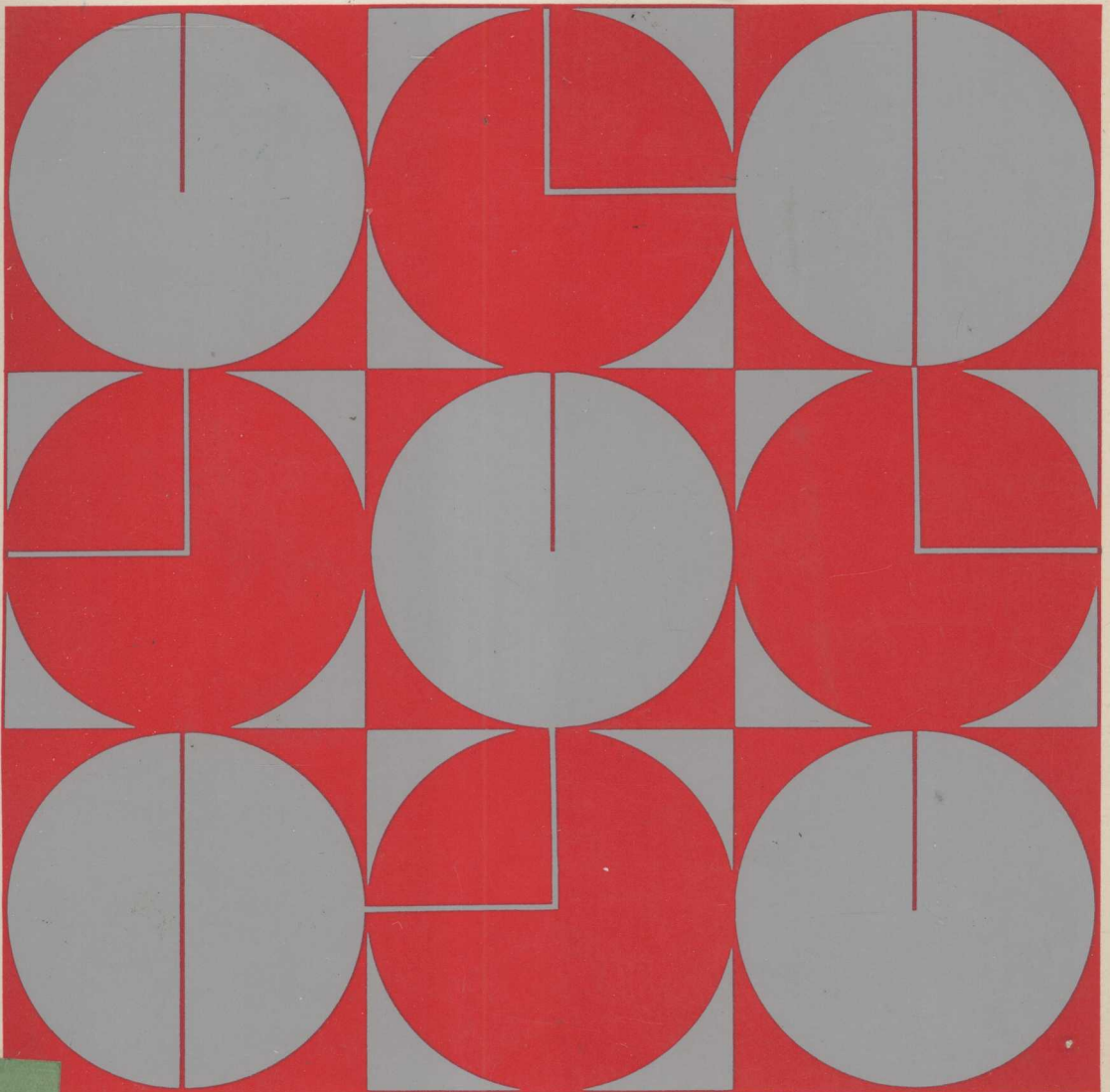


Stewart L. Stokes, Jr.

Time Is Of The Essence

The DP Professional's Guide
to Getting the Right Things Done



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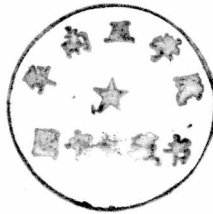
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Wellesley, Massachusetts 02181

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TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE:

**THE DP PROFESSIONAL'S GUIDE
TO GETTING THE RIGHT THINGS DONE**

PREFACE

"Time consciousness pervades data processing," explained one senior MIS executive, "but time management is not so prevalent." "It's worse than that," responded a colleague. "We're acutely aware of time and its pressures: elapsed time during development steps, project milestones and deadlines, the effect of user impatience and lack of understanding. It's the stress that results from all these that's cutting into my effectiveness."

"What bothers me," replied a third manager, "is the trouble my newer, less experienced project leaders and managers are having managing their time. They're uncomfortable with the need to pay attention to people, and to really communicate with them. It was easier when all they had to worry about were themselves and their own piece of the project. Managing others requires a different kind of time consciousness."

"Time consciousness and time commitment," noted our first speaker. "The biggest step my new managers have to take is that step from managing details to managing people. They did pretty well when they were individual contributors, but it's tough shifting gears and moving from team player to team manager."

"Let's stop talking about it and let's do something," suggested the fourth manager in the group, a person who, up until that moment had been a listener. "Stew, you've been helpful to our people in courses you've presented. How about giving us a blueprint for all our people. Aren't there some time management fundamentals you can suggest to help both our technical people and our managers?"

"Yes, there are," I replied. And so this book was born.

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CHAPTER ONE

DATA PROCESSING: A BUSINESS WITHIN A BUSINESS

1.0 Managing Under Pressure

The occasion described in the Preface was a "round table" luncheon with a small group of senior data processing executives. It was one session in a series of "open-ended" discussions we have with representatives from client companies. These discussions enable us to keep in touch with client needs and it was clear that what our clients needed was more effective time management in their data processing installations. Or, as one of my conversationalists said later, "Let's change from being reactive people to being proactive people, and let's cut out the behaviors that encourage others to set our priorities for us ... and then change those priorities as they wish, with little regard to commitments already made."

That's a tall order, for data processing is a "business within a business" and is a "service business" at that. This means that we often march to someone else's tune: the tune of the corporate mission and strategy; the tune of user needs, requests, and demands; and the tune of changing technology. The resulting medley more often resembles a free-flowing jam session than a well-orchestrated symphony. Is it possible to manage our own time - and the time of others - more effectively in such a pressure-packed atmosphere? Can data processing professionals assume more control over the most important resource they possess - their time? Will time management skills help? Yes, they most certainly will.

1.1 Managing Time Means Managing Priorities

At this point, let's be very clear about what time management is, and isn't. Time management (as I view it, at least) is priority management. Time management isn't chopping off a few minutes here, and a few seconds there. Yes, this helps, but it won't enable you to really stay on top of your job, and, in the words of my aforementioned DP executive, to be proactive.

Managing our time more effectively means making tough choices, and tougher decisions. It means negotiating, and communicating, but always being flexible. It also means learning how to say "yes" to some goals, projects, and activities, and "no" to others. It means being aware of the value of the most important resource we possess - our time.

1.2 A Brief Look Back

The "literature" of data processing is filled with references to time, its finiteness, its elusiveness, its cost, and the speed with which it seems to move. Indeed, the computer industry was "born" only yesterday, in the early 1950's. The earliest applications were supported by the government and the military, but the booming post-World War II economy soon supported the rapid spread of computers into the private business sector.

My objective is not to chronicle the history of data processing but to call the reader's attention to the speed with which time has moved, in taking our industry from vacuum-tube technology and unit record equipment to silicon chips and personal computers.¹

1. For readers interested in the history of our industry, I refer you to Frederic G. Withington, FIVE GENERATIONS OF COMPUTERS, Harvard Business

We cannot survive in our era or our industry for long without developing an acute awareness of time. Whether or not we appreciate the value of that time is another matter.

1.3 Why This Book Was Written

I wrote this book for two specific reasons. First, I enjoy the subject of time management and teaching and writing about it. I have been doing so since the early 1970's, and recently completed a book and audio tape on time management for general audiences²

Second, I want to apply time management principles to the field of data processing. We are becoming increasingly aware of the stress present in our lives, stress that is often caused by time-related situations and pressures. The best way to relieve this stress is to first understand the conditions and behaviors which contribute to it, then to understand the attitudes behind the behaviors, and, finally, to change the attitudes and behaviors which contribute most to time-induced stress.

Review, July-August, 1977, pp. 99-107; Cyrus F. Gibson and Richard L. Nolan, MANAGING THE FOUR STAGES OF EDP GROWTH, Harvard Business Review, January-February, 1974, pp. 76-88; Alexander Gaydasch, PRINCIPLES OF EDP MANAGEMENT, (Reston Publishing Company, Inc., Reston, Virginia 1982, pp. 1-11)

2. Stewart L. Stokes, Jr., IT'S ABOUT TIME, A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO MANAGING YOUR MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCE (Boston; CBI Publishing Company, Inc., 1982)

1.4 How This Book Is Organized

For your ease in reading and convenience in future referencing of key points, checklists, and exhibits, this book is organized in three sections.

Section One, containing four chapters, looks at data processing as a business within a business, examines attitudes and their effect upon behavior, self-fulfilling prophecies, and "famous fifty" time thieves in the data processing environment. This first section concludes with an introductory look at establishing change-oriented priorities.

Section Two contains three chapters and presents a complete time management system and model. After focusing on "key areas" for concentrating time and energy, the section concludes with a description of the Time Control Log, a vital tool for time control.

Section Three also contains three chapters and begins with a consideration of organizational personality and several universal time control problems. It goes on to describe thirteen (13) time saving strategies, ten (10) "key areas" on which to concentrate when planning and running a meeting, and six (6) guidelines for more effective delegation. This section, and the book, concludes with the development of a personal time control action plan which the reader can use, adjust, and personalize.

Each chapter is followed by a brief summary of keypoints, organized for easy future reference. In addition, Sections One and Two are followed by summaries of all the key points covered in their respective chapters. Thus, this book was conceived, designed, and written to be easy to use, interesting to read, and organized for handy reference.

I hope this book will encourage you, the reader, to examine your own time-related pressures and the attitudes, behaviors, and conditions which cause them. Changing behavior is what this book is all about, but changing attitudes comes first. In order to change, we must first want to change. So, if you're concerned about your career, and interested in improving your efficiency and effectiveness, please read on.

KEY POINTS IN CHAPTER ONE

1. More effective time management is needed in today's pressure-packed data processing installation. Technically-skilled project leaders, supervisors, and managers are especially vulnerable to time control problems.
2. Data processing is a service "business within a business" and must be responsive to the corporate mission and strategy, and the needs of the users. At the same time, it is technology-driven; that is, the pressure to be "state-of-the-art" is intense among data processing professionals. The result is often a pressure-cooker of conflicting requirements and expectations. Effective time management is especially important in an atmosphere of this sort.
3. Time management is priority management, and requires the making of tough choices and decisions. It means being able to say "yes" to some goals, projects, and activities, and "no" to others.
4. The stress often associated with the data processing environment is often triggered by time-related situations and pressures. Such stress can be relieved by changing the attitudes and behaviors which contribute most to time-induced stress.

CHAPTER TWO

OUR ATTITUDES AND HOW THEY AFFECT US

2.0 Attitudes And Behavior

Our attitudes underlie our behaviors, and our behaviors reflect our attitudes. The way we think and "feel" about something (or somebody) affects our behavior toward that project, task, idea, recommendation, or person. For instance, suppose we "feel" or believe that, by and large,

"users just don't comprehend the significance of what we in data processing do, nor do they understand the contribution we make to the organization."

Now, with that as our attitude about users, what might our behavior be toward users? Will the project management process be enhanced? Will deadlines be met? Probably not.

What we have done is set up a self-fulfilling prophecy, about users and the amount of data processing comprehension and understanding they possess. We tailor our behaviors to fit our attitudes and, more often than not, we get the results we expect. These results then serve to reinforce our attitudes, which in turn reinforce our behaviors, which in turn reinforce our attitudes, etc.

As an example, in a recent time management course, some data processing personnel used these adjectives to describe their attitudes toward meetings:

"boring, useless, trivial and a complete waste of time..."

With attitudes and feelings like these, how would you think these personnel approach their meetings ... in what frame of mind ... and with what behaviors? Would they come prepared to view the meeting in a positive way, recognizing it as an important time management tool, necessary for the smooth functioning of the organization and crucial to the success of a project? Hardly. More often than not, negative attitudes such as these are predictions of negative behaviors, guaranteed to produce "self-fulfilling prophecies" - meetings that are, in fact, "boring, useless, trivial, and a waste of time."

The experience of a meeting turning out to be "boring, useless, and trivial" in turn reinforces the negative attitudes about meetings in general. These attitudes continue to impact behavior, which becomes more and more dysfunctional. The process continues to feed upon itself and deteriorates into a downward spiral. Time is badly misused; communication is ruptured, and projects are delayed.

On the other hand, the reverse is also true. Data processing personnel who are aware of the important role interpersonal communication plays in successful systems development often use these adjectives to describe their attitudes toward meetings:

"necessary, valuable, revealing, useful, and a worthwhile use of time ..."