file folders. She made folders for recipes, bills, letters to be answered, letters to save, make-up ideas, stitchery projects, coming events, children's activities, trips to take, books to read, and the like. Once she finally got her accumulation filed away, it was easy for her to take each new piece of paper and put it in the proper folder. Then, when she felt like writing letters she didn't have to use all the time finding the letters that needed answering. She could go directly to the "letters" folder and begin at once.

No doubt many housewives have some type of filing sys-

tem. The important thing is to keep the A's separated from the C's. If you have a lot of letters and correspondence, you might want to have separate folders for A-letters, B- and C-letters.

### *Every Housewife Deserves a Desk*

Even better than a cardboard filing box, if you can manage it, is a desk. The homemaker has a great deal of paperwork, and she's entitled to a comfortable place to do it. I have seen interior decoration suggestions for putting a little desk instead of an end table along side of a sofa with a lamp on it in the living room, or converting an unused corner of the kitchen into a paperwork place, using the kitchen drawers for paper storage. I heartily applaud such efforts to find the homemaker a paperwork place to call her own.

The owner of a large clothing store came to me feeling overwhelmed by the quantity of paperwork that came his way every day. He was bombarded with information about new clothing lines, order and inventory forms from the many manufacturers he bought from, advertising and promotion ideas from his advertising agency, local papers and radio stations, and tax and payroll forms. He felt it necessary to open all the mail and examine it himself. In addition, he wrote many memos with ideas for improving the store and its merchandise and salespeople's skills.

He was continually reshuffling these papers, since he couldn't quite decide what to do with many of them. Also, there were so many good ideas that he hated to give any of them up. He knew he wasn't making ABC distinctions, and the pile of papers on his desk was overwhelming him.

I enabled him to solve his problem by suggesting that each day, when the mail came in, he arrange it in priority order with the most important on top, then start at the top of the pile and work down. I had him put all of the B and C paperwork he didn't get to that day in his right-hand drawer. The next day he began with the new mail and, if there was time, reached into the drawer and did some of yesterday's paperwork. Often he would go home sorry that he hadn't gotten to a particular item, and so the next morning he would reach into his drawer and pull out that piece of paper and put it with his "today's" pile. Sometimes he would get a follow-up

request for additional material on something he hadn't gotten to previously, so again he would reach into the drawer, pull it out, and combine it with the current mail.

Not surprisingly, 80 percent of the paper he put in that drawer never got worked on. He did, however, take 20 percent of it out of the drawer and process it with the day's work.

When the drawer was full, I suggested he take all of the paper and move it to the bottom right-hand drawer. This worked fine for another three weeks, until the top drawer filled up again. He then went through the bottom drawer and threw away what he didn't need. And he repeated the process about every two weeks, or as he needed to.

### *Next: The Wastebasket*

All along, of course, whenever he saw an opportunity, he threw paper into his wastebasket. Probably most of the papers that he had just taken out of the bottom right-hand drawer could have gone into the basket and never been missed, but he was reluctant to throw away something, so I suggested he take his stuff and put it all in a file folder labeled "C's from the bottom right-hand drawer, September 1-30." When he had another batch of material, it was put in a file folder with the date on it and placed behind the first file folder in a large filing cabinet. At my suggestion, he continued to remove the contents of his bottom right-hand drawer to a file folder, which was then kept for a year. He found it most satisfying to make room for his current folder of C-material by removing last year's folder and going through it quickly, congratulating himself on not having done so many things that turned out to be unimportant. At this point, he felt comfortable tossing out most of the stuff and keeping the one or two pieces of paper that still seemed to be viable. These went in priority order with that day's mail and were recycled to the middle drawer if not done that day.

After a year it became clear that he had kept himself from doing much hard work that would have netted him very little benefit. For instance, his thoughts about sprucing up the shelves where he displayed sweaters were obsolete, since he had taken out the shelves and put in racks. His clipping about how to promote costume jewelry could be thrown away, since he no longer stocked jewelry. His reminder to himself

about the inadequacies of the stock boy could be dispensed with, because the stock boy quit a few weeks later.

## How to Keep on Top of Paperwork

The truth is that you need never shuffle a piece of paper again. This does not mean that you can stop handling paper. But you can develop a system that will keep the paper where it belongs and keep you on top of it—if you need to be. The system must take into account both incoming and outgoing paper, and what happens to it in between.

Incoming mail should be screened and sorted. For a few days, examine all mail critically. Look for opportunities to eliminate or reduce the volume of paper that comes in. (You might find a series of obsolete reports to be discontinued.) You can then tell your secretary what material to screen out routinely and throw away, what to route to others or file directly.

One executive has his secretary sort his daily mail into "Action," "Information," and "Deferred" folders. The "Action" folder requires, and gets, his immediate attention. The "Information" folder he slips into his briefcase for reading on the train. He keeps the "Deferred" file, which includes his periodicals, in a drawer for spare moments or when he needs a break from concentrating on more substantial matters.

You can encourage faster decisionmaking and get work out sooner by writing informal notes right on a piece of incoming mail and sending it on to the out-box. If you need to keep a record of the correspondence for your file, or want a reminder to check for follow-through, have your secretary make a photocopy.

For correspondence that requires a more formal or lengthy reply, a dictating machine can be your best friend. Those who learn how to dictate a finished product on the first try rave about the time it saves. One executive saves even more time by dictating only key ideas and then letting his secretary construct a letter that accomplishes his purpose.

### *Only Once, With Feeling!*

One of my best rules is "Handle each piece of paper only once." Try not to put down an incoming piece of paper that

requires a response until you have fired off that response. It is often easier to think of the right thing to say when you've just received the letter and your first reaction is fresh in your mind. In addition, you save the setup time required to familiarize yourself with it again later on.

Not all pieces of paper lend themselves to immediate and final action. Some papers linger for weeks or months and require many actions spread over time before work on them is complete. In some projects every word counts and polishing each word is a good investment. Sometimes you make better decisions if you put them off and think about them for a while.

Therefore, the more comprehensive rule is "Try to handle each piece of paper only once. If you can't, every time you pick up a piece of paper do *something* to move ahead the project it represents." If you can't take a big step, even the smallest step counts.

For example, one executive might pick up a piece of paper and think, "This represents an unpleasant task. I can't bring myself to do it now, but the next time I pick it up I'll make a phone call and get it started." He has done at least something to move this project ahead by planning his next step. The next time he finds the same paper in his hands, he is not likely to put it down until he has made that phone call.

On the other hand, don't do more than is necessary. One secretary complains that her boss is such a perfectionist that he never gets a letter out in fewer than three drafts, even on the most trivial correspondence. She, in turn, has gotten into the bad habit of giving him drafts that can't be mailed anyway because of errors.

Expect your secretary always to give you a letter ready for the out-box. Before you make any changes, ask yourself whether the time spent will significantly increase its value. As an added incentive against perfectionism, think about how much it's worth to you to have your letter in the hands of your addressee rather than tied up in your office for another revision.

The next time you catch yourself needlessly shuffling papers, remind yourself that the most important things often are not on paper at all. Ask yourself what underlying situation the paper represents and how you would deal with it

most profitably if you were on top of your paperwork. Then "do it now."

## Coping with Information Overload

Many people also do not discriminate between A's and C's when it comes to keeping up with news in their field and current events in general. Given a limited amount of time, what is the proper mix of reading the daily paper, weekly and monthly magazines, and books? Do you spend an hour a day on the paper, an hour a week on magazines, and an hour a month on anything as heavy as a book? Or do you let the daily and weekly events take care of themselves, focusing instead on monthlies and books by experts and specialists in a particular discipline?

There is no "right" answer to such questions; just what you decide is good for you. All I'm suggesting is that decisions be made consciously and then be acted on. If you decide that it's not worth more than ten minutes a day to read a newspaper, and you find yourself going back to an hour a day, question the validity of your original decision. You may decide to give a higher priority to newspapers.

Many executives complain that they don't have enough time to read books that would be useful to them in their work. On the other hand, they find hours each month to read newspapers. Perhaps it is because newspapers are widely available each day, cost little, and are read as much for entertainment as for news. Books usually require an effort to obtain, cost much more, are considered substantial, and are read "seriously." As a result, most executives read hundreds of newspapers a year and only a few books.

### *Reading Books Like Newspapers*

If you feel the need to read more books for your work, try reading them as you would a newspaper, using the following procedure. Each day have your secretary put one book from a want-to-read (that you've given her) in your in-box. Have her take yesterday's book from your out-box. There is no harm in letting a book go to your out-box unread, since you would probably never have even seen it previously.

When you do pick up a book, start by reading the "headlines" on the book jacket, where the publisher sets forth what he considers most significant. Then glance through the book quickly, looking here and there for something of interest to you. Give yourself no more time than you would take to read a newspaper.

The manner in which many non-fiction books are written suggests an approach to reading them. The author starts with a message he wants to convey, and summarizes it in a couple of sentences that he keeps in front of him as a guide while writing. He develops this message with the aid of an outline, then expands the ideas into enough pages to fill his book.

Your job in reading a book, even if it has five hundred pages or more, is to find these key ideas and understand their application to your situation. The preface and table of contents, as well as summaries that are sometimes found at the beginning and end of a book, will help you to do this quickly. Read the details only when something really meaningful to you seems involved. In this way you can gain much value from a book in a surprisingly short time.

This method can help you upgrade the quality as well as increase the quantity of books you read. Because more books are at least crossing your desk, you can feel comfortable in setting aside one that has no appeal. On the other hand, with the exposure to a number of different books, you are more likely to come across ones that are worth careful study and will repay an investment of several hours' time.

People soon forget much of what they read. Therefore, even if you did read all details of a book, you would not be likely to remember most of it anyway. If you've ever tried to summarize a book to a friend, you'll probably agree that what you recalled and considered worth passing on were only a few salient points. Since you remember little, it saves time to be selective and read only what is most likely to be worth remembering.

Over the years you may have developed a library of books you have found especially meaningful. Once you may have studied these carefully, but with the passage of time much has probably been forgotten. You may want to use the newspaper-reading method to review such books and refresh your memory of the key ideas.

Sometimes you run across a book that may be useful in

the future. Don't take time to read it now; you will have forgotten the details by the time you need them. Instead, have your secretary keep a note of the book in a special file for later reference. One doctor, who formerly had his office piled high with unread books, and abstracts, switched to a 3x5 card entry for each item and now has some room on his desk to read.

If you feel uncomfortable about the seeming superficiality of this approach to reading books, consider it a way of getting started. Even at "newspaper" depth only, you are giving yourself a chance to absorb some useful new ideas. Moreover, you may find that your business reading becomes more enjoyable because you're now able to read more in less time.

### *Should You Try Speed-Reading?*

Clearly, the faster you read, the more time you save. However, I find that few people who take courses in speed-reading manage to maintain much increase in their reading speed. They can speed-read for a few weeks after the course, but most of them soon revert to their former pace. If you have to do a great deal of reading, it may be worth taking a speed-reading course, because studies indicate that if you read at least two hours every day after taking the course, you'll be able to maintain a higher reading speed.

But I think it's more important to read smarter rather than faster. In other words, cut out the C-reading that is unsatisfying, useless, uninformative, or uninteresting and use that extra time and energy on A-reading (most likely at your former reading pace). Since you won't read as much, it's important to be selective about what you read. If you spend less time reading C's, you'll find more time for the A's.

My wife and I have a hobby of reading aloud to each other. We read about twenty books a year this way. We could sit down side by side and read the same books to ourselves in a fraction of the time if efficiency were our only goal. The reason I tell this story is to reassure you that the most efficient way to do something is not necessarily the best one. It is highly inefficient to read aloud—but a great way to spend time together.